

ICONOGRAPHICAL AND ANALYTICAL STUDY: THE INNOVATIVE EVOLUTION OF THE BUDDHA IMAGES IN BURMESE ART DURING EARLY KONBAUNG PERIOD (1753-17 2)

Ven. Pannajota

Mahidol University, Thailand

Author for correspondence email; pannajota1348@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

About the art of Buddha images produced during the early Konbaung period, previous researchers: U Maung Maung Tin (M.A.) and U Win Maung (Tampawady) in 1983, Than Tun (Mawlamyine) in 2013, and Maung Maung Siri in 2019, have asserted that the art of early Konbaung images relied on the second Ava called Nyaungyan style in Myanmar. Nevertheless, none of them analyzed the early Konbaung images stylistically in depth. It is a gap of knowledge. To fulfill it, this study is intended by the researcher to criticize the early Konbaung images, to find evidence as the images really were, and to verify the similarities and distinctive characteristics of the images. The researcher questions whether the Buddhist art of the early Konbaung images, as they claimed, was rooted in the Nyaungyan art completely or not, whether there was any innovative evolution during this period or not, and the evidence to verify the similar and distinctive features of the images? This is a qualitative research based on data gathered by pragmatic observation and documentation. The research framework is organized with the chronological and iconographic analysis of data that is the applying, in this paper, the first one of two methods by Erwin Panofsky: Iconography and Iconology. Researcher does not display the iconology in this paper. The result shows the similarities and differences in the five important points of the images—head, face, robe, hand, and āsana, certainly demonstrate the innovative evolution of the Buddha images in Burmese Buddhist art during the early Konbaung period. The images analyzed here were the evidence of this study.

Introduction

Burmese historians divide the Konbaung period into three periods: Early (1753-1782), Middle (1782-1853), and Late Konbaung period (1853-1885). Historians identify the Early Konbaung art from 1753 CE, the time of King Alaungpaya (1753-1760) ruling over Shwebo, to 1782 CE, the time of King Maung Maung, a son of King Dipeyin known as Naungdawgyi, reigned over Ava on February 5, 1782. The art of Buddha images in Burmese Art produced during the early Konbaung period gradually developed in Myanmar. In this study, the images, including murals produced from June 21, 1753, to February 5, 1782 CE, will comprise early Konbaung art. To recognize the particular style and specific features of the period, the dated images will be preferentially observed and analyzed in-depth, secondly datable images¹, and third, possible images² in the Buddhist museums.

Although previous researchers: U Maung Maung Tin (M.A.) and U Win Maung (Tampawady) in 1983, Than Tun (Mawlamyine) in 2013, and Maung Maung Siri in 2019, proclaimed that the art of early Konbaung images relied on the second Ava called Nyaungyan style in Myanmar³, they did not state in depth nor analyzed stylistically about the early Konbaung images. So, the researcher will in depth and stylistically study the iconography of the Buddha images in this research. Researcher conducted the pragmatic observation the various early Konbaung images and dialogue with the experts. So, this research is qualitative research based on the evidence in which the primary sources is the fieldwork study, and documentary research and dialogue with the Burmese Buddhist art history experts are used as the secondary source. The research methods used in this research are the chronological and iconographic analysis. They bases on the iconography, one of two methods— iconography and iconology by Erwin Panofsky. He mentions the iconography as an understanding of work of the art as images are and analysis of the images with the knowledge of literary sources. The study of intrinsic meaning, it technical and cultural history of the images is iconology, said by Panofsky. The researcher does not display the iconology in this paper.

¹ These images don't bear a date but can be linked to historical records from stone inscriptions or chronicles.

² They are also undated images but they stylistically and typically resemble some particular dated images and they have official Museum Registration and records.

³ Maung Maung Tin (Mahavijja), U, and U Win Maung (Tampawady), *Khitachatchat kyokywalkyathaw Yokepwarsintutawmyar* (The Venerated Buddha Images through the Ages), (Nyan Lin Dhamma Sarbadethar, 1983), 21

The research questions covered in the research are as follows:

1. Whether the Buddhist art of the early Konbaung images relied on the Nyaungyan art entirely or not?
2. Whether there was any innovative evolution during this period or not?
3. What is evidence to verify the similar and distinctive features of the images?

Especially, this research aims to criticize the early Konbaung images, find evidence as the images were, and verify the similarities and distinctive characteristics of the images.

Iconographic Analysis of the Buddha images during the early Konbaung period (1752-1782 CE).

Iconography is a description, interpretation, and classification of images. Visual representation of the Buddha can be seen in Konbaung murals in serial order: the twenty-eight previous Buddhas, illustrations of seven weeks after the Buddha's enlightenment, the story of the Gautama Buddha (*Buddhavaṃsa*), and ten great *Jātaka* stories. They displayed as the narratives in most of the mural paintings in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries⁴. These narratives became a mediator of Gautama Buddha, his past and present life, and teachings from texts. Alexander Green said that the Burmese wall paintings reflected contemporary social context and their religious views and daily activities⁵. However, Burmese artists tried to develop Buddhist art through time.

