

Cultural interaction between Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia: revealed from Sinhala style pagodas

Gamini Ranasinghe

Department of History and Archaeology,
University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka.
gaminir76@yahoo.com

Introduction

The cultural interaction between Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia can be studied by various aspects such as art, architecture, Buddhism and linguistics. The study is focused on the Sinhala style pagoda, which is built in Southeast Asia showing cultural interaction in the Polonnaruwa period of Sri Lanka. The period of Polonnaruwa highly concerns to the Southeast Asia for the maritime trade and political stability in the region. Based on the strong political background Buddhist activities were increased in the Polonnaruwa period. The society of Buddhist monks was reestablished with the help of Myanmar by king Vijayabahu I (1056-1111AD) and Parakramabahu I (1153-1187AD) in the eleven and twelve centuries. Sri Lankan contact with

Southeast Asia has made with selective regions that was important for the maritime trade such as Java, Sumatra, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos. Those countries are located in the sea route between Sri Lanka and China therefore, political and cultural contacts were more valuable for Sri Lankan maritime economy. Eventually, the ties between Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia came to the peak in the kingdom of Polonnaruwa in twelve-thirteen centuries. Therefore, Sri Lankan cultural influence can be seen in Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, Java and Indonesia through art and architecture.

Methodology

The evidence depended on the previous research that has been completed on

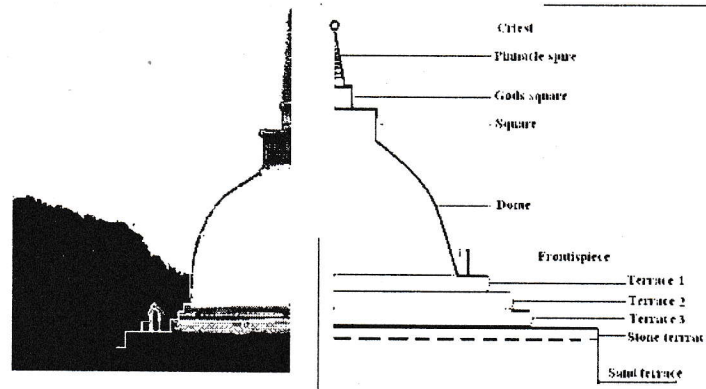


Fig. 1. The parts of the traditional Sinhala style pagoda of Sri Lanka

various studies including ancient architecture in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia. Also used numbers of pictures received from publications and personal contact with scholars who engaged in ancient architecture in Asian region.

Archaeological remains

The large scale of pagoda (stupa) is a significant symbol of Sri Lanka. The history of Buddhist pagoda dated back to fifth century BC in Sri Lanka that having influenced by Indian art. The shape of pagoda changed from the Indian style and made endemic style by Sri Lankan artisans from the second century BC. The style continued over tenth century. When it comes to Polonnaruwa kingdom there were small changes. However, the main model was not changed over the all kingdoms of Sri Lanka.

The great pagoda named Ruvanwalisaya (second century BC), Mihintalaya (firs century AD) in Anuradhapura kingdom

depicting the main shape of the style of Sinhala pagoda. Main features of pagoda built in Polonnaruwa with very small changes for example, are Rankothvehera at Polonnaruwa kingdom in the twelfth century. Four of large scale of pagodas were built in the kingdom of Polonnaruwa and that style spread to Cambodia, Myanmar and Thailand with the Buddhist relation through maritime route. Therefore, that kind of cultural interaction can be studied through the maritime aspect too.

