수완나부미 제2권 제2호(2010년 12월) : 69~82

▣ 연구논문 ▣
ARTICLES

Perceptions and Practice on the Buildings of Defensive Barriers

: A Study of Belief Systems in Ancient Cities of Myanmar

Nanda Hmun*

Introduction

Defensive barriers meant not only tangible barriers to protect and prevent from enemies like invaders or intruders but also intangible barriers for preventing from outside attacks which have been more related to the religion and beliefs, spirituals, and traditional arrangements. Looking back to its retrospective of how capitals of Kingdoms in Myanmar and their locations were chosen, it is obvious that all royal capital cities were built far from the sea except Bago, an ancient city near Yangon. It can also be assumed that Myanmar can be regarded as "*land power state*" under the various kings in the past (Thin Kyi 1959, 143-145). On the other hand, buildings of city wall, city gates, stockades, forts and fortresses during the reigns of respective Myanmar kings played a very important role for not only the defensive as barriers but also beliefs on certain traditional arrangements purpose to spiritual world in history of Myanmar.

* Director General, Department of Historical Research, Ministry of Culture, Myanmar. nandahmun21683@gmail.com

This paper attempts the study of traditional beliefs on the defensive barrier buildings in ancient cities of Myanmar. This paper also gives an account of the mixture of belief and defence purposes based on excavated cultural evidences from those historic landscapes and the remaining immovable heritage. Throughout the high civilizations, the buildings of Pyu city-states, Beitkthano, Thayehkitaya (Srikshetra) and Ha Lin, and in the successive historical eras, the practice of mentioned process had been taken into account.

Auspicious Ground

The findings from those excavations have also proven the perceptions of Myanmar mingled in the defensive ideas. They were believed in "*Auspicious Ground*" on which one treads to ensure victory or success and the worshipping of "*Spirits or Gods for warriors"* who were famous for giving the mighty strength and mustered up courage. That is why before they tried to conquer and occupied a territory or on their march to battle, not only the practice of worshipping and making a solemn wish but also the pagoda or temple or the specific place where they stopped to worship on their way to the battle-ground, played very important and they were demarcated as "*Auspicious Ground"* for the generation.

Myanmar kings, traditionally, also believed in those interpretations of omens, presages, reciting incantations and astrology not to encounter with any disturbances or failures and to conquer and overcome battles and any disturbances (Khin Hla Han 2006, 111). They were also very aware of asking to arrange cabalistic square and inscribe cabalistic signs in a grid pattern for the specific purposes. The arrangements made for the city or the state to be secure and safe, can be found from those historical sites after excavations.

In Pyu Period (AD 1-10 Century), the building of fort near the Palace can be noted as the mixture of belief and defence purposes. Pyu can be regarded as high civilized society in many ways: their strategic outlook and arrangement for defense are remarkable. In Thayehkitaya (AD 4-10 Century), an ancient Pyu city near Payay, the security and the defense was taken into account and built the fort and also built pagodas at the corners of the city for religious buildings cum security outposts. The account on findings of stone slabs being inscribed with Buddha's Suttans in Pali at each city-gates are evidences of beliefs and practice of early people in Myanmar (Sein Maung Oo 1968, 178). More details of Thayehkitaya and the reputation of Pyu can also testify that Pyu were the people of high civilization and those practice of Buddhism and utensils of Pyu were also main pillars of socio-economic life of Pyu Period.

From the "Shwe Tagar" or Golden city-gate at the west of Thayehkitaya, the excavated stone slabs being inscribed with Mora Sutta and Mangala Sutta in Pali; from another city-gate at the north east, found stone pillar with Yadana Sutta inscribed in Pali, and also from the city-gate of Nagatunt at the north-west (Sein Maung Oo 1968, 198). The tradition of inscribing the Sutta in Pali on the stone slabs placed at the inside and outside of city-gates was aimed to prevent from enemies and evils.

Another objects found from those city-gates are miscellany of iron nails, screws and rivets, and iron rods. They were found from the bottom of outer and inner parts of city-walls, tips of the eastern city walls, from the corner of the royal palace ground and in the burial urns. This kind of practice was carried out during the Pyu Period and those ancient Pyu cities had characteristics (Ba Shin 1966, 167). The objectives of laying those things were to avoid the attacks by the evils from outside and to protect from the enemies. Traditionally, *iron* has been regarded as a strong element because of its hardness; it plays a

very important role as an object used as resistance and protection. Even in present time, it is still remained as means of protection in some rural areas. That is why most pregnant women in the villages are asked to carry along safety pin or put a needle in the hair when they go out at dusk.