The Buddha images on wall paintings will be first analyzed by the researcher to observe their iconography. Researcher did not find any dated Buddha statue during the early Konbaung period in the museums of Mandalay, Sagaing, Shwebo, Budalin, Ava, and Amarapura, the ancient royal capitals of the Konbaung period⁶. Thus, the researcher conducted face-to-face interviews with some professors, previous researchers, experts on Buddhist art, and government officers from the above museums. Fortunately, U Hla Shwe⁷ and U Aung Min Chit from the Department of Archaeology National Museum (DANM)⁸ in Mandalay shared an inventory book and photos taken at the three Pindaya caves, Shan State. Furthermore, the

⁴ Munier, Cristophe, and Myint Aung, *Burmese Buddhist Murals: Vol.1- Epigraphic corpus of the Powin Taung Caves*, (Bangkok: White Lotus Co Ltd. 2007).

⁵ Green, Alexandra, *Buddhist Visual Cultures, Rhetoric, and Narrative in Late Burmese Wall Paintings*, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2018).

⁶ At that time, my previous main advisor, Dr. Julia Estève, a present co-advisor, gave me instruction (December 11, 2019) to meet to some professors, and previous researchers in order to gather some data on this topic.

⁷ A Deputy Director at the Department of Archaeology and National Museum, Mandalay, Myanmar.

⁸ Later on, it also will be used with the abbreviation "DANM".

researcher had the opportunity to meet Dr. Thein Lwin⁹ through the help of Daw Soe Soe Win¹⁰, and he shared with me some dated images. Of them, three wooden images from Pindaya caves date 1134 BE (1772 CE) and another 1141 BE (1779 CE) from Wet Thet village in Magway will include to analyze as the essential evidence of the early Konbaung period.

1. Phowin Taung, Winkabar Cave (1116 BE, 1754 CE; fig. 1)

During the early Konbaung period, the earliest mural painting is in Phowin Taung, Yinmarbin township, near Monywa in Sagaing Division. It is situated in cave no—513, named Winkabar Gu (labyrinth cave), Phowin Taung complex. One inscription located on the Western wall gives the date 1116 BE (1754 CE). Christophe Munier and Myint Aung identified five inscriptions in this Cave no. 513 in their book *Burmese Buddhist Murals: Volume 1- Epigraphic Corpus of the Powin Taung Caves*: two of 1114, one of 1116, one of 1118 Burmese Era, and the last one with no date but only names of donators¹¹. Hence, hypothesis is that the murals in this cave no. five hundred thirteen were between 1114 and 1118 BE (1752-1756 CE). The remaining paintings on the back of the sandstone statues and the Western wall represent seven weeks and some of the series of 28 Buddhas. One of the— two scenes of the Buddha's life is invaluable monuments of early Konbaung Buddhist art though we cannot identify them because of lack of captions. Other remaining episodes are the representations of seven weeks by the Buddha.

In these unidentified scenes¹², the Buddhas are seated in *Bhūmisparśamudrā* on the other thrones. They have the flame sinking into protuberance, broaden forehead, eyebrows being very far from the eyes that are opening and bulging. Their ears are straight down and touching the shoulders. They have not apparent mouth and nose, and short neck. Their robes are so clear with two folds: double robe and upper robe on the left shoulder divided with curved lines in the middle, and significant and broaden heels. Furthermore, although the three lines of the neck are



Figure 1. Date- 1752-1756 CE; height 40cm, width 30cm, fieldwork study by Researcher on Jan 2, 2020.

⁹ A Deputy Director General at the Department of Archaeology and National Museum, Naypyidaw, Myanmar.

¹⁰ A Director General at the Department of Archaeology and National Museum, Mandalay, Myanmar.

¹¹ Munier, Aung, 2007, 29.

¹² See figure 1.

clear, there are other specific features: they lie on the upper part of the chest and not on the neck. The line of the upper robe falls from the left shoulder to the lower part of the right chest with the straight diagonal line and turns up to under the right armpit.

2. The mural from Ma Au village (1123 BE, 1761 CE; fig. 2)

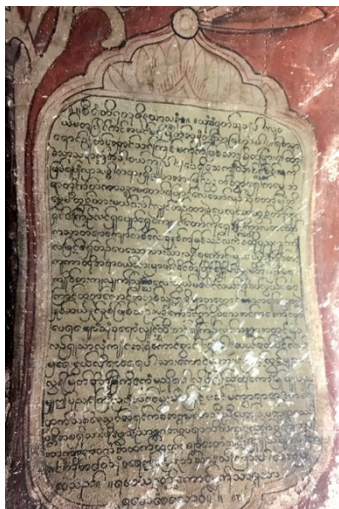


Figure 2-Date- 1742 CE; height 78cm, width 53cm, fieldwork study by Researcher on Jan 1, 2020.

