

Buddhist arts and crafts of the Nagayon Pagoda, Meiktila Township

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Abstract

In this paper, there are three main parts. In preface, renovation of original pagoda as a Nagayon pagoda was revealed. In body, Buddha statues (images), religious buildings, internal and external decoration of Nagayon pagoda, history of Nagayon pagoda and location of the pagoda were explained. Although, the history of the Nagayon pagoda was not found when it was built, the history of renovation was expressed. Finally, a stake of Nagayon pagoda and traditional floral arts found in pagoda were presented.

Key words- history, arts and crafts, culture, religious faith

Introduction

Nagayon Pagoda was renovated by enshrining the original pagoda in Nandawgon Quarter, Meiktila. Spirits of dragon from Bhogavati offered several kinds of fruits to Buddha while Buddha was sitting on the double layered vestment laid by Nyitaw Ananda after birthing. After Buddha had fruits, he preached sermon of *Dhammarakkhita* to four guardian spirits of Meiktila Lake and spirits of dragon on Monday, 4th waxing of Tasaungmone in 117 Myanmar era.

In BC 563, King Narapatisithu renovated Meiktila Lake which was renovated by his father before. At that time, spirits of dragon pointed out king Narapatisithu the land where Buddha had alms food of fruits after birthing to build a pagoda. So, the king rebuilds Nagayuan pagoda, which has a cave leading to the east, by enshrining the original pagoda and *saririka* relics brought from *Majjhima* to King Anawratha.

Moreover, eastern gateway was renovated and decorated with mosaic on Thursday, 8th waxing day of Wakhaung, in 1330 Myanmar era (21-8-1969). Nagayuan pagoda was driven in a stake to establish as Mahā Bhodhi Pagoda on 8th waxing day of Wakhaung, in 1333 Myanmar era (27-7-1971) led by Venerable Indaka and Venerable Uttara from *Sadhamma Wamthayone Pariyatti* Sarthin Taik.

Materials and methods

In this research paper, all of the data about the history of Nagayon pagoda, Buddhist art and architecture were collected from libraries and field survey. Descriptive method was used. The materials used in the research are historical and cultural Texts.

Findings

Location of Nagayon Pagoda

Nagayon pagoda is located between 20°52'N 42.13'CN and 95°51'N 14.98'CE, on Meiktila-Kyaukpadaung road, Nandawgone quarter in Meiktila. It is obvious that Nagayon pagoda is an ancient pagoda according to the history. It is 108 feet high, the platform is 40 square feet and the precinct is 150 square feet wide. Previous type of Nagayon Pagoda was nine cubits pagoda (*stūpa*). Now, Nagayon Pagoda was rebuilt by enshrining the relics and original pagoda.

Seven Floral Arts

Nagayon Pagoda was decorated with seven floral arts of architecture such as art of lacquer, art of carving wood or ivory, art of craft of blacksmithing, art of making items from bronze, copper or brass, art of painting and art of stone sculpture. All of the Myanmar artists decorated the pagoda.

For instance, Buddha statue (image) figured out by the architect in the eastern cave gateway, lacquers Buddha statues (images) above and sides of the wall in the cave, bronze Buddha statue (image) at the south-east corner, Tuesday planetary post, the surrounding *cetiya* (*stūpas*) made from marble above the terrace, dragon images made from iron below the diamond bud, the paintings of Buddha life and *Dhamma* cycle figured out by the art of carving wood on the ceiling. So, Nagayon Pagoda revered by Buddhists because of such arts.

History of Nagayon Pagoda

Previous type of Nagayon Pagoda was nine cubits pagoda (*stūpa*). Now, Nagayon Pagoda was rebuilt by enshrining the relics and original pagoda. While

Buddha was sitting on the double layered vestment laid by Nyidaw Ānanda after Buddha had taken a bath, spirits of dragon from Bhogavatī offered several kinds of fruits to Buddha. After having fruits, Buddha preached sermon of *Dhammarakkhita* to four guardian spirits of Meiktila Lake and spirits of dragon on 4th waxing of Tasaungmone, in 117 Myanmar era.