The remains of stone statues likely to be used as city-guards were found in front of the city-gate of Beikthano (AD 1-5 Century), an ancient city near Taungdwingyi. They were scattered in the ground when they were excavated. It is assumed that the attacks of enemies during the fall of the city might have destroyed them. This is also another obvious findings which related to the perceptions of ancient people on this land were accustomed with keeping the objects and written forms of Buddha's Sutta to prevent from undesirable things and evil attacks (Sein Maung Oo 1968, 186-196). According to those evidences, it is assumed that Myanmar people were religious and they were aware of prevention and they were people of high strategic thinking and arrangement for security has been regarded as remarkable. These two characteristics have been mixed. The evidences of the mixture of religion and defense purposes can be seen not only in Pyu period but those successive historical periods. Keeping the statues of doorkeepers can also be found in Thayehkitaya. In Konbaung Period (1752-1885), the last dynasty of Myanmar, in Mandalay Mya Nan San Kyaw Palace, the means of protection were arranged in traditional ways (Khin Hla Han 2006, 106).

Spiritual Culture in the Building of Ancient Cities in Myanmar

The building of capital city was always entwined with the construction of pagoda built at forepart or corner of the city, *stupa* built on sand bank which were intended for both religion and outposts for

defense. Therefore in Bagan Period (AD 11-13 Century), most high rising pagodas and temples were built near to the river bank outside of the city wall. The Shwezigon pagoda was built on the high ground and near the Ayeyarwady River. Similarly, Lawka Nanda Zedi, Bu Paya were built on the bank of river Ayeyarwady.

The continuous explorations and excavations works on city-walls, city-gates and related materials and stone slabs, demonstrate both material culture and spiritual culture of ancient Pyu. The massive walls and gates also offer a viable indicator of a centrally organized social hierarchy, capable of mustering labor to construct and maintain those fortifications (Moore 2004, 129-131). As most chronicles, U Kala's Great Chronicle (1724), Hmannan Chronicle (Glass Palace Chronicle) (1829) and Konbaungset Mahayazawindawgyi (1905), display a very different perception about the relevant time, some were remained as oral history and the assumptions have to be added as they encompass a number of dynasties, localized accounts and mysterious beliefs. The sources are diverse often scattered.

The city-gates in which statues of celestial or spiritual beings have being put are also seen as symbols of ancient cities in Bagan and successive periods. They are also often discussed or made research as a sequence of capitals of a single kingdom and those traditional arrangements related to religion and defense have never been highlighted. To prevent from invaders and intruders, such belief and arrangements undertaken might be varied from one kingdom to another but the perceptions behind and the assistance of Astrology and calculations with planets have been remained. As it is believed, most of the arrangements have been based on the superimposition of the solar system that can affect one's horoscope and his faith or the faith of the country.

Another significant fact pointed out by Than Tun is that – pagodas of bulbous type like Bupaya and Nga Kywe Nadaung are, we believe

of Pyu origin. Prototype of Bagan cetiya and guha are found in Thayehkitaya (Than Tun 2005 b, 202-207). Apart from the finals or topmost part of religious monuments, which are invariably modern. Bupaya ceti, Nga Gywe Nadaung ceti and even Lokananda ceti founded by King Aniruddha (AD 1044-1077) look very much similar in appearance to Pyu ceti type such as Baw Baw, Payagyi and Payama. Aniruddha was the first historic Myanmar king who built a kingdom almost similar in size and area to that of the Pyu Kingdom.

In connection with the obeisance of *Nats* means devas or celestial beings also can be noted as different *Nats* were worshipped for different purposes respectively; e.g. *Brahma* which has four heads was worshipped for asking assistance to complete the development process of the country and welfare of the people; *Visnu* for the administration to be fair and just; and *Siva* which was the prior one always being worshipped before the kings or warriors went to battlefields. Hall stated that religious remains show both forms of Buddhism; Mahayanism and Hterawadaism, together with Vishnu worship (Hall 1950, 7-13). There are large stone Buddhist sculptures in relief in the



Figure 1. Vishnu at Nathlaung Kyaung, Bagan. Sources: All photos here taken by the author.

Gupta style, bronze statuettes of Avalokitesvara, one of the three chief Mahayanist Boddhisattvas, and so many stone sculptures of Vishnu that the city was sometimes referred to as ”Vishnu City”.