Another early Konbaung mural is in a cave temple with the date 1123 Burmese Era (1761CE), Shwe Hmudaw complex, Ma Au (Ma U) village, Magway division. Shwe Hmudaw Pagoda is in Eastern Ma Au village and many ancient Buddhist pagodas and cave temples of the late Nyaungyan and early Konbaung period remain there. Besides the Northern Gage of Shwe Hmudaw pagoda, five cave temples are in a row from South to North, called Ngar Su Tan Bayar. The ceiling and wall of one cave temple, like the Nyaungyan stupa with the multi-corners called *Kho Nan Cho* in Burmese Buddhist term, are covered by the murals. Two ink inscriptions on both sides of the eastern gate are

historically and epigraphically invaluable records for early Konbaung Buddhist art. An ink inscription¹³ on the Northern wall inscribes more details about when this cave temple was built, repaired, and painted. According to this ink inscription, the temple was constructed during the Nyaungyan period in 1104 BE (1742 CE), restored in 1122 BE (1760 CE), and the mural was depicted in 1123 BE (1761 CE)¹⁴.

The composition of this mural is that row of 28 past Buddhas, illustrations of seven weeks, Eight great victories, and ten great *Jātaka* stories. Of them, pictures of rows of 28 Buddhas and seven weeks are still excellent and clear to observe. In figure no. 3, the Buddhas are depicted with a Nyaungyan style flame sinking into protuberance, a broad forehead and temple, big ears, opened and bulged eyes, and clear eyelid. This short nose is so close to the eyes. Eye and eyebrows are far; they have a wide mouth, long and smiling



Figure 3. Date-1742; height 54cm, width 41cm, fieldwork study by Researcher on Jan 1, 2020.

¹³ See figure 2.

¹⁴ See figure 3.

lips. They are seated with crossed legs position and in *Bhūmisparśamudrā*. There are two kinds of heel forms: one equal in size with the sole and another one which the heel is higher than the sole. These different forms of heels made early Konbaung art conspicuous that the artists in the early Konbaung period relied on the traditional style of Nyaungyan and stylistically created inventions on the Buddhist art of images.

3. Htitaw Kyauksa Gu in Shwezigon pagoda, Bagan (1130 BE, 1768 CE; fig. 4)

Another cave, UNESCO No. 22, situated in the North-East corner of Shwezigon Pagoda, Bagan, supports the recognition of the influence of Nyaungyan style on Buddhist art during the transition time between Nyaungyan and early Konbaung periods. This cave is not a temple but a brick building where stores a stone inscription dated 1130 BE (1768 CE) about the record of the donation of an umbrella (*Htitaw* in Burmese) to Shwezigon by King Hsinbyushin (1763-1776), the third King of Konbaung. Hence, it is called *Htitaw Kyauksa Gu*, an inscription building.



Figure 4. Date- 1768 CE; height 47cm, width 56cm, fieldwork study by Researcher on Jan 27, 2020.

In this shrine, mural paintings remain invaluable evidence of the early Konbaung Buddha images. The arrangement of painting is that of the cycle of lotus with many layers and other floral patterns on the ceiling and the wall, the illustration rows of 28 Buddhas with their names, four holy remains of the *Gautama* Buddha from different places: *Tāvatainsa* haven, from China, the palace of Dragons under Ocean and *Srilankā*, and deities and humans paying homage to them. One of the 28 Buddhas, *Piyadassi*¹⁵, is sitting under the *Shyishya* tree surrounded by two great disciples: *Pālita Thera* and *Sabbadāsī Thera*. Stylistic features of the Buddha images in this painting and two disciples reflect the influence of Nyaungyan tradition in the early Konbaung period. On the head, the Buddha has a short flame which base is sinking into topknot, broad temple and forehead, straight down ears, bulged eyes, and obvious eyelid. His nose is short and so close with the eyes but no bridge of the nose. The image has so far space between eyes and their eyebrows, long line on the mouth, thick lips and they seem to pout. In the case of mouth of Konbaung images, U Win Maung (Tampawady) explains that “Actually, the mouth of Konbaung images has equal size with Nyaungyan style in length but because of becoming a

¹⁵ See figure 4.

little thick of lower lip, Konbaung images seem to pout.¹⁶ The Buddha's neck is depicted with only two lines to show a short neck. Hands are so slender, almost right chest is opened with the slack edge of the robe down. The broad chest is visible, the two layers of edges of two robes on the left chest are drawn as Nyaungyan robe: upper line points double robe out (*Thingangyi or Dukoke*), and lower part illustrates upper edges of the upper robe (*Uttarāthanga or Apoyone Akathi*).

4. Three wooden images, Pindaya cave (1134 BE, 1772 CE; fig. 5, 6, 7)

The dated Buddha images during the early Konbaung period are rarely found in Myanmar. The photos of three early Konbaung statues were shared by U Aung Min Chit, an artist at the Department of Archaeology and National Museum, Mandalay. He and his group, led by U Hla Shwe, a Head of the DANM, Mandalay, observed three caves of Pindaya in Shan State on August 14 of 2018, as a survey of the Buddha images Pindaya complex by the order of DANM, Naypyidaw. Fortunately, they found three early Konbaung images with dates. The inscriptions on the frontage of the top layer of the throne, reveal the names of donators and

