

Myanmar's Art of War or Military Tactics in the murals of Laung Oo Maw Library

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Abstract

The murals of *Mahosadha* Jātaka in Laung Oo Maw library reflects the image of Nyaungyan period and early Konbaung period which were at the dense wars again and again. From this scene, the art of war or military tactics of Myanmar and the elephant corps, the chariots corps, the infantry, the cavalry, weapons, guns, the infantry, the cavalry, weapons, guns, spear, javelin, long sword, dagger, *Dain*(round shield), *Hlwa* (oblong shield), *Ka* (shield) can be seen. The artists could depict well the weapons and armed forces because they would have taken part in those battles. In that period in Myanmar, the resident of a locality who comes of age must serve in armed forces to defense their country. So, everyone could get chance to defense their country in that period. And then, the illustration of 101 nationalities and own names of nationalities can be seen rarely.

Key words: *Yar-Pyu-Myo, Htoun- Pyu-Myo, elephant corps, chariots corps, Koun: lezi (trooper), Hsin Chei Pon, Pwe-Kyaung (school of eighteen manly skills),Dain(round shield), Hlwa (oblong shield), Ka (shield), 101 nationalities*

Introduction

Laung Oo Maw library is situated in Ywathitgyi village, Sagaing Region. There are the mural paintings about Buddha's life, 28 Buddhas, ten great Jātakas, and last lives of Buddha's. In this paper, *Mahosadha* Jātaka illustrations will be favoured to represent. In this painting, seven facts of military tactics or art of war can be seen. At that period of early Konbaung, marching to the battle front and reconstructing the country by getting unity in Myanmar are recorded as a reflection in this mural painting. During the whole Nyaungyan period and early Konbaung period, the public from Myanmar would have faced with the battles and they themselves took part in these battles. From this mural of Laung Oo Maw, everyone can get the knowledge of Myanmar's "art of war". Next, distinctive scene is 101 nationalities and kings are not only illustrated but also described with ink inscription. The name of each nationality can be read from their environment in Myanmar.

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In Laung Oo Maw murals, the scenes of *Mahosadha* Jātaka take many places on the south wall, north wall and west wall. In the level seven of west wall, the scene of seats for King *Culani Brahmadata* and kings from other countries in the ceremony is started to depict from the left side. In the same level, the scene of *Maho*'s trusted persons striking and breaking up all the poisonous drinking liquor pots is seen. In level seven, on the west wall, the scene of marching to battle to *Mahosadha*'s country is illustrated at the right side. The *Mahosadha* Jātaka is illustrated continuously the scene of *Culani Brahmadata* and Brahmin *Kewatta* sitting on the back of war elephant and managing and predominating their army is depicted. In this scene king *Culani, Kewatta* and commanding officer as the trooper riding at the center on the back of war elephant, lead and superintend the (100) kings and nationalities to the battle. The ink inscription describes that "101 nationalities" below the scenes.

In this murals, the scenes of marching to the battle with war elephants, war horses, war chariot, land forces, the elephant corps, the cavalry, the chariots corps, the infantry,

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weapons, guns, spear, javelin, long sword, dagger, *Dain* (round shield), *Hlwa* (oblong shield), *Kā* (shield) are depicted in detail. The artists from that period may often see the marching to battle front and they may participate themselves in those battles. Because according to the constitution of defense law in that period in Myanmar, every civilian, resident of a locality who comes of age (attains maturity) must serve in armed forces to defend their country. Myanmar kings formed, land forces and navy forces systematically. The elephant corps, the chariots corps, the cavalry and the infantry are firmly organized. Every young man from villages studied military training from *Pwe- Kyaung* (school of eighteen manly skills) and the leaders of their native and some villages formed military unit with hundred soldiers and some towns formed with one thousand soldiers. Thus, everyone has chance to defend their country. (The town which is formed with 100 soldiers is called *Yar-Pyu-Myo* and the town which is formed with 1000 soldiers is called *Htoun- Pyu-Myo*). During the 17th century, ten percent of one battalion were taken out and formed systematically as army which was set up with horsemen. (See Fig 5)

