

Buddhist Culture in Meiktila

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Abstract

In the merit-oriented Myanmar, society-building and renovation of temples and pagodas got the highest priority. Throughout the low lands and uplands of Meiktila, the structure of the religious monument was interpreted into the design of architecture, the layout of a kingdom and the rituals of kingship. Cosmology or belief in the fundamental order of the universe pervaded all of the Hindu Buddhist World in Myanmar. The promotion of tangible culture includes cultural identity and achievements in the early stages of Buddhist culture in Meiktila.

Keyword: Tangible and Intangible Culture, Cosmology

Introduction

Meiktila Lake consists of two parts, the southern lake and the northern lake that are divided by the bridge of Meiktila-Kyaukpadaung Highway. At present, there are more pagodas than in the past because of population density.

Many ancient pagodas are found in Meiktila because it has been a famous town since the earliest time. In studying the concentration of pagodas in Meiktila, it is found that two inner zones are more concentrated than others. We can, however, guess their historical conditions by trickling such questionnaires: How do we approach the religious structure in Meiktila? How and why did they accept the cosmology point of view?

There are forty-four pagodas including those that are anonymous in Meiktila. They are located in fourteen quarters. Unfortunately, we have found pagodas in nine quarters. All of the religious structures found in nine quarters are calculated and the percentages are as follows:

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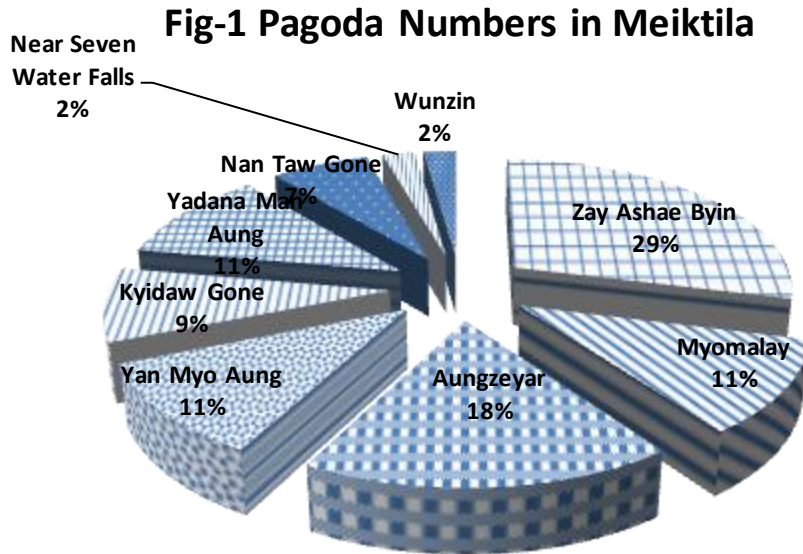
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Source: Pagoda List in Meiktila Quarter, 2012, Dr. Moe Moe Oo Collection

Among them let me inform the ten pagodas in Meiktila. There are two pagodas in the northern part, one pagoda in the northeast, four pagodas in the middle of Meiktila Lake, one pagoda in the southeast, and two pagodas in the southwest.

The famous pagodas near and in the middle of Meiktila Lake are more famous. This may be probably due to geographic factors such as taking places of residential houses near the lake.

Aims and Objectives

The research aims to provide knowledge and to produce systematic and reliable sources and a better understanding of the historical aspects. We believe that our research makes particular values or beliefs for religion in achieving development objectives.

Materials and Methods

Several field trips had done to Meiktila Town. The historical evidence were classified on the based on their utility in the area. Forty-four pagodas collected from fourteen quarters were used to collect the quantitative data. The statistic method was calculated for manipulating information. The information from the ten pagodas photos discussion was gathered for the qualitative data.

Literature Review

U Ni Tut, Meiktila Sasana, Type Writing, 1998 and U Htun Lwin (Meiktila), *Meiktila Myone Thamaing Phitsin Hmat Tam*, (Historical Record of Meiktila Township) (Pagan to Colonial Period) have been written book. This book was carried out by Meiktila Township's pagodas between religious information and archaeological survey. The author analyzed a more detailed discussion on geographic factors and its effects on prominent architectural structure and cosmology points of view. Thus, this probability date and style analysis is the most reliable method to analyze this work.

Location

In studying religious establishments in and around Meiktila, it is necessary to group them in accordance with their location. There are fourteen quarters in Meiktila.⁷ The names of pagodas found in seven quarters are as follows:

No	Pagoda Name	Place
1	Shwe Myin Tin	Yadana Man Aung
2	Phaung Taw U	Myoma Lay
3	Su Taung Pyi	Myoma Lay
4	Naga Yone Maha Bodhi	Nantaw Gone
5	Chantha Gyi	Ashae Byin
6	Aung Theikdi	Near Seven Water Falls
7	Aunt Ta ku	Nantaw Gone
8	Wun Taw Pyi	Kyitaw Gone
9	Shwe Saw Lu	Nantaw Gone
10	Htee Thoe Sint	Wunzin

In the list mentioned above, the names of pagodas in Aung Zaya quarter and Yan Myo Aung quarters are not included because they are not popular. The pagodas built in Meiktila do not depend upon the land condition. They are found on the low lands as well as on the uplands and also in the Meiktila Lake.