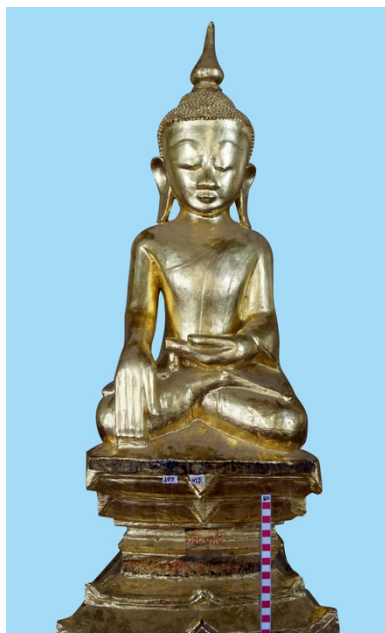


Figure 5. Date- 1772 CE; height 62.5cm, width 32.5cm, photograph by U Hla Shwe & U Aung Min; "Inventory of three Pindaya caves."

their dates. They have *Kha Loke* throne where we find many stubs on horizontal elements, and the stubs are in the opposite: stubs from upper elements are hanging down, and others from lower parts are sticking up. This design of the throne was specific to the Konbaung period¹⁷. In that case, Dr. Than Tun said that "The dated images in Pindaya area are the strong evidence of the influence of Burmese Buddhist art over Shan State because their characteristics completely resemble with the images around the Monywa township and the inscriptions on Pindaya images are in Burmese¹⁸."¹⁹

Image No. 201 (fig. 5) is recorded with an ink inscription in Burmese, but the letters are not clear except the

¹⁶ U. Win Maung (Tampawady, personal communication, February 18, 2020).

¹⁷ In Bagan period, it was used but there are other two small thrones between statue and main throne: Samakhan (Cammachaṇḍa in Pāli) Flat under-piece and double Lotus. No lotus throne is between statue and Kha Loke throne but only Samakhan in Konbaung period and sometime there is nothing.

¹⁸ Than Tun 2016, 69.

¹⁹ This sentence is translated into English by the researcher.

date to observe because of gold leaf²⁰. The date of the inscription is 1134 in the Burmese Era (1772 CE). The Buddha is seated with crossed legs and *Bhūmisparśamudrā*, one hand touches on the throne and the other puts on crossed legs as a *Jhānāsana*, meditation posture. The view displays the Buddha's peace, consistency and tranquility. On the head, there are both flame (*Ketumālar*)²¹ and topknot (*Mañi Daw or Ushnisha*)²², but the topknot became longer than featured in the Nyaungyan style on the top²³. It is a distinctive feature of early Konbaung images. Hair is sculptured with pointed lumps. There is no forehead, a specific mark of the Buddha: a little broad forehead and temple, prominent eyebrows that are far from the eyes, downcast eyes, a sink upper part of the nose, and clear bone from mid to end, round chin. The mouth seems to pout because of short lips in length and little tick lips. Ears have concave auricles, and the lower part becomes narrow and turns aside like Mandalay style. No line is present on the little short neck. A simple robe is depicted with a thick line, and a double robe is so prominent with the thick and long fold that it looks like a folded towel from the left shoulder to navel drawn with lines in the corner. There is no line in the middle of the fold of the double robe, and this style is a distinctive feature from the above two mural images (fig. 1, 2) influenced by the Nyaungyan style. The edge of the upper robe is covered on the whole left hand from shoulder to wrist, but we cannot see any edge of the upper robe on the body. The position of hands is distinctive from images in paintings: the right hand touching on earth, called *Cha Lat* in Burmese Buddhist term, is not shown as supple as in murals images. Finger sizes of both hands: *Cha Lat* (right hand) and *Peik Lat* (left hand) are not similar as the right hand four fingers are longer than the back of the palm in length, but the four fingers are equal in size with the back of the palm in width. Four fingers except the thumb are identical in size and shaped like a fork. Another distinctive feature of the hand is found in the left hand, turning up on the crossed legs, in which there is an obvious flexion between the fingers part and upper part of the palm. On this hand, both sizes of palm and fingers are equal. Moreover, the feature of feet introduces the specific early Konbaung style by sculpturing different foot sizes in which the heel become higher than its sole.

²⁰ It seems to be a wooden image described by Dr. Than Tun in his book *Nalleyarzawin*, 101 as an example. He wrote that it was found in Maha Yan Aung monastery and states its inscription in page no-144 that "it was done in Nadaw month 1134 BE (1772 CE) and donated by Bayar Dakar Pwae Zar Thar Aung and his wife."

²¹ In Burmese Buddhist art, the flame has been called *Ketumālar* or *Ushnisha*.

²² In Burmese Buddhist art, the Topknothas been called *Mañi Daw* while in West the word *Ushnisha* is used.

²³ In Nyaungyan period, the flame is short and looks like an onion (called *Kyat Ton Gaung* in Burmese) but in early Konbaung period, the top of flame become longer than in Nyaungyan traditional style.

