

A Historical Study of Inscriptions at *Kyau-ksar Yon* (Inscription Shed) in Mandalay Royal Palace

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to study the data from lithic inscriptions located at *Kyau-ksar Yon* (Inscription Shed) in Mandalay Royal Palace from historical point of view. The information mentioned in these ancient inscriptions are the contemporary events prevailing at that time and these data can be used as primary sources in portraying the economic condition of Myanmar in ancient time. In this research paper, economic condition of Myanmar during the early period, construction of dams, canals by the kings in successive periods and development of irrigation system, agriculture and animal husbandry, as well as the agricultural products of that period are described with reference to the data mentioned in the inscriptions. Therefore, it would contribute to the livelihood of the people. Moreover, people knew a variety of handicrafts. In that period, there were many wealthy people who could effort to build and donate pagodas and monasteries for propagation of Buddhism. By studying the data mentioned in the inscriptions, it can be deduced that people in that people were thriving in economy.

Keywords: economy, religion, cultivation and domestication

Introduction

The matters mentioned in these inscriptions are mostly concerned with contemporary economic factors prevailing at that time and therefore, the inscriptions are highly valuable as historical sources to describe and analyze the economy of Myanmar in that period. The irrigation system had been well established in Kha-yaing (District) since the 9th century A.D. The cultivated lands were categorized into Le (Paddy Land), Ya (Dry cultivation), Kaing (Cultivation on silted land) and U-yan (Gardening) depending on the condition of weather and locality of the area. With regard to animal breeding, cattle, horse, elephant, and goat were raised not only to be used in agricultural works but also for meat consumption and transportation. Therefore, it would get sufficient food for consumption and people seem to be well thrived in their economy.

Aim and Objectives

This research paper is an attempt to study the data from lithic inscriptions located at *Kyau-ksar Yon* (Inscription Shed) in Mandalay Royal Palace from historical point of view. In this research paper, economic condition of Myanmar during the early period, construction of dams, canals by the kings in successive periods and development of irrigation system, agriculture and animal husbandry, as well as the agricultural products of that period are described with reference to the data mentioned in the inscriptions.

Economic Conditions

The lithic inscriptions in Mandalay royal court show mostly the facts on donation. However the economic facts are also mentioned. In relation to agriculture, the place and extent of the donated land and the terms hse(dam), myaung (drain or canal), kan(lake) and inn (natural pond) are mentioned in this inscriptions. It was evidenced that irrigated agriculture developed together with irrigated land because the paddy fields were found together with hse (dam), myaung and kan.

The names of the drain or canal, pond and lake mentioned in the inscriptions are Kouk-kou myaung(IMP, No. 4(a)¹⁰) (kouk-kou canal or drin), Nga-lap-pan canal(IMP, No. 90⁵), Hse-pe canal(IMP, No. 4(a)¹⁰), Tan-yauk-tin sub-canal(IMP. No. 98(b)¹⁵), Thet-ka canal(IMP, No. 98(a)¹³), Tha-byei-nyaun-pin nyauk myaung(IMP, No. 98(b)¹⁴) (the northern canal of tha-byei-nyaun-pin)Ky-i-inn(IMP, No. 4(a)¹⁶) (Ky-i natural pond), Ngape-inn(IMP, No. 98(b)¹³), Nyaun Phyu tan soun inn(IMP, No.229(b)¹⁰), Bazun-zeit-inn(IMP, No.90^{6,7}) Pounne-madi-inn(IMP, No. 4(a)¹⁸), Maun-ma inn(IMP, No.369^{9,10}), Kya-kan(IMP, No.246²⁰) (Kya lake), Hta-naung kan(IMP., No.119(b)⁵), Ngan-phe kan(IMP, No.246²⁰), Pyun kan(IMP, No.246²³), Pauk kan(IMP, No.246²¹), and Magyi kan(IMP, No.246²¹). Based on these dams, cannal (or) drains ponds and lakes, the cultivations were made in these regions because these areas were in dry zone. Gawon-kyauung, Kyauksar (the inscription of Gawon monastery) inscribed in AD 1058 shows the term "pansi-ashei-myauk daunt Nyaun kan htan tahtaun saik(IMP, No.10²⁰)" (pansi ashfei-myauk daunt the corner of north-east of Pansi, Nyaun-kan+Nyaun lake, htan tahtaun = 1000 toddy-palms, saik = cultivate or grow) meaning " A thousand of toddy-palms are grown in Nyaun lake at the corner of north-

east of Pansi". Therefore it may be regarded that there were yar (farm land), mayin zaba le (mayin zaba = species of paddy, le=paddy field) and toddy-palms in these regions.