In BC 563, King Nayapatisithu renovated Meiktila Lake which was renovated by his father before. At that time, spirits of dragon pointed out King Narapatisithu the land where Buddha had alms food of fruits after bathing to build a pagoda. So, the king rebuild Nagayon Pagoda, which has a cave leading to the east, by enshrining the original pagoda and *sarīrika* relics brought from *Majjhima* to king Anawrahta.

Moreover, eastern gateway was renovated and decorated with mosaic on Thursday, 8th waxing of Wakhaung, in 1330 Myanmar era (21.8.1969). Nagayuan Pagoda was driven in a stake to establish as Mahā Bodhi Pagoda on 8th waxing of Wakhaung, in 1333 Myanmar era (27.7.1971) led by Ven Indaka and Ven Uttara from Thaddhamma Wamthāyone Pariyatti Sarthin Taik. Nagayon Pagoda was renovated in the morning on 7th waxing of Tawthalin, in 1336 Myanmar era (22.9.1974) but stopped in 1976.

Chairman, Japanese monk Mr Taoya and secretary monk Mr Ojima of South-East Asia Buddhism Association restarted the renovation of decorating the mosaic at Tuesday corner and Saturday corner in 1983. It has been 18 years that types of umbrella for pagoda were collected. Nagayon Pagoda is Mahā Bodhi type and umbrella is seven stepped umbrella. Thidagu Sayadaw Shin Ñānissara, Sagaing hill draw the type of umbrella from Nipaw, which goes well with Nagayon Pagoda. Diamond bud and umbrella were donated by five venerable monks, trusteeship council of Nagayon Pagoda at 3:20 pm, on Wednesday, 14th waxing of Tasaungmone, in 1987 (4.11.1987).

Structure of Nagayon Pagoda

Nagayon Pagoda is type of Mahā Bodhi Pagoda, which has been built in India, and 108 feet high. There are four gateways. There are many floral shapes, ten dragons, nine lions, and *Lawkapāla* Nat (spirit) holding scepter on either side of the south gateway. The entrance is like a cave. There are platforms on either side of the entrance, six concrete poles at the base and four concrete poles above, decorated with floral arabesques.

The name, Mahā Bodhi *Cetiya* can be seen above the gateway. There is a porch at the West gateway build with two poles. There are six poles at the East gateway and continuously built with *Dhamma* hall, so there is no particular gateway. There are 20 poles decorated with floral arabesques inside the pagoda. The roof is square shape and built with concrete. A shrine "Kalakyaung" built with bricks is above the roof.

Moreover, there are lotus petals, inverted lotus, four dragons, vane, and iron umbrella with nine dragons inside, seven circular decorative bands, turban band, bell shape and floral accents festooned on the inverted alms bowl below the diamond bud.

There are four surrounding *cetiyas* (*stūpas*) at each corner, totally 16 *cetiyas* (*stūpas*) at Nagayon Pagoda. There are nine Buddha statues (images) inside the notches on each wall of pagoda, totally 36 Buddha statues (images)

Internal Structure and Decoration

Sunday Planetary Post (North-East Corner)

There is a shrine for Buddha statue, decorated with floral arabesques gilded. Bronze Buddha statue (image) can be seen, so art of making items cast or wrought from bronze, copper or brass. North-East corner is Sunday planetary post and symbol of *Karuṇā* which is under the statue. The life span of planet is six years.

Monday Planetary Post (East Corner)

There is a cave, in which Buddha statue (image) sojourned in the throne guarded by two dragons. There are two *Dhamma* cycles and two stone inscriptions on the wall decorated with mosaic floral arabesques. Buddha image, two spirit images and floral arabesques made from lacquer were figured out on the ceiling. There are four lotus flowers and guardian spirits, kneeling down to the ground with putting the right hand on the kneel and left hand on the thigh, carved on either side of the cave.

The two stepped shrine archway with gilded lotus posy and flowers in the middle is decorated with mosaic. East corner is Monday planetary post and symbol of Tiger image which is under the Buddha statue. The life span of planet is 15 years.

Tuesday Planetary Post (South-East Corner)

There is a shrine for Buddha decorated with gilded floral arabesques. *Bhūmiphassa Mudrā* Buddha statue (image) was sojourned on the throne. South-East corner is Tuesday planetary post and symbol of Lion. The age of life span of planet is eight years.