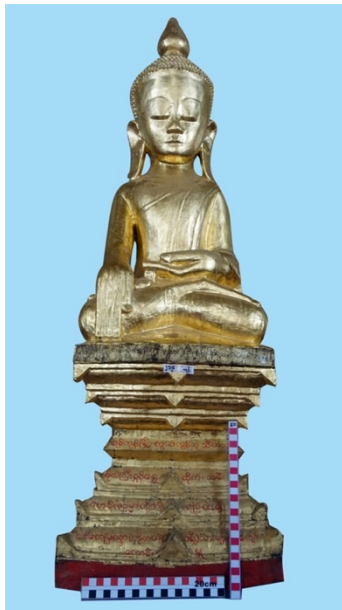


Figure 6. Date- 1772 CE; height 84cm, width 48cm, photograph by U Hla Shwe & U Aung Min; “Inventory of three Pindaya caves.”

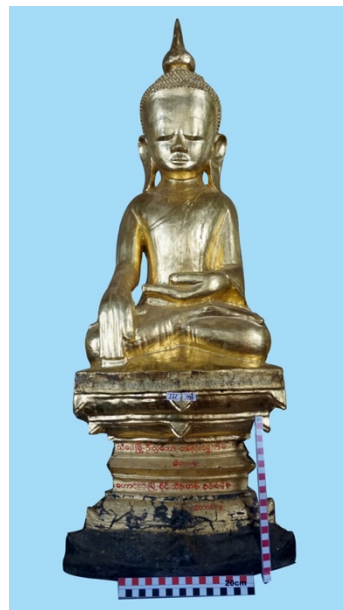


Figure 7. Date- 1772 CE; height 59cm, width 30.5cm, photograph by U Hla Shwe & U Aung Min; “Inventory of three Pindaya caves.”

Other wooden images no. 219²⁴ and no. 222²⁵ in Pindaya Shwe U Min Cave sitting on the *Kha Loke* throne were also recorded with the same date but different donors. The inscription in the same place mentions that “The Buddha image donated by San Thar and his wife named Ma Nging Su was completed during the Dapodwe Month in 1134 Burmese Era (1772 CE)²⁶.” Following inscription states that “It was donated by Maung Oo Pha and his wife named Daw Shwe Hla, and finished on the full moon

day of Dapodwe Month in 1134 Burmese Era (1772CE).” Most of the characteristics of these images also reflect the Nyaungyan style, but if we carefully and iconographically observe, it is obvious to recognize the innovation of the art of Buddha images during the early Konbaung period. The majority of characteristics of the image are similar to above images. The differences from the first one are that the second one’s flame was broken on the top; their forehead and temple are broader than the above image, and eyebrows that are so far from eyes are more prominent than the other one.

5. A wooden Buddha image with *Bhadrāsana* from Thi Ho Shin Buddhist Museum (fig. 8)

A wooden Buddha image²⁷ with *Bhadrāsana* is also important evidence of the early Konbaung images. It is preserved in the Thi Ho Shin Buddhist Museum at the Thi Ho Shin pagoda complex. The image was not dated but stylistically, and typically it was an artwork of the early Konbaung period. The image represents the Buddha sitting on the double *Sa Lin Myaunt* throne with the *Bhadrāsana* posture in which both legs are hanging down in front and

²⁴ See figure 6.

²⁵ See Fig. 7. Although, Dr. Than Tun introduces 10 inscriptions of dated images in same monastery with the same date in 1134 BE (1772 CE) (Than Tun 2016, 144–45), I could not find this image in his book.

²⁶ This inscription is found in the same book page 145. It made me understand that the images in Maha Yan Aung monastery seemed to be donated by one abbot at the monastery, later in 1965 CE, in order to keep in the Pindaya Caves.

²⁷ See figure 8.

feet are firmly planted on the small lotus pedestal. The flame on the head is short, and it looks like an onion (*Kyat Ton Gaung* in Burmese). Flat and wide topknot were shown by the artists with shaven hair. The trapezoidal upside-down shaped face, broad forehead and temple, short nose, and short neck also display the influence of Nyaungyan art. The position of the eyes is closer to the eyebrows. Ears are not vertically straight down, and their lower part became smaller and turns aside. The feature of lips seemed to pout in that they were a little long and turning up at the end like a flying seagull.



Figure 8. Date- 1752-1778 CE;
height 57cm, width 36cm,
fieldwork study by Researcher on
August 8, 2020.

The style of wearing a robe was distinctive from other early Konbaung images. The robe, here, was extremely sheer on the upper body and flared out around the lower part of the body. The edges of the flaring robe are with the double undulating lines looking like zigzag shapes. Moreover, viewers are conscious of folds of the inner robe in front of the abdomen and between the two legs. These characteristics of the robe indicated that the images produced around the Pakokku area, especially, the *Bhadrāsana* images,²⁸ were influenced by the Bagan art. His right hand displays *Abhayamudrā* (fearless gesture) and *Vadaramudrā* (Boon-granting gesture) by the left hand. The fingers are elegantly up-turning, and there is an obvious flexion between fingers and palms that are specific

characteristics of early Konbaung images. Thus, the image stylistically shows that it was an early Konbaung artwork.