The extent of the land was mostly mentioned with the word "pe(IMP, No.71(b)³)". The ancient Myanmar used to this word "Pe" when they told their land area. 1 "pe" is equal to 1.77 acre(Dr.Than Thn, 1964). Besides the words "khwe le(IMP, No.502⁴)" and "seit(IMP, No.502⁸)" are also found. The paddy field in which one khwe of seeds can be planted is called khwe le and the paddy field in which one seit of seeds can be planted is called seit le. Sometimes the ancient Myanmar used to count the unit "tinn" (16 Pyi). In the inscription of Sutaung Pyai pagoda inscribed in AD 1349, it mentioned "yale kan auk pyou khinn thoun-tinn win ta-twin(IMP, No. 122¹⁰)" with the amount of tinn. The land planted 5 tinn was roughly called "one Pe(Dr. Than Tun, 1964)".

The farm produce obtained from the land donated for the religion are mentioned in the royal inscriptions. This land and farm are called tharthanar myei (the land donated for religious purpose). If Tharthanar myei was extended the king's taxes were decreased. However there was no reason for the decline of economy as well as the agriculture because the farmers continued to grow the crops and buy and sell the farm produces. The names of the farm produces found in the inscriptions are onion(IMP, No.5¹¹), betel vine(IMP, No.604(a)¹¹), gyin (IMP, No.5¹¹), (ginger), ngayout(IMP, No.5¹¹) (pepper), zapar(IMP, No.219(b)⁵) (paddy), htan(IMP, No.429¹⁸) (toddy palm), peinn-me(IMP, No.429¹⁸) (jack fruit) pann-man(IMP, No.429¹⁸) (collective term for flowers), Pe(IMP, No.219(a)^{4,5}) (pea), Pyaung(IMP, No.219(a)^{4,5}) (corn), magyi(IMP, No.604(a)¹) (tamarind), citrus(IMP, No.604(a)⁵), mango(IMP, No.604(a)¹), limon(IMP, No.604(a)¹) and coconut (IMP, No.429(a)¹).

According to the traditional practices of the crops, the cultivated land and farm were divided as Uyin (horticultural land), Kain; (silting land), Kyun; (island resulting from silting), Yar (farmland bearing crops other than rice), Muyin le and Than le. The perennial plants were planted in Uyin. The horticultural crops are betel vine and nut(IMP, No.604(a)¹), toddy palm(IMP, No.429(a)¹⁸), coconut(IMP, No.429(a)¹⁸), mango (IMP, No.604 (a)¹), jack fruit(IMP, No.429(a)¹⁸), tamarind(IMP, No.604(a)¹), citrus(IMP, No.604(a)¹), and lime (IMP, No.604(a)¹). The donation of the toddy palms is also stated in the inscriptions. The toddy palms were mostly grown in the central region of Myanmar. Most of the crops in horti-garden were toddy palms which became commercial crops. It was found that the toddy palms population of 10806 plants were donated for the religious purposes. The cultivation of Kain; (the land formed by the process of silting) was found in the surroundings of the rivers, streams and natural ponds or lakes. The crops of kain; were onion(IMP, No.5¹¹), ginger(IMP, No.5¹¹) and mustard(IMP, No.5(a)¹²). Yar cultivation area is in the tropical regions. A number of

beans and corn are the yar crops (IMP, No.219(a)^{4,5}). The royal inscriptions mention the terms such as "hying koug tahte (IMP, No.105⁶)" meaning a good cotton cloth and "hpyin lei:the (IMP.No.40¹⁰)" meaning four cotton clothes. This suggests that there was cotton plantation in yar for the clothes. Yar was usually measured in pe, chin and kan. According to the term "yar ta-chin hrint nga;-kan (IMP, No.140⁷)" meaning one chin and five kan of yar, kan is smaller than chin.