Wednesday Planetary Post (South corner)

There is a shrine for Buddha decorated with floral arabesques. Lotus posy and three lotus flowers were carved on the shrine. Lotus vase, flowers, festoons and posies were figured out according to Myanmar architecture aspect. Buddha statue (image) guarded by five dragons was on the throne decorated with mosaic and each *Dhamma* cycle on either side of the gateway and there are 27 Buddha statues (images) roofed with each dragon enclosing the South corner Buddha statue. South corner is Wednesday planetary post and

symbol of Elephant. The life span of planet is 16 years.

Saturday Planetary Post (South-West corner)

At this corner, the shrine for Buddha and the entrance were decorated with floral arabesques and lotus petals at the base. Bronze Buddha statue sojourned in the shrine. South-West corner is Saturday planetary post and symbol of Dragon. The life span of planet is 10 years.

Thursday Planetary Post (West corner)

At Thursday planetary post, the shrine for Buddha was built with two poles decorated with lotus bud images and floral arabesques on either side of the shrine and each *Dhamma* cycle on either side of the wall. There is a Buddha statue roofed with nine dragons and surrounding 27 Buddha statues (images). West corner is Thursday planetary post and symbol of mouse. The life span of planet is 19 years.

Rāhu Planetary Post (North-West corner)

There is a shrine for Buddha with poles, lotus flowers at the top, decorated with Myanmar traditional floral arabesques but no decoration above and beside the shrine. Bronze Buddha statue (image) is on the lotus flower throne. North-West corner is *Rāhu* planetary post and symbol of tusk less Elephant. The life span of planet is 12 years.

Friday Planetary Post (North corner)

There is a shrine for Buddha with two poles decorated with lotus petals at the base. A *Dhamma* cycle at the top of the shrine and lotus buds on either side of the cycle were carved with floral arabesques. *Samādhi Mudrā* Buddha statue (image) with *Dhamma* cycle at the background is on the lotus flower throne, roofed with nine dragons, and enclosed by 27 Buddha statues (images). North corner is Friday planetary post and symbol of Guinea pig. The life span of planet is 20 one years.

External Structure and Decoration

A Lo Taw Pyae Pagoda

A Lo Taw Pyae Pagoda was established at the south-east of Nagayon pagoda. There is a shrine for Buddha roofed with galvanized iron sheet and constructed with aluminum and glass. The platform in front of A Lo Taw Pyae Pagoda covered with tiles was fenced with poles painted with white, yellow, red, gold and brown colors. A Lo Taw Pyae Buddha statue (image) is on the gilded lotus throne. There are two poles decorated with floral arabesques and flowers of Sal tree (*In-Jinn-Pann*). Each stone inscription inscribed the donor names are on either side of A Lo

Taw Pyae Pagoda shrine. Beside those stone inscriptions, gilded lotus flowers were figured out.

External Structure and Decoration

It is situated at the south-east of *Paññādhika Dhamma* Hall. The shrine, decorated with golden floral arabesques, was constructed with four poles and roofed with concrete and a lot of wooden floral arabesques are on the ceiling. The rails on either side of the shrine was constructed with each tumbling Kelly statue at the top of the rails according to Myanmar traditional architecture.

There are two stone inscriptions written the names of donors at the back of the shrine. Shin *Sīvali* shrine possesses two steps with *Cetiya* image in the middle, decorated with floral arabesques, above it. Standing Buddha statue (image) holding the walking stick on the right hand and alms bowl on the left shoulder is sojourning in the lotus throne.

Shin U Pa Gutta

Shin U Pa Gutta shrine is situated at the south-west of Nagayon Pagoda precinct. The seven steps – shrine with *Cetiya* image at the top was constructed with four aluminum poles with the circular concrete pool decorated with gold, red, blue, and green colours. *Dhamma* cycle was carved on the ceiling and aluminum floral arabesques on either side of the wall. Bronze Shin U Pa Gutta statue (image) is in the shrine. The circular lake and precinct of the shrine were covered with tiles. Buddha Statue (image) in the Lake. There is a lake where three Buddha statues (images) are sojourning, side by side with south gateway of Nagayon Pagoda.