Religious Architecture

The pagoda is a prominent architectural structure in Meiktila. It took its aspiration from a stupa, a structure that originally enshrines the relics

of the Buddha and is of Indian province. The typical pagoda can be divided into three distinct portions. They are (1) only stupas, (2) stupas with spire and (3) temple.

- I- Pagodas depicting the shape of only stupas- Su Taung Pyi⁸,
Phaung Taw-U⁹, Chantha Gyi¹⁰, Aung Theikdi¹¹ and Aunt Ta ku¹²

⁷ See Map-I, Irrigation Department (Construction - 7), Meiktila District

⁸ Figure-2, Su Taung Pyi Pagoda, Daw Hninn Ngwe Collection

⁹ Figure-3, Phaung Taw-U Pagoda, Daw Su Su Win Collection

¹⁰ Figure-4, Chan-tha Gyi Pagoda, Dr. Thida Myint Collection

¹¹ Figure-5, Aung Theikdi Pagoda, Dr. Moe Moe Oo Collection

¹² Figure-6, Aunt-ta-Ku Pagoda, Dr. Moe Moe Oo Collection



Fig-2, Su Taung Pyi

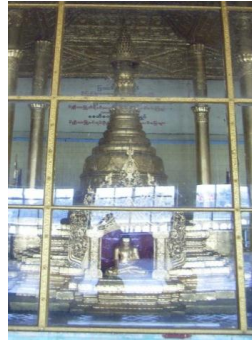


Fig-3, Phaung Taw-U



Fig-4, Chan-tha gyi



Fig-5, Aung Theikdi



Fig-6, Aunt-ta-ku

Type one pagoda shape represents the bell design, receding terraces and conical finical.

II- Pagodas depicting the shape of only stupas with spire- Shwe Myin Tin¹³, Shwe Saw Lu¹⁴ and Htee Thone Sint¹⁵



Fig-7, Shwe Myin Tin



Fig-8, Shwe Saw Lu



Fig-9, Htee Thone Sint

The outside area of Type two pagodas is usually whitewashed with gilt only the spire. This design is Myanmar's favorite pattern.

¹³ Figure-7, Shwe Myin Tin Pagoda, Dr. Moe Moe Oo Collection

¹⁴ Figure-8, Shwe saw Lu Pagoda, Dr. Moe Moe Oo Collection

¹⁵ Figure-9, Htee Thone Sint Pagoda, Dr. Moe Moe Oo Collection

III- Pagodas depicting the shape of temple-Nagayone Maha Bodhi¹⁶ and Wun Taw Pyi¹⁷.



Fig-10, Nagayone Maha Bodhi



Fig-11, Wun Taw Pyi

Type three buildings is the temple formed of a square hollow structure with one story temple type. On the chamber, there are three receding terraces with small niches at the center of each terrace.

The prime purpose of the temple is to enshrine the image of the Buddha's interiors arrangements with galleries and corridors are designed for religious ceremonial.¹⁸ The temple bears no remarkable inner and outer decorations, like flame pediments with animal and human relief and floral motifs on the plinths usually found on Nagayone Maha Bodhi temple and Wun Taw pyi temple.

Dates and Styles

By studying religious establishments in and around Meiktila, it is necessary to group them according to their location without definitely saying their types and age. Because King Asoka¹⁹ sent missionaries far and wide, besides causing more than eighty thousand relic shrines to be built, earlier structures than this cannot, therefore, be expected.²⁰

We can analyze the donors of successive Myanmar kings and ordinary donors in Meiktila. We can't accurately say the period. But we can approximately guess the descendent from the ancient design and period.

¹⁶ Fig-10, Nagayone Maha Bodhi Temple, Dr. Moe Moe Oo Collection

¹⁷ Fig-11, Wun Taw Pyi Temple, Dr. Moe Moe Oo Collection

¹⁸ Lu Pe Win, *Some Aspects of Burmese Culture*, Six Annual Research Conference, December 31, 1957,