With the emergence of primitive economy to feudal economy, the life styles and social patterns changes changed to feudal lords and serf society. Since then, there were sea ports, wharfs and harbors were established in Myanmar riverside. The trade with India became more extensively done and especially with the southern India. Since the emergence of socio-economic changes took place, the penetration of religious faith also existed. The early ideology and belief was Brahmana followed by Mahayana, Hterawada, which were emerged and accepted (Hla Pe 1962, 39). The influence and dissemination of Hindu and Buddhist polities reached to the Southeast Asian countries including Myanmar which made the emergence of building the city states in the early historic periods. And Tambiah noted the religion of Southeast Asia in his work as follow.



Figure 2. Brick image of the standing four-armed Vishnu at Nathlaung Kyaung, Bagan



Figure 3. Shiva being displayed at Bagan Archeological Muaseum

"*World Conqueror and World Denouncer" stated that "The Buddhists and Hindu polities of Southeast Asia were modeled on cosmological motions and basis of parallelism between the supra-human macro-cosmos and micro-cosmos. The Kingdom was miniature representation of the cosmo, with the palace in the centre being iconic of Mount Meru, the pillar of the universe and the King, his princes and ruling chiefs representing the hierarchy in Tavatimsa Heaven- Indira, the four Lokapalas and 28 subordinate Devas"* (Tambiah 1978, 109).

Fundamentally, this mixture of beliefs and religions led to establish the kingdoms throughout Myanmar and their walled palace grounds. According to those entwined belief and religion, the royal palaces of Mon like Thaton, Bago which were built near the Gulf of Martaban, Danyawaddy and Vesali , royal palaces of Rakhine: those were situated throughout Bay of Bengal's coastal regions at the west side of Myanmar, and the royal palaces sites of Pyu kingdoms that were built along the Ayeyarwaddy river like Beikthano, Ha Lin, and those Myanmar kingdoms and royal palace sites from central Myanmar like Bagan, Pinya, Myinsaing etc. were constructed (Luce 1969, 314). Even the traditional town planning of palace sites in Pyu periods was followed and practiced till to Bagan period which was based on square type can be traced back. Not only the structure and lay out plans of each palace sites of kingdoms in Myanmar was quite similar but also the choice of location changes in accordance to the astrology occasionally done. Though the planning of the palace ground and the allocation of royal buildings and royal staff was done hierarchically and the similarity of ancient cities and other significances varied from one dynasty to another. In the light of those excavation works of ongoing projects, there have been many untold stories and unidentified objects which have many facets of historical values and perceptions of peoples from those days.

Other Cultural Evidences Found in Myanmar Ancient Cities

Whence, tracing a country's history, the other side of the coin is its culture; the customs, behavior and the products of people are to be taken into account. The ongoing projects concern with archaeology contains; deciphering, translating and dating the discovered the inscriptions, compiling an entomology of Myanmar words or glossary which were found in early Myanmar records, recording and publishing of masonry works such as stucco carvings decoration, stairway forms, iconography, stone works like the images of Buddha, Boddhisavatta, Brahma, Deva, man and mythical being (Luce 1960, 314) as well as beads, bowls, lamps, etc. metal works like bell, chandelier, cooking utensil, finial or Hti, musical instrument, receptacle of betel as well as relic casket, different designs of weight, all gold works like ornament, miniature stupa, portrait statue of ancestor, etc. iron works like weapon, instrument for domestic and agricultural use, architectural use of bar, bolt, hinge, nail and socket, etc. wall paintings of different events, all types of buildings made of wood, multiple roof forming, wood decoration use for different purposes (Harvey 1925, 2).

Moreover, for the social life, through the evidences being excavated, modes of dancing, coiffure and costumes, things of commoners' everyday use, coins of successive periods, pictures of depicting lifestyles of different events, requisites of monks, paraphernalia of kings, which were added with history of kings and the centers of political powers have been revealed and focused for their historical values in many ways. These were mentioned and reflected in most works of Than Tun especially in his Felicitation to Lu Htu Daw Amar's 80th Birthday (ThanTun 1996, 261-262).

Those people made intangible and tangible barriers can be assumed that they were entwined with the beliefs and religion, practice and traditions of successive periods. The most ancient civilization of

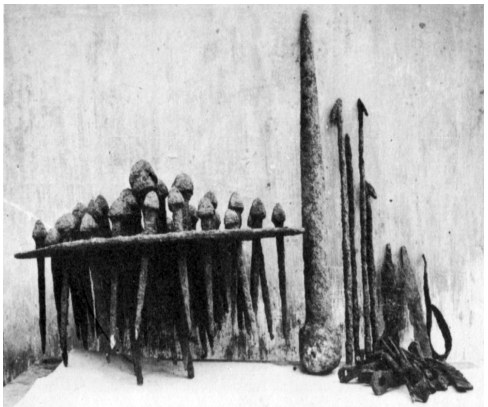


Figure 4. Iron Plate with iron nails from Srikhetsra.