A war elephant contains, *Koun: lezi* (trooper) who rides in the center, on the back of war elephant, *Hsin U: zi* (mahout), *Pesi* (helmsman), *Hsin chei pon* (troop flanking a war elephant). This scene is completely painted in Laung Oo Maw murals. A war elephant must have one *Lin: lei* (a long bow as different from crossbow), one hundred arrows, ten *Hlans* (quick javelins), three *E: maun:s* (lance adorned with a long tassel used by royal cavalry), *Chun:* (one iron hook or beak of elephant goad). A war elephant has ten infantry *Hsin Chei Pon* soldier and five horsemen *Hsin Chei Pon* soldiers. (See Fig -1)

In Myanmar, in the Art of war or military tactics, there are (1) seven facts of combat arms (2) four facts of marching to battle (3) two facts of advancing to contact (4) six facts of entering into combat (5) six facts of defensive action in war (6) six facts of being routed battle and (7) six facts of making a retrograde movement. The treatise of Myanmar *Theininga Byuhar* (the treatise art of war) was recorded in each period. During the reigns of Sin Phyu Shin and king Badon, Theininga Byuhar Pyo, Bhuharsakki Pyo and Nandhitheina Pyo are recorded by Letwaesundara, the member of the parliament.

Two facts of advancing to contact are like a sun and like a moon. In the mural of Laung Oo Maw, *Kawatta* and king *Culani* advance to contact like a moon for marching to battle. (See Fig 2)

The artist who created Laung Oo Maw murals can illustrate the scenes of marching to battle front skillfully. At that period of early Konbaung, marching to the battle front, reconstructing the country by getting unity in Myanmar is recorded as a reflection in mural painting.

“At the time of king Nandabayin (1581-99) the second Myanmar Empire of Bayinnaung the Great (1551- 81) collapsed in 1599. Felipe De Brito, a Portuguese mercenary, seized lower Myanmar, taking advantages of this internal disintegration. King Nyaungyan (1600-1606), a son of king Bayinnaung founded a new dynasty and during the short time he organized territories from Yamethin to Mogaung, Mohnyin, Bhamo, Nyaungshwe, Theinni and Hsipaw. He died in 1606, returning from the battle of Theinni and his son king Anaukpetlun (1605-28) succeeded the throne. He marched on Thanlyin by land and water in December 1612, with a formidable force of one hundred and thirty thousand of Shan and Myanmar and he took Thanlyin. Then he attacked and took Chiangmai, in northern Thailand and won the Lord of Thandwe in Rakhine. The period of decline and disunity lasted for some twenty years from 1581, with the country gradually recovering by 1615. After the death of Anauk Petlun, his son Thalun reigned from 1629 to 1648. His kingdom extended up to the boundaries of the Manipur and Rakhine regions in the northwest to Kengtung, Chienmai Viengchang in the east, to the Rakhine ranges in the west and to regions beyond the gulfs of Martaban to the border with Thailand in the south. In that period, the country enjoyed peace

and the royal capital welcomed foreign diplomatic missions from Sumatra and Bengol, Golconda and Goa in India.

In 1658 Yungli, the last Ming emperor of China, arrived interfere to Bhamo and they killed men, plundered the village, burned monasteries in Sagaing region. Between 1673 and 1698 the later Myanmar kings of the Nyaungyan dynasty could not bring the country peace and prosperity. During the times of King Mahadamayaza Dipati (1733-52), Manipura threatened even Inwa, the capital, in 1749. In 1752 the Mon king Banya Dala reduced Inwa to ashes and took captive King Maha Dhammavaza Dipati and his entire court to Pegu. In 1752 Alaung Mintara, was able to unite the villages in his neighborhood and force the Mon to retreat and he was able to found a new dynasty known as Konbaung.”(Ref. Chronology of Myanmar History, Historical Research press, 2007, p100-173)

Thus during the whole Nyaungyan period, the people from Myanmar face the battles and they participate themselves in those battles. So, the artists can draw and paint skillfully the scenes of battle.