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¹⁹ Joan Sommer, "The Evolution of the Buddha Image", *Sawaddi Magazine*, Nov-Dec 1967, Vol:6, No.2,

p.1

²⁰ Lu Pe Win, 1957, 24

Table-I, Stupas and Temples Style

No	Name	Period	Donors	(Style)
1	Shwe Myin Tin	1112 A.D	Nara Pati Sithu ²¹ (1168-1231)	Late Bagan
2	Phaung daw U	-	-	Colonial? ²²
3	Su Taung Pyi	1888 A.D	Nara Pati Sithu ²³ (1168-1211)	Konbaung
4	Naga Yone Maha Bodhi	-	Narapati Sithu (1168- 1211) ²⁴	Gupta
5	Chantha gyi	-	Narapati Sithu ²⁵ (1168-1211)	Kon-baung
6	Aung Theikdi	2000 A.D	-	Present
7	Aunt ta ku	-	-	Kon-baung
8	Wun taw Pyi	1853 A.D	Naung Taung Mya (1211- 1231) ²⁶	Kon-baung
9	Shwe Saw Lu	-	-Saw Lu Min (1077-1084) ²⁷ , -NaraPati Sithu (1168-1211) ²⁸	Kon-baung
10	Htee Thoe Sint	1201 A.D	Narapati Sithu ²⁹ (1168-1211)	Kon-baung

We can say that these depictions are related to Buddhist religion. The motive of the artist or the donor of the pagoda might be to teach illiterate pilgrims about the Buddha's structure. Literate people intended, to study the life of the Buddha and how he had acquired merits. The Myanmar people accepted their feelings and concentrated their thoughts on the supreme model.³⁰ The craftsman ideas are not confined to mere artistic appeal but imbued with national traditions and religious beliefs.

Structure and Floor Plan

Art historians would greatly value and inspire it for the religious structure showed the donor's desire especially their art and architecture designs in that period.

²¹ (a) *Meiktila Kan Taw Bwe* (Title of Meiktila Lake), *Parabaik MS*, No-19, Meiktila University Library Collection (Henceforth *Parabaik MS*, No-19, MULC)

(b) A Kari Buyin Ma Htan Set Thwin Yan (Letter to Queen), *Parabaik MS*, No-20, Meiktila University Library Collection (Henceforth *Parabaik MS*, No-20, MULC)

(c) Meiktila Lake Inscription (1856), Top of the Nat Mauk lake; U Htun Lwin (Meiktila), *Meiktila Myo ne Thamaing Phit Sin Hmat Tam*, Historical Record of Meiktila Township (Pagan to Colonial Period), First Edition, Sape Beik Hman Press, 2014, 204, (Henceforth Htun Lwin, 2014)

(d) *Zambu Dipa U Saung Kyan* (Zambu Island in a nutshell), ed. by Pe Maung Tin and J.S. Furnivall, Yangon, Burma Research Society, 1960, 132

²² Htun Lwin, 2014 , 233

²³ *Parabaik MS*, No-19, MULC

²⁴ *Parabaik MS*, No-20, MULC

²⁵ Htun Lwin, 2014 , 232

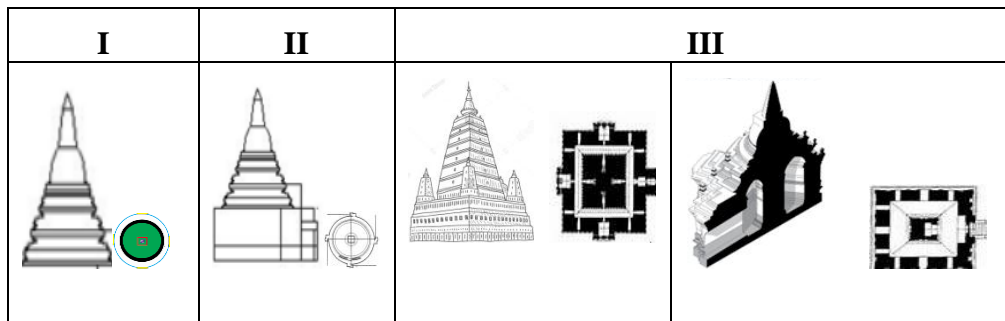
²⁶ Htun Lwin, 2014 , 226-7

²⁷ (a) Scott J.G and Hardman, *Gazetteer of Upper Burma and Shan State*, Vol.II, 1901, 279

²⁸ *Parabaik MS*, No-20, MULC

²⁹ *Parabaik MS*, No-20

³⁰ Lu Pe Win, 1957, 25-6



All these architectural features are purposive. They are dictated by the Myanmar conception to make a symbol for something spiritual. There is hardly any architectural design without an artistic motif in Myanmar religious art which does not suggest any spiritual significance.

Vertical Representation of the Cosmos

The chief Buddhist architectural representation of the cosmos, seen in the stupa was originally the architectural body into which relics were placed and thus stood for the body of the Buddha and Buddhist law.³¹ The stupa was associated with the pillar representing the cosmic axis of the world mountain.