Myanmar dated to Pyu Period is the one to be referred for its cultural and historical values. Moreover, it is the historic period in which most of the protection objects have been found out along with their strange superstition. The belief of iron could prevent and protect from enemies and evils, and those big iron nails and rivets were studded into all around the city walls and the tradition of putting those iron rivets and iron nails into the burial urns became one of the characteristics of Pyu culture too. There were big seven iron nails excavated from bottom of the outside of the city walls of Thayehkitaya (Sein Maung Oo 1993, 104-153). One of the excavated objects found near Baw Baw Gyi pagoda in 1923, is the iron plate studded with various sizes of iron nails from 7 inches to 11 and a half inches long. The longest and the biggest iron nail had been placed at the centre of the iron plate.

Another significance is that though the location of other Pyu capital city states like Ha Lin and Beithano were separately existed, they possessed identical structure of entrance to the city gates which proven that there was relationship in architectural styles and design. The walls of Thayehkitaya were so massive and with strong structure. And in some wall sides, there were double and triple walling which showed their awareness of military strategy and defensive preparations. The relics and those remaining from Pyu Period enshrined the strong evidences of old ancient cities and its glories and falls. Their triumphs

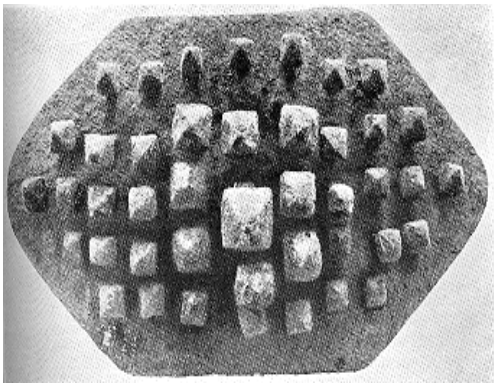


Figure 5. Iron Plate with iron nails found from Srikhetsra

were also mixture with myths, beliefs and doubtless with those predictions of astrologers. According to the fine works of masonry from Thayehkitaya, it can be regarded as highly civilized state and in which highest arts and crafts were found. Generally, the four types of mason works can be classified as follows;

(i) Buddhism statues

(ii) Statues of Hinduism

(iii) Stone works for furniture

(iv) Statues of imagination

It is also stated by the findings and excavation works that the masonry works of Thayehkitaya was indebted to the religion like in India and generally, it can be noted that the works of Pyu were skillfully done on the stone slabs by embossed. For the purpose of defensive and beliefs, also Hinduism statues were revealed and excavated in these Pyu sites.

Conclusion

The excavated cultural evidences from those historic landscapes and the remaining immovable heritage which seek for preservation, commend to make some more related research to be carried out. Even

they also highlight the continuation of full attention with high heritage management skills. The mentioned perceptions and practices dated back to very early civilization in Myanmar, the enduring concepts with related to beliefs and those milestones they made their existence recall the diversity of tales, myths and superstitions capture the culture and tradition of people on this land. In fact the tangible heritages with intangible cultural values are the respect of the past and remain as the natural museums and open museums.

Key Words : Defensive Barriers, Myanmar, Ancient City, Auspicious Ground, Spiritual Culture

Bibliography

Aung Thaw. 1972. *Historical Sites in Burma*. Yangon: Ministry of Union Culture.

Aung Thwin, M. 1980. *Prophecies, Omens and Dialogue: Tools of the Trade in Burmese Historiography*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska.

Hall, D. G. E. 1950. *Burma*. London: Hutchinson's University Library.

Hargreaves. H. 1933. *Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India 1928-29*. Delhi: Manager of Publications.

Harvey, G. E. 1925. *History of Burma*. London: Longmans, Green and Co.

Khin Hla Han. 2006. A Cultural Approach to the Myanmar Capital Yadanabon. *Myanmar Historical Research Journal.* 13: 105-134.

Luce, G. H. 1940. Economic Life of the Early Burma. *JBRS.* 30(1): 203-335.