6. Mural from Athan cave temple, Khin Mon Village (1138 BE, 1776 CE; fig. 9)

The earliest mural painting with Nyanungyan style in the early Konbaung period are located in the Khin Mon village, near Monywa in Sagaing Division. Tin Aye (Pa-gyi) states the date of paintings, donators, and the artist's name with the ink inscription in his article in Burmese titled “*The name of an artist in early Konbaung period.*” He describes the ink inscription that “*In Burmese Era 1118 (1756 CE), on Thursday, the 13th waning day of Dagu (first month of the Burmese Calendar), these paintings in Loka Aung Myaye cave temple were*

²⁸ The two *Bhadrāsana* images and most of standing images in that Thi Ho Shin Museum are found with this style of wearing robe that is a specific feature of Bagan standing images.

*painted by Sayar Maung Pu and donated by Kyaung Da Kar U Pwae and Mal Mwae. We share these merits to with the parents and teachers.*²⁹”³⁰



Figure 9. Date- 1776 CE; height 57cm, width 36cm, fieldwork study by Researcher on Jan 3, 2020.

In figure no.9, two Buddhas: *Medhinkarā* and *Tanankarā* sitting on double lotus throne under their specific Bodhi trees with *Bhūmisparśamudrā*, are surrounded by two great different disciples. The base of their flame is not sinking into topknot, and it looks like the shape of a pointed budding lotus flower. Their halos are with red color. Brow are not wide and become round, eyebrows also are not so far like in Nyaungyan style, they become close with the nose, but two disciples' eyebrows are so far with their eyes. Temple and forehead are not broad but become narrow. The nose and bridge of the nose are so clear; the mouth and lips are too small and short, painted red. Ears do not touch on both shoulders, the upper part of ears are a little bit, and wide, the lower part becomes narrow and turns aside, unlike Nyaungyan style vertically straight down. This style is so similar to the late Konbaung style, Yadanarbone (Mandalay) period. The robe is painted with red color, and the end of the robes is edged with white spots. Folds of robe on the left chest are obvious, with the pointed line in the middle. Their soles and heels are not on a horizontal line, but heels became higher than soles.

There is no consensus on a date for these murals³¹. On personal discussion with U Win Maung (Tampawady) about these paintings and the ink inscription. He argues that “This inscription date given by Tin Aye (Pa-gyi), 1118 in Burmese Era, cannot be certainly recognized because, before Tin Aye (Pa-gyi), he read this inscription. Most of the researchers saw a defect of character on this inscription that stucco under the third letter of 1118 in Burmese Era has being spoiled. This defect confuses the observers of Burmese letter 1 (၀) or Burmese letter 3 (၃). He asserts that it is more reasonable to give the date of 1138 in the Burmese Era.

²⁹ (Pa-gyi 1983, extra sheet).

³⁰ Translated into English by the researcher and this article in Burmese was shared by U Maung Maung Siri on January 9, 2020.

³¹ It was re-dated by Christophe Munier-Gaillard in 1816 (Munier-Gaillard, 2013), 7–9.

He points the four important facts out in murals (1) on illustration of houses and monasteries—the artists used the 3D design that usually started to depict after completely conquering Ayutthaya in 1767 CE during the Burmese King Hsinbyushin reign (1763-1776 CE) (2) twenty-eight Buddhas are sitting on the *Kha Loke* throne, a specific design of the throne in Konbaung period³². (3) Heels of images in murals became higher than their soles that is also a new invention of the early Konbaung period³³ (4) In early Konbaung painting with Nyaungyan style in which the images are usually with the only nostril and not the bridge of the nose. But, the bone of nose becomes obvious on the images in that Athan painting, which is a new creation of Konbaung art that has not been seen before.”

The researcher also agrees with him because distinctive features of the images in this painting can be observed by comparing the images in other early Konbaung Murals such as Ma U paintings (1761 CE), Lokahmankin paintings (1782 CE), and wooden images in Pindaya Cave. The many features of the images in the Athan cave temple do not look similar to Nyaungyan style influenced in early Konbaung period: big and broad upper part of head and face, far eyebrow away from the eyes, vertically straight ears down, and double lines on the robe on the left shoulder. In contrast, these images have a round head but not broad; eyebrows become close to eyes, ears are not vertically straight down, and lower part of ears become small and turn aside. Furthermore, the mural images in this Athan cave temple have a sharp tip on the upper part of folds of double robe on the left chest like a sharp tip of horoscope palm-leaf (*Jartar Gaung* in Burmese) that is recorded when someone was born, in which there is a sharp tip at both sides. These characteristics point out when this mural was depicted. Therefore, I assert that the date of this mural in the Athan cave temple is later in Burmese Era 1138 (1776 CE).

7. Mural from Aneint (1139 BE, 1777 CE; fig. 10)

A temple registered no. Ana 068³⁴ is located at the South-West of Aneint village, now known as Thone Pan Hla. This temple is known as Shwe Gu Htut that the village. Ma Kay Thwe Soe states about the ink inscription of this temple in her M.A Thesis that “the temple was built in 1139 Burmese Era (1777 CE),” but now the ink inscription is completely

³² It was used in Bagan also but at that time, there was a small lotus throne between statue and Kha Loke throne (Win Maung (Tampawady) 2020a).