In this mural, the distinctive character is painting of 101 nationalities described with ink inscription. The name of nationalities like Tayoke, Tayat, Kayin, Kayar, Yodayar, Taline, Brahma, Shan, Kyon, Shyon, kualla, Parikkaya, Rakhine, Dawal, Inkal, Kalka, Thapa, Kanyan, Kan Myin, Kachin, Thoutkatae, Lathae, Hein Thu, Yei Thu, Pinwar, Meiktar, Lawa, Yeiswa, Linthaei, Kancho, Thain, Thet, Lawyar, Ponnar, Bodhi, Ain patt, Kasu, Kaekyin, Letwae, TharGayar, Thuyon, Lahout, Pout Tha, Yaman, Byarpar, Chin, Byaw, Thoat Tan, Pandate, Lin, Taninthayee, Zawgyi, Chinsoutte, Let Thet, Pann thaye, Palay, Palaung, Thu Hlaung, Tha Hette, Ta Pathi, Haryee, Sandar, Vanlayar, Sawar, Spain, Wein, Lahu, Danu, Zinkyaan, ...rattan, Oaktha, Lintikar, Myu, Kon, Patu kae, Thu tae, Lin taung, Thu Yaung, Bathar, Pindicar, Ya, Lahut, Yei mee Htwet, Kan Sett taung, Taung Thu, Myet Hnar Myin Kyin, Khamar and so on are depicted and written in ink inscription below the murals on the west part of north wall. (See Fig 3)

Although it has 101 nationalities, some inscriptions are badly damaged. The kings of small kingdoms of 101 nationalities holding *Than lye* march to the battle in the war chariot in front of the column deployed for battle (See Fig 4). In the scene of *Culani* king's military unit, eleven horses are depicted on the west wall and eleven war-elephants heroes are seen on the west part of north wall. Five war chariots with kings of small kingdoms and seven horses' heroes may be seen on the east part of north wall. But, some murals are badly damaged. When the artists illustrated the scene of 101 nationalities, they try to be different between the features of nationality according to the hair and dress styles, their weapons, their action, their head wear, their face- feature. It is considered that in the illustration the artists depict the nationalities that they have seen in contemporary daily life. The signs of narrow eyes, sharp nose, long nose, lower jaw, peeping out the fowl, faces with sideburns, lower jaw, peeping the jowl, faces with sideburns or whiskers, spreading jaw, wide and bulging eyes, wide eye ball are seen in different nationalities in this painting.

On the south wall in Laung Oo Maw library, the scenes of *Maho's* troops pretending to march to the battle front is painted in level six and *Maho's* trusted men digging the tunnel to the foot of king *Culani's* palace are illustrated skillfully. The portrayal of horses, elephants and weapons is very naturally apparent. The scene of *Mahosadha* taking out the chief queen of king *Culani*, *Nanda devi*, his mother *Calaka devi*, prince *Pancala Canda* and princess *Pancala Candi* by way of tunnel and in the tunnel the door leaves separated the rooms are illustrated.

In Shinpinwintlan (Pakoakku), the murals of *Mahosadha* Jātaka show the scenes of 101 nationalities of small kingdom making a gesture of reverence by putting the palms together are portrayed and described with ink inscription on thick frame of entrance of east wall. (See Fig 7) It is rare painting like the murals of Laung Oo Maw. The scenes of four



Fig - 1 A war elephant (Laung Oo Maw)
(Photo by researcher)



Fig - 2 **Kawatt** and king **Culani** advance to contact like a moon for marching to battle (Laung Oo Maw)
(Photo by researcher)



Fig - 3 101 nationalities with ink inscription (Laung Oo Maw)
(Photo by researcher)



Fig - 4 War chariots with kings of small kingdoms (Laung Oo Maw)
(Photo by researcher)



Fig - 5 Horsemen from cavalry battalion (Laung Oo Maw)
(Photo by researcher)



Fig - 6 King *Culani*'s military unit containing 101 kingdom (Shwegutha)
(Photo by researcher)



Fig - 7 101 nationalities of small kingdom making a gesture of reverence (Shinpinwintlan), (Photo by researcher)