The extent of yar was also stated with "pe(IMP, No.24¹⁰)". According to the inscriptions, the total area of yar dedicated to the pagodas and monasteries are 50 pe, 4 chin and 6 kan. The donors gave in charity their yar or farms to the pagodas and monasteries as "si-mee wut" and "thin-bout wut" (si-mee means lamp or candle, thin-bout means food offered to the Buddha, and wut means duty). The dedicated lands comprised of than le(IMP, No.224(b)²⁵) (the monsoon rice land) and mayin le(IMP, No.224²⁵) (the spring rice land). Moreover the word "pyou: gin(IMP, No.18⁴)" (nursery plot) is frequently mentioned in the inscriptions and therefore the method of transplantation was already a regular practice in those days. The total area of the rice or paddy lands dedicated for the religious purposes were 11204 pe. The ancient Myanmar cultivated the crops system at cally using the irrigated water from the dams, the drains or canals, the lakes, the natural ponds and brooks and produced various sorts of farm produces.

Moreover many species of plants mentioned in the inscriptions are Kouk-kou pin(IMP, No.219(b)⁸) ("albizzia lebbek") Kha-baun-gyi(IMP, No.427(b)⁸) (the nux-vomica or strychnos muxblanda), Tamar(IMP, No.427 (b)¹⁰) (neem tree or margosa tree or azadirachta indica), Dani(IMP, No.219(b)¹²) (nipa palm or nipa fruticans), nhan-be-pin-gyi(IMP, No.427(b)⁹) a kind of timber tree (lannea grandis), Pyi-shi-sha-pin(IMP, No.219(b)⁸) (cutch: acacia catechu), Pauk pin(IMP, No.219(b)¹⁵) (parrot tree), Lein pin(IMP, No.427(b)⁹) a kind of large timber tree (terminalia pyrifolia), Than-that-pin(IMP, No.219(b)¹⁴) (albizzia lucida) and Ou-hnu:pin(IMP, No.221(b)³) (streblus asper).

Buying and selling of the farms shows some of the price of land demarcated and set up the stone pillar") which suggests that there were the land surveying officers and the land surveying clerks at that time. If someone pulled out the stone pillar it was regarded that he committed the great misdeed and he would be punished by a fine. Phyak-ka-thu inscription dated AD 1266 describes the phrase "tai hnouk yaka ngweipyan 100 kya i:(IMP, No.29⁸)" meaning "those who pulled out the stone pillar had to pay the money infinitely as fine". The finishing of the land bargain was also recorded in the inscription. Satta-linka-thunge inscription dated AD 1229 mentions the term "sayin tintho: sa-yei: tho;-thu(IMP, No.223⁵)" meaning "theclerk who wrote the records". The donors of the land and farm recorded their donation on stone to make their good deeds firmer and stronger. The person with good writing skill had to write the record of

donation on stone. The usage "kyauksa yei: thi ka Oau-sin-thin(IMP, No.58(b)¹¹)" ("Oau-sin-thin who wrote the records on stone") confirms the above statement.

The domestication was made together with agriculture. The cattle breeding was the most important because the word "nwa" ("cow and bull") was frequently used in the inscriptions. The records on the donation of so many cows and bulls to the pagodas and monasteries were also found in the inscriptions. The term "nwa:-htein:(IMP, No.76(b)⁴)" points out the development of the cattle breeding. The raising of cattle was made with the intention of using in the cultivation and transportation as well as for food supplies. However the words "harrowing" and "ploughing" were not found in the inscriptions. But finding of the term "hle: htaun thugyi(IMP, No.4(a)⁹)" meaning "the headman who set up the bullock cart" proved that the cows were used for transportation. It was found in the records of donation that the cows were dedicated together when the donors gave away their land and farms to the pagodas and monasteries(IMP, No.76(b)³). The words such as "nou nhyit nwa:(IMP, No. 598⁹)" ("the cow which was raised for milk"), "nwa ma(IMP, No.598²⁴)" (cow) and "nwa la:(IMP, No.24¹¹)" (leading bull of the herd") were stated in the inscriptions and so it may be assumed that the cattle were raised for cultivation, milk and meat. The other animals mentioned in the inscriptions were the chicken(IMP, No.218(b)⁸), elephant(IMP, No.5⁹), goat(IMP, No.105¹³), horse(IMP, No.18^{4,5}) and pig(IMP, No.217¹⁰). The royal inscriptions mention the terms such as "hseit htein" (goat keeper), "hseit cha" (goat farm), "kywe:htein" (buffalo keeper) and "hsin htein" (elephant keeper). These facts suggest that the breeding of various sorts of animals reached a high level. The buffalo was used for the cultivation and the transportation. The total population of the cattle dedicated together with the farms to the pagodas and monasteries were 231 in number. The animals such as the chicken, goat and pig were raised for food supplies and the animals such as the elephant, horse, buffalo cow and bull were domesticated for using in the cultivation and the transportation.