³³ It can be compared to the Nyaungyan murals from Taung Bi Pitakattaik in Bagan with the date in 1068 BE (1706 CE) and from Tilokaguru cave in Sagaing (datable – in 1606-1628). Their heels were not as high as heels of images in Konbaung murals.

³⁴ See figure 10.

damaged³⁵. It is a cave temple associated with the brick building in front covered with mural paintings. Ceiling and wall have been painted with big lotus, twenty-eight Buddhas in the past, footprints, stories represented preaching by the Gautama Buddha, and ten great *Jātakas*. Inside the shrine, since mostly wall paintings begin to destroy and to loose colors, now the style of paintings cannot be observed clearly.

It is difficult to observe wall paintings also in brick building in front of cave temple but fortunately, mural paintings above the entrance are still bright and very clear. They are the representations of three Buddhas of twenty-eight Buddhas: *Padumuttarā*, *Sumedhā* and *Sujātā* Buddha, and representations of the Gautama Buddha preaching at four places: *Vesālī*,



Figure 10. Date- 1777 CE; height 51cm, width 81cm, fieldwork study by Researcher on Jan 1, 2020.

Kosambhī, Palalae forest and *Tāvateinsā* haven. In this presentation, the three Buddhas are sitting under the different Bodhi trees with *Bhūmisparśamudrā*. Two great Arantas are kneeling down beside each Buddha holding the sprays of flowers. The Buddhas are sitting on the double lotus throne (*Padmāsana*) and they stylistically are not different; only their names unable us to identify them. They have a halo painted with red color and edged with two black lines and yellow line. Flame upon *ushnisha* is short like a shape of a pointed budding lotus flower and a little sharp on top. *Ushnisha*, topknot is depicted with the black color and the base of flame is sinking into protuberance. Brow is a little wide like Nyaungyan style. They have opening and bulging eyes. Eyes and eyebrow are so far but eyes are very close to nose. Ears are straight down and touching the shoulders. They wear monastic robe on left shoulder and open right shoulder. Folds of robe are depicted with lines that draw down until navel from shoulder and in the middle, there is a special design to show the over lapping folds like Nyaungyan style. Left hand is placed on the crossed legs and the other one is touching on the throne. In the representations of the Buddha preaching at four places: *Vesālī*, *Kosambhī*, Palalae forest and *Tāvateinsā* haven, the Buddha's left hand is holding a fan made from palm-leaf with the special designed handle which is very rare to see on the murals. Their soles and heels are on a horizontal line that is a significant character of Nyaungyan images.

³⁵ Kay Thwe Soe 2018, 14.

8. Maha Thein Daw Gyi, proximately (c1770-1786 CE; fig. 11)

According to Christophe Munier, the mural paintings in Maha Thein Daw Gyi have been influenced by Siamese art of the last Ayudhaya period, Thailand. The shape of throne, *Sinthao* in Thai (Zigzag pattern) used for separating different panels of paintings, traditional leaf motif and other floral designs accentuate the influence of Siamese art in Myanmar during the Konbaung period. They can be compared with the paintings from Wat Mai Prachumpon (1629-1656), Wat Chong Nonsi (late seventeenth century) in Yannawa, Bangkok.³⁶ Munier dated it earlier than the pieces of the Anandian group³⁷ (1786-1800 CE) in Bagan.³⁸ Unfortunately, the seated Buddha image and other 28 Buddha images in this painting lost their color and the remains show only under-painting color. These Buddha images³⁹ have different facial expression, robe, and flame. Orawin Likhitwisedkul said the Ayudhaya fine art in



Figure 11. Date- 1770-1786CE; height 41cm, width 30cm, fieldwork study by Researcher on November 16, 2019.

Myanmar were produced by Thai craftsmen who were prisoners of Burma and late Ayutthaya War during reign of the King Hsinbyushin in 1767 CE called *phayar phayan* in Thai (Likhitwisedkul 2019, 183). These different characteristics show that paintings at Maha Thein Daw Gyi were a corporative artwork accomplished by the artists from both Ayudhaya and Myanmar. Otherwise, it can be defined as a hybrid mural stylistically. The influence of late Ayutthaya art in these mural Buddha images⁴⁰ is visible in the double eyelids and right hand touching the throne, which is placed

covering the right knee joint: that was a specific feature of late Ayutthaya images while Burmese art usually placed it in front of the shin-bone, and parallel small cloth appeared under the crossed legs and hanging down in front of the throne with rectangle shape. The feature of the flame⁴¹, the facial form with the trapezoid upside-down shape, the robe folds on the left

³⁶ Ibid, 13, See also the brief scholarship by others about these paintings.

³⁷ He used a new term for the murals from Ananda Ok-kyaung (1786 CE), Upali Thein (1794 CE), Kamma Kyaung U Phaya and Mingala Shwe Kyaung U Phaya (17790-1800 CE) in Bagan (Ibid, 4).

³⁸ Ibid, 63.

³⁹ Christophe Munier and other scholars did not criticize the iconography of the images in these murals but they focused only on *Sinthao*, throne, umbrella, its royal ornaments and other floral designs.

⁴⁰ See figure 11.