The spire differs in that the number of lotus buds represented the number of Lord Buddhas' life span of a universe. The stupas structure in each of four niches represented a Guardian of one of the Four Quarters.³² Frequently, below those further cosmic images, we can see in a group of demon figures holding up Mount Meru. One of the most dramatic representations of the cross-section of the universe is visualized traditionally on the west wall of a temple. Behind the principal float the heavenly palaces imbued with bejeweled glory and peace.

Below the earth, often very graphically depicted, are the various hells full of leaping flames, with tortured and painful expressions on the poor souls who must be condemned to dwell therein. This cosmology is often shown on the sole of a Buddha's footprint.³³

These are but a few of the cosmological expressions of the universe, which were based the architecture in a temple compound, and the rituals, rites, and customs of those times.

Finding and Discussion

In this work, a total of 44 pagodas were surveyed. From this survey, three group designs of ten pagodas were analyzed. We can discuss the religion to endure for long and the further generation a favor of high ideals. Regional research is reflected in their responses not only in the ownership of the learning but also in focused group discussion.

Conclusion

Meiktila is an old township that appeared in the Myanmar historical scene during the successive period. The religious monuments were erected since then throughout ages the

³¹ Beverly F. Frankel, "The Universe and Ayuthaya," *The Sawadi Magazine*, p-38 (Henceforth Frankel)

³² Frankel, 39

³³ Frankel, 39

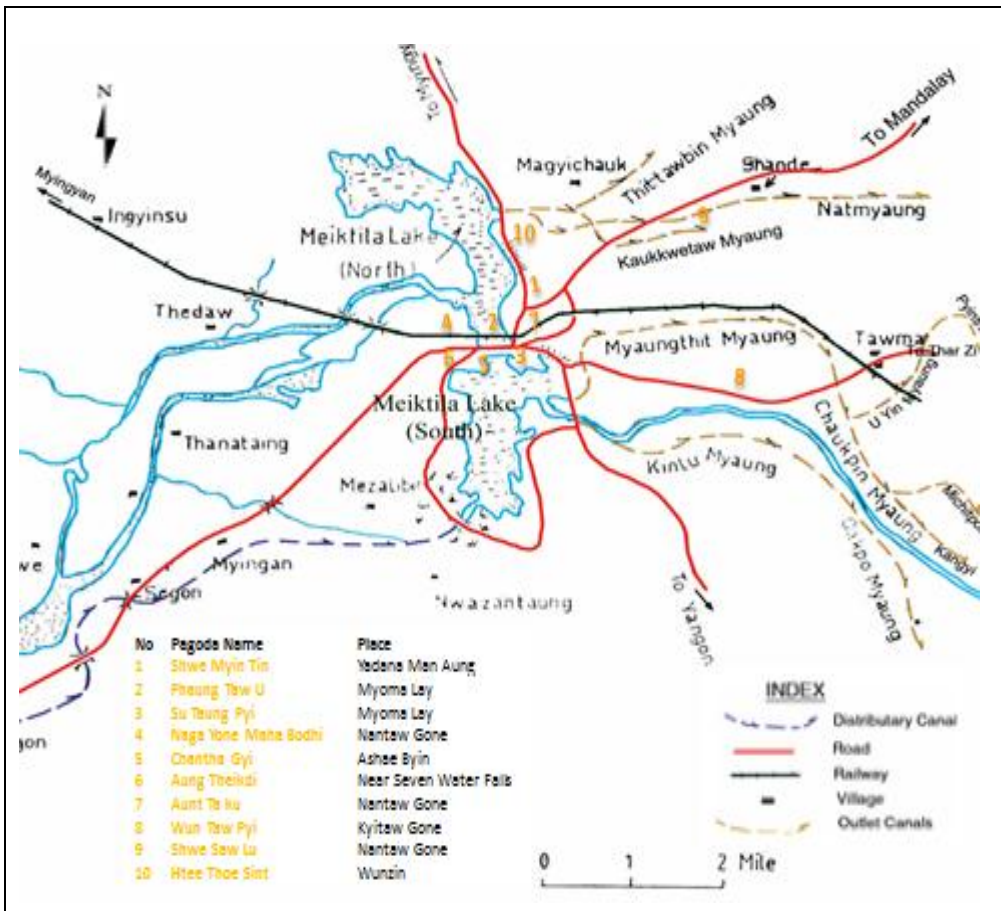
people of Meiktila did not meritorious deeds by building religious structures. All religious structures throw light on Myanmar society. Art and social historians could bring historical facts from these monuments in order that they could either acquire architecture techniques and their views. It shows the sense of promotion exhibited by the people. The author never tries to interpret them from the religious point of view and to deal with them in great detail.

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Map-I

Ten Pagodas Location in Meiktila



Source: Irrigation Department (Construction - 7), Meiktila District

References

Stone Inscription

Meiktila Lake Inscription (1856), Top of the Nat Mauk lake

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Photo Collections

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Map

Irrigation Department (Construction - 7), Meiktila District