_____. 1959. Notes on the Peoples of Burma in the 12th-13th Century. *JBRS.* 42(1): 152-179.

_____. 1969. *Old Burma Early Pagan*. New York: Artibus Asiae and Institute of Fine Art.

Moore, E. H. 2004. Interpreting Pyu Material Culture: Royal Chronologies and Finger-marked Bricks. *Myanmar Historical Research Journal*. 13: 2-5.

_____. 2007. *Early Landscapes of Myanmar*. Bangkok: River Books.

Myo Myint. 2010. *Collected Essays on Myanmar History and Culture*. Yangon: Department for the Promotion and Propagation of the Sasana.

Ray, N. R. 1932. *Brahmanical Gods in Burma*. Calcutta: University of Calcutta.

Thin Kyi. 1959. The Early Capital of Burma: A Brief Geographical Appraisal. *New Burma Weekly*. 4: 143-148.

<Myanmar Books >

Aung Thaw, Sein Maung Oo, and Myint Aung, Than Swe. 1993. *Shehaung Mynamr Myodaw-mya* [*Ancient Myanmar Capital*]. Yangon: Ministry of Information.

Ba Shin. 1966. Beikthano Myohaung hnit Thamine Amyin [Beikthano Ancient City and Historical Outlook]. *Tekkathopyinapadesa Journal*. 1(3).

Kyin Htay. 1996. Asint-sint Pyaung-khe-thaw Myanmar Nainggan Myodaw-mya [The Changes of Capital Cities in Myanmar in Successive Period]. *Tetkatho Pyinya Padetha Sarsaung*. 1(1): 193-212.

Hla Pe. 1962. *Beikthano Myohaung* [Ancient City Beikthano]. Yangon: Shwe Pyi Daw Press.

Sein Maung Oo. 1968. Shehaung Myanmar Myotaw-mya [Ancient Myanmar Capitals]. *Tetkatho Pyinya Padetha Sarsaung*. 3(1): 138-143.

Sein Win. 1992. Thayaykhittayr Myo-haung shi Shay Kabyee Sarpay-mya [Literature and Inscriptions of Srikhetsra]. *Mahaethi Monthly Magazine*. October. 171-172.

Than Tun. 1996. *Bagan-letthit hnit Acha Sadan-mya* [New Bagan and Other Papers]: *In Felicitation of Luhtu Daw Amar's 80th Birthday*. Mandalay: Kyee Pwa Yae Press.

_____. 2005 a. *Bagan Khit Nainggan-ye Thamine* [Political History of Bagan Period]. Yangon: Po Wa Press.

_____. 2005 b. *Thamine htei-ga Design* [Myanmar Design from the History]. Yangon: Po Wa Press.

Received: September 11, 2010; Reviewed: October 09, 2010; Accepted: December 09, 2010

<국문초록>

방어 장벽 구조물의 실제적 인식:
미얀마 고대 도시의 신앙체계 연구

난다 흐뭉
미얀마 문화부 역사연구국 국장
nandahmun21683@gmail.com

이 글은 미얀마의 고대 도시에서 축조된 방어장벽의 건축물에 나타나는 신앙문화에 관한 연구이며, 여러 고대 도시, 특히 뷰족(Pyu)의 도시였던 베잇따노(Beikthano), 하링(Halin), 떠예킷떠야(Thayehkittaya, Srikshetra) 등지에서 발굴된 유물, 유적을 분석하였다. 이와 함께, 미얀마의 고대 도시에 형성된 전통적 신앙세계를 해명하는데 중점을 두고자 한다.

미얀마에서는 성문, 성벽, 요새, 또는 파고다를 건축할 때에 신앙적 요소가 반드시 개입되었다. 건축물의 축조 토지의 선택에 있어서나 건축물 용도에 따른 재앙의 예방의 목적을 구현하기 위하여 신앙체계가 적용되었다. 특히, 방어 장벽(예를 들어, 성벽, 성문 등)에서 나타나는 불교경전이나 쇠못이 박힌 철판 및 각종 힌두신과 낫(정령)의 조상(彫像)은 그러한 신앙적 차원에서 도입되었던 것이다.

결론적으로 미얀마의 고대 도시에 있어서 방어 장벽의 구조물에서도 전통신앙과 힌두교 및 불교가 혼합된 신앙체계가 엿보이며, 나아가 뷰 왕국에 형성된 여러 고대 도시에서 서로 유사한 물질문화와 신앙체계가 널리 존재하고 있음이 밝혀졌다.

주제어 : 방어장벽, 미얀마, 고대도시, 성지, 정신문화