The stupa named Phra Boromathat ceit and Wat Phra in Thailand, Phra Khan pagoda-Cambodia (built by king Jayawarman -1181-1219AD) and Pebingyaung pagoda and Sapada Zedi pagoda in Myanmar are called Sinhala style pagoda (Fig.2) that built after the Kirivehera of Polonnaruwa, Sri Lanka. It is very clear Sri Lankan cultural interaction for the Phra Boromathat ceit pagoda and Wat Phra in Thailand in the twelve century. It is interesting to note that,

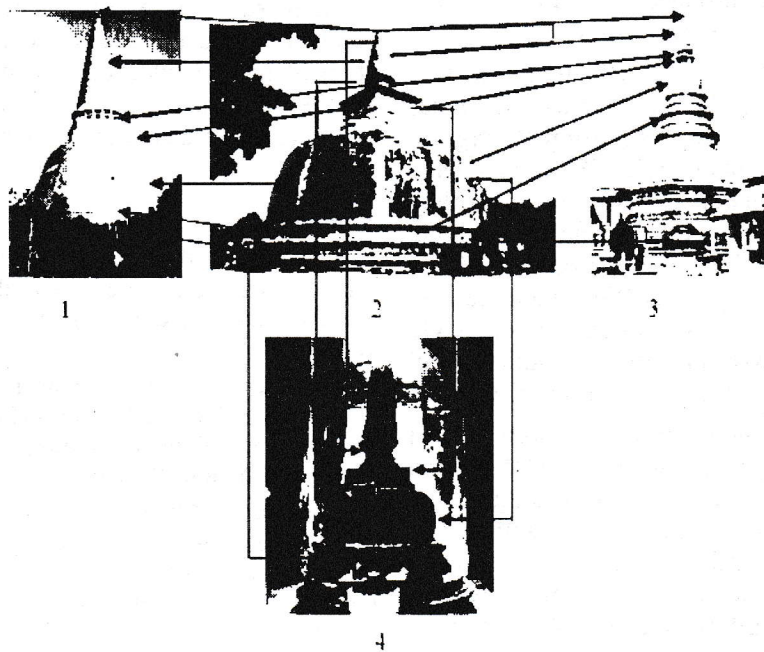


Fig.2. Phra Boromathat ceit-Thailand (1), Kirivehera-Sri Lanka (2), Wat Phra-Thailand (3), Phra Khan pagoda-Cambodia (4)



Fig.3. Pebingyaung pagoda



Fig.4. Sapada Zedi pagoda

there was not this kind of pagoda in Thailand before the Buddhist contact with Polonnaruwa in the twelve century (Goonathilaka 2003 a, b). The discussed shape was produced only in Sri Lanka then called *Sinhala stupa* (Pagoda of Sinhalese). Not only those two but also Wat Chang Lom in Sukhodaya and numbers of pagoda were built in the twelve-thirteen centuries in Thailand that followed the Sinhala style. Specially, there were found four small size pagoda models in Wat Phra that might be exported from Sri Lanka or produced in Thailand by way of Sinhala style (Sirisena 1976).

The pagoda named of Dhammayzika was built in 1198AD, Bagan area of Myanmar that is noted as the biggest pagoda following Sinhala style of Sri Lanka. They not only shared the style but also they deposited the relic inside the pagoda following the ancient practice of Sri Lanka. Pebingyaung (Fig.3) and Sapada Zedi (Fig.4) also called Sinhala style pagoda in Myanmar that was built parallel to the kingdom of Polonnaruwa Sri Lanka.

Those pagodas have followed the Sri Lankan style but they changed the shape of pinnacle spire and made bigger than Sinhala style which were established in Thailand and Cambodia. It is very interesting to note the Seinnyet Nyima pagoda and Seinnyet Ama Paya in Myanmar built in the twelfth century showing multi cultural influence from Sri Lanka, India, Tibet and China.

Conclusion

The study of the Sinhala style pagoda in Southeast Asia, reveals the cultural interaction with Sri Lanka that spread by Buddhist contacts through the maritime relations in the Polonnaruwa period. Not only the shape but also concept and accessories of the Sinhala style pagoda has followed by the discussed countries that showing the cultural value of Sri Lankan architecture in the ancient time. There is space the further research for study of the Sri Lankan cultural interaction for the Southeast Asia by way of art and architecture which remained in the region.

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