Apart from cultivation and domestication, there was a commercial dealing. On buying and selling, the inscriptions mention the commodities in relation to the religion. They were "khin-hni:(IMP,No.218(b)¹)" ("anything spread or laid out to serve as a seat:), "hgwe sa laung" (silver receptacle), "ngwe khwek oup(IMP, No.35(a)³⁸)" (silver lid or cover) "pahsou: sap pait tasout:(IMP, No.218^{10, 11, 14})" (a part of cotton cloth), hpyin(IMP, No.40⁵) (sackcloth or coarse material made of flax), " Myak thout(IMP, No.219¹⁷)" (face towel), "yei zit kha ya":(IMP, No. 587⁸)" (the water pitcher with beak and handle"), "lin ban:(IMP, No.347⁶)"(the salver), "thin gan:(IMP, No.587²)" (robe worn by Buddhist monk), ap(IMP, No.587⁸) (needle) and "in:gyi(IMP, No.219(b)¹⁸)" (general term for upper clothing). The using of "din:ga:" (coin) as money was not mentioned in the inscriptions> Instead

the various crystal forms of metal such as silver and copper(IMP, No.218(b)¹⁰) were used as medium of exchange in commercial dealing. In buying the land or farm, the value of land was stated by 50 silver and one kyat(IMP. No.607^{4,5}) (tical) of gold. Apart from the materials such as copper, gold and silver, the barter system was used in the bargain of land with such animals as the cattle, elephant, and horses.

In the inscription, there was no exact mention of the extent of land and the amount in number of land which the buyer obtained although the land was bought by exchanging with the metals. The inscription mentions the usage "nwa:takhu wet takhu thout sa: pa ihmya puso: thoun: hte lin-pan: thoun: chap: mye: bo:(IMP, No.347^{5,6})" meaning "the value of land was equal to such things as one bull, one pig, three garments and three sailvers". Accordingly it was difficult to estimate the accurate value of the land. The barter system was the most effective way at that time. the land price in the district was more expensive than the one in the circle region. In the district, the land price was twenty kyats for one pe, even though the land in the circle region was obtainable at the price of one kyat(Dr. Than Tun, 1964).

Yamut pha ya kyaung kyauk-sa (the inscription of Yamut pha ya monastery) in Myin Saing, Kyauk-se district, mentions that one pe of farm was bought by fifteen kyats(IMP, No. 46^{8,9}). It suggests that the land value run high in the district. The selling prices stated in the inscription are 15 kyats for a horse(IMP, No.110¹⁷), 30 kyats for "thin tain: yin khat ta-hta(IMP, No.110¹⁸)" (a smock-like garment made by hand") and 15 kyats for a bull(IMP, No.110¹⁹). The records on bargain of plam were also mentioned in the inscription(IMP, No.607(b)⁷). According to the inscription the slave trade came into existence. The slaves were regarded as self-properties and inherited prosperities. The inscriptions of Bagan mention the price of a slave as thirty of silver or a viss of copper(Dr. Than Tun, 1964). However it was found in the royal court inscriptions that the slaves were donated together with the articles of offering to the religion.(IMP, No.106(a)^{2,3}) There was no mention in the inscription of the records concerning the tax. Most of the records in the inscriptions pay a great attention to the donation of land and farms to the religion.