Red and gilded flowers of Sal tree were adorned around the lake and there are three Buddha statues (images) with each lotus buds at the background of each Buddha statues (images) roofed with dragons: two *Bhūmiphassha Mudrā* Buddha statues (images) and one *Dhammasakka Mudrā* Buddha statue (image) in the middle of the lake. Four stone inscriptions carved the donor names and decorated with floral arabesques can be seen in the lake. There is a stone inscription written the devotional verses of A Lo Taw Pyae Pagoda, at the west of lake.

Paññādhika Dhamma Hall

Paññādhika Dhamma Hall was built with twelve poles, close to east gateway of Nagayon Pagoda, floored with wood and roofed with galvanized iron sheet. Traditional art style of depicting convoluted lotus stem, buds, blossoms and floral arabesques were figured out on the ceiling. A shrine for Buddha built with two floral arabesque poles and *Bhūmiphassha Mudrā* Buddha statue (image) on the dragon throne are at the northern part of the hall.

Statues (Images) of Buddha at Nagayon Pagoda

The Buddha statues (images) sojourning at Nagayon Pagoda can be classified into three main types according to hand postures.

Type I: Thumb and forefinger of right hand is touching the thumb and forefinger of left hand, elevating up to the chest. Mostly left hand covers the right hand. It is known as *Dhammacakka Mudrā* which means preaching the first sermon.

Type II: Right hand facing inside is hanging from right knee to the throne or ground. Left hand is put on the cross-legged posture, so palm of the left hand and *opisthenar* of right hand can be seen. It is called *Bhūmiphassa mudrā* which means proving the earth or presenting the earth as witness.

Type III: Both hands are on the cross-legged posture and right palm is on the left palm. It is known as *Samādhi mudrā* which means meditation.

Entrance gateway and Brick wall.

There are three shrines which have seven steps, and three dragons. There are a saintly person holding the walking stick, celestial king grasping the conch shell at the left in the middle of the shrine, diamond bud, vane, golden duck, umbrella, banana bud and inverted lotus flower at the top. All the architecture aspect of the shrine were figured out by using concrete and painted with green, white, gold and red colors. South gateway of Nagayon Pagoda precinct was nine poles decorated with lotus bud images and iron-structure arabesques at the top.

There are 15 lotus bud images at the right side of the entrance and slab stone with two Buddha image poles built with concrete at the east. On that slab stone, "*Dhamma Rakkhita* Land Nagayon Pagoda *Sāsanā* era 2543, Myanmar era 1361, Meikhtila" was inscribed. Each lotus bud image and eight candle images on either side of the slab stone were carved and decorated with concrete floral arabesque and painted with gold color.

Conclusion

Nagayon Pagoda was rebuilt by enshrining the original pagoda with a cave leading to the east in Nan Taw Gone quarter, Meiktila in Myanmar era 563. Buddha statues and shrines for Buddha at each planetary posts, art of lacquer, art of carving wood or ivory, art of craft of blacksmithing, art of making items cast or wrought from bronze, copper, or brass, art of painting and art of stone sculpture, can be found inside the Nagayon Pagoda.

Moreover, different numbers of dragons at different gateway and guardian spirits with different arms were found there. The distinctive appearance of Nagayon Pagoda are that pagoda was built like a temple with floral accents festooned on the inverted alms bowl, bell shape, vane and diamond bud.

Furthermore, it is extraordinary that there are nine dragons inside the umbrella, floral accents festooned on the inverted alms bowl and bell shape because of square shaped pagoda and nine Buddha statues (images) at the notches of each side of the pagoda, totally 36 Buddha statues (images).

In addition, it is very wonderful to see the architecture aspect on the ceiling of *Paññādhika Dhamma* hall and stone inscriptions were inscribed in Pāli, Myanmar, English and Japanese. Therefore, it is obvious that Nagayon Pagoda is very famous not only in Myanmar but also in the world.

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- မြန်မာ့အနုပညာအဘိဓာန်၊ မေတ္တာမိုးပုံနှိပ်တိုက်။ (၂၀၀၁)။ ရန်ကုန်။