The Ancient Role and Present Significance of “Completeness” in Bagan Architecture: *Hti* Hoisting and Pagoda Repair

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Abstract
This article considers the ancient role and significance of ‘completeness’ in connection with religious architecture. It then assesses the present significance of completeness in relation to the umbrella or *hti* on the summit of the stupa.

The Ancient Role and Significance of the *hti*
The *hti* is a symbol of worship and power (Myanmar Encyclopedia (Vol.5)). In terms of application, the *hti* can be divided into two types: as regalia and as an ordinary umbrella for daily use. Figuratively, the *hti* also symbolizes sovereignty when used as a regalia and an aura of auspiciousness when depicted to protect the Buddha against sunlight or rain (Fig1).

![Fig (1). Depiction of Hti on the wall painting erected behind Buddha, Bodhisatava and Zedi. (a) Latt (2012), Comparison of Pyu and early Bagan Architecture, “Researches on Pre-history, Proto-history, Bagan and Nyaungyan Periods”, U Myo Nyunt, Director (Retired), Architecture, Bagan. Pg (87-110). (b) Bagan Archaeological Museum (Taken by author, 9.11.2019) The *chatravali* or ringed conical spire can be defined as *hti* (umbrella) in Bagan Architecture (Tun 1996). In the earlier periods of Bagan (*circa* 10th to 11th century CE), visual depictions indicate quite convincingly that the *hti* was made up of three or more-layered tiered metal sheets. In succeeding centuries, the material used in the *hti* changed from metal to brick and thus modifying the form of *hti* to become more like the ringed conical spire in Bagan pagodas (Fig2). The Finial or *varsasthala* later was transformed into an elongated banana bud with a more embossed form in order to firmly grip the pole of protruding metal umbrella.
Traditionally, there are eight beneficial results of hoisting hti in people’s perception of gaining merit for example gaining respect from both human and celestial beings (Hlaing 1992). In addition, as part of the repairing of a pagoda, the donation of a hti confers three benefits including rebirth in the form of a cakkavatti (emperor) endowed thirteen times with seven gems of a ruler. Given these specific spiritual benefits, most of the pagodas in Myanmar today are surmounted by a hti.

Recent Concepts of the hti

The word အအ  in Myanmar is a corrupted Pali word “anga” meaning “part, limb, constituent part, component or even quality and attribute” အအအ  or in-ga-sone is a compound word meaning “to be complete with all the required parts or features” (Myanmar-English Dictionary, 1993). The word အအအ  appeared frequently with reference to pagoda repair in Bagan around 1996 as part of the official government campaign to promote tourism (Aung Kyaing, former Deputy Director General, Department of Archaeology, Pers.Comm. 10/2019). When the ancient role and present significance of Hti are linked, the idea of completeness becomes a catchword, used up to the present to justify the hoisting of a new hti on one of the prominent ancient structures of Bagan by the highest-ranking military officials. As a result, however, the apex of the ancient structures was fitted quickly for the new metal hti without time to design and install. An additional difficulty is the damage to the uppermost structure of the temples and stupas in Bagan because of the earthquakes.
Conjectural drawings were based on wall paintings, wall decoration and at times the encased stupa. However, the introduction of new materials to the old structures in order to hoisting a *hti* has significant negative impact on the old monuments. Specifically, the original materials of Bagan temples broke into small pieces when the 2016 earthquake hit. New materials, especially the bricks bound by cement that were used in the 1990s lacked cohesiveness with the ancient brick and have broken off as a single block, causing further deterioration to the old structure (Fig 3) (Tokyo National Research Institute for Cultural Properties, 2016).

Fig(3). Lack of Cohesiveness between Primary and New Materials (Sulamani temple after 2016 earthquake) [http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-37183943]

**Conclusion**

Myanmar Buddhist perception of the merits of hoisting and repair of a *hti* to gain merit and support the *dhamma* without knowing its original architectural style and appropriate conservation methods exposes the pagodas to more damage. Further research is needed to assess motivations for hoisting new *hti* not only in Bagan but also in other places in Myanmar and neighboring countries. Even as a preliminary study, however, the act of *hti* hoisting highlights a complex wider issue on balancing religious sustenance and architectural conservation.
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