Apart from the professions of cultivation and domestications, various kinds of traditional art and crafts were made for living. The art and crafts stated in the inscriptions were "pan-ta-ra(IMP, No.126 (a)¹³)" (music), "pan:-ta-mo(IMP, No. 112²)" (art of stone sculpture), "kyauk-out-in:-gadei loup (IMP, No.126(a)¹⁸)" ("the craft making stone, brick and cement"), let-tha-ma(IMP, No. 76(a)⁸) ("the craft of carpenter"), badein(IMP, No.213⁴) ("the art of goldsmith or silversmith"), bagyi(IMP, No. 317(b)¹) ("the art of painting"), babu ("the art of woodcarving"), payan (the craft of a mason) and bebe: ("the craft of blacksmithing"). The word "apyauk thi:(IMP, No.53^{10,11})" ("the craftsman who made decorative scroll and relief work") mentioned in the inscription suggests that there was the art of making

lacquer were called pan:yun:. In short, the works for living comprised of such professions as cultivation, domestication, art and crafts, and the keeping of bull, bullocks, cows, goats and elephants. The craftsmen made household utensils and materials and wove the cloths by hand. They built the pagodas, monasteries, lakes and resthouses. They made the essential things of human being. The blacksmiths produced humanhood goods and farm implements. The craft of blacksmithing became the most important craft in this time because the implements and tools used for the cultivation and the transportation came from this craft. The gold smith and the silversmith made the ornamental things. The woodcarvers carved the images. Their living standard ran high. The people of dramatic art mentioned in the inscriptions comprised of "si thi(IMP, No.438^{9,10})" (drummer), "pan-ta-ra thi(IMP, No.438^{9,10})" (musician and dancer) and "pa-tha-thi(IMP, No.605¹⁴)" ("the person who beats musical instrument with leathwe"). The donors donated the slaves together with "sit hi" and "pan-ta-ra-thi" to the pagodas(IMP, No.292^{6,8}). Therefore the artists played important role in the society. The other crafts men were "Ouhpwe-thi(IMP, No.52¹³)" who made a living on hair-dressing and "Hsa:-thi" who made a living on the making of salt.

There were the hunters lived by hunting because the word "mu-hsai(IMP, No.30⁶)" (hunter) was seen in the royal court inscription. Finding the term Kun-thi(IMP, No.55⁴) also suggests that there was the fishers with fishing net who made a living on catching fish. Considering the records on the "in:" (the natural pond or lake) which is widely mentioned in the inscriptions, we may say that the work for living on fishing flourished at that time and there was the dried fish(IMP, No.5¹¹) production. The various kinds of professions point out that their social and economic conditions were not low. Most of the food supplies abundant in the local regions came from the farming and the animal husbandry. Their professions gave a true description of how they lived. The poor educated persons served as clerks (IMP, No.218(b)⁹).

To sum up, the royal court inscriptions mention mostly the facts concerning the donation and to some degree the facts on economy. The basic economy was agriculture which developed together with the irrigated land and farms. The ancient Myanmar were able to manage the water supply by means of rivers, streams, or brooks, natural lakes or ponds. They constructed the dams, canals, drains and lakes for the distribution of water to the fields. The agro-soil was divided into five kinds: Uyin (horticultural land), Kain: (silting land), Kyun: (island resulting from silting), Yar (farmland bearing, dry crops other than rice and Le (the paddy fields). They applied the transplanting technique in agriculture. The cattles were raised for using in harrowing, ploughing and transporting. The horse and elephant were also used for transportation. The breeding of the chicken, goat and pig was meant for food supply. It may not be regarded that there were no much trade between one district and another district as well as between one

circle region and another circle region because this period was the feudal age. Because most of the inscriptions are the ones on donation, it is found that the inscriptions mention the records on the donation of the articles to the religion, buying and selling of the land and farms, using of the barter system, the bargain of the slaves and the exchange of the slaves.

Conclusion

Myanmar people in ancient times had grown crops with water from naturally existed rivers and creeks but also from man-made dams canals and lakes. From the inscriptions, kinds of crops which had been grown at that period are also known. Moreover, people were also skillful in making handicrafts and they had earned their livelihood by making handicrafts. Therefore, it seems that people in those days were able to live in comfortable life without anxiety for their livelihood. Beside agriculture and animal breeding, people also engaged in trading. It might be only local trading within the territory of a District. These factors reveal the fact that the society in that period was highly developed in administration, economic, social, education, and cultural condition.

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