⁴¹ It is distinctive from the flame of Thai art: Ava flame is a lotus-bud shape while another looks like a flame-fire (Griswold, n.d., plate. V, LV, XIII ; H. Fickle 1979, plate. 19).

chest with twin-feather tail of a kite at the end are all influences from the first Ava. Moreover, the feature of higher heel than sole of foot seems to be close with the late Nyaungyan and early Konbaung art in painting. The different characteristics of the images from Maha Thein Daw Gyi can be compared with the images in mural at Wat Chong Nonsi (late seventeenth century) and at the Buddhaisawan Chapel, one of the Bangkok National Museums, painted between 1795 and 1797.⁴²

9. A Wooden Image from Wet Thet Village (1141 BE, 1779 CE; fig. 12)

Another early Konbaung image can be found in Dhammaceti monastery in Wet Thet village, Htilin township, Magway division. It is a contribution of Dr. Thein Lwin⁴³, a Deputy Director General at DANM in Naypyidaw. The date can be seen in the inscription present on the back of the image, but we do not get information about the donors; it reads: “It was produced on full moon day of Dagu Month in 1141 Burmese Era (1779 CE).” This wooden image⁴⁴ is seated on the double lotus throne decorated with small and long blue-water lily petals. This kind of throne is called *Sa Lin Hmyaunt* in Burmese Buddhist terms: one is placed face down, and another is turned upside. Their bases meet in the middle that is combined with a big and flat line. This design is unique and well known as *Sa Lin Myaunt* throne in the late Nyaungyan and early Konbaung period because of small and long blue-water lily petals. U Win Maung (Tampawady) explains that there are three kinds of lotus (*Kyar* in Burmese Buddhist term) on this throne: firstly, small up-standing lotus petals on the first line known as (*Kyar Nu*), secondly, the row of Blue-water lily petals turned upside in the middle part (*Kyar Hlan*) and third, a row of blue-water lily petals placed face down in the lower part called (*Kyar Hmouk*) in Burmese Buddhist term.⁴⁵

Stylistically the image relies on Nyaungyan style: short flame looking like an onion (called *Kyat Ton Gaung*



Figure 12. Date- 1779 CE; height 43cm, width 18cm, thickness 15.2cm, fieldwork study by Researcher on Jan 14, 2019.

⁴² H. Fickle, 1979, Panel 6-7, Plate 18-19.

⁴³ Now, he is in the process of publishing a book named “The Dated Buddha images in Myanmar.”

⁴⁴ See figure 12.

⁴⁵ U. Win Maung (Tampawady), personal communication, February 22, 2020.

in Burmese), topknotdecorated with beryl, no forehead (a sign of Enlightenment), downcast eyes, soles, and heels are on a horizontal line, long fingers and broaden back of the hand. The feature of wearing a robe is so distinctive from others that the lines of the robe on the left shoulder fall to half of the right chest and bend over to the navel (in Myanmar, it is called *Ta Sit Choo*). Other characteristics show the new inventions of early Konbaung images: strong body, not so broad brow, becoming eyebrow close with the eyes, prominent nose and bridge of the nose, ears that turn aside in lower part.

Conclusion and Significant Results

The iconographic analysis of the early Konbaung images demonstrates that the art of Buddha images in the early Konbaung period fundamentally depended on Nyaungyan art, but it partially and not completely for all characteristics. The early Konbaung images have either the same features as Nyaungyan art or the specificities in five significant images –Head, Face, Robe, Hand, and *Āsana*. These points show the significant results of this study as the evidence as follows:

Head

The parts of the head of a Buddha image play an important role in distinguishing different images. They include the flame, protuberance, hair, and forehead (*Thin Kyit*) of the images. These parts of the images were stylistically similar and distinctively different during the early Konbaung period.

The early Konbaung flame of Buddhas in murals is sinking into the topknot; it shows the influence of the late Nyangyan style⁴⁶ during the early Konbaung period (fig. 1, 3, 4, 10). There were two kinds of flame for statues—the short flame that looks like an onion (*Kyat Ton Gaung* in Burmese)⁴⁷ (fig. 8, 12), and a slightly longer flame than the first one on the top with a longer tip⁴⁸ (fig. 5, 6, 7). This second one is a new creation of early Konbaung art, while the first one is the Nyaungyan style. The topknot of the early images was short but slightly wide. It is shorter than flame while some images with the onion flame have equal size with a topknot in height. *Hair* were usually decorated with cluster of pearls. There was not a decorative frontlet

⁴⁶ In murals of the Tilokaguru cave in Sagaing (c1606-1628) and Taung Be Pitakataik Kyaung in Bagan (1706 CE), the Buddha's flame did not sink into Topknotbut in Powin Taung cave no-109, 111, 268, 462, 478, 480, 512, it is sinking into protuberance.

⁴⁷ Its upper part (tip) is shorter than lower part (base).

⁴⁸ It has equal size in height between two parts.

of the early Konbaung images' forehead (known as *Thin Kyit*). Instead, the artists used a small line to separate the forehead (*Na-phu* in Burmese) from hair.

Face

Similar and different facial characteristics indicate the evidences of the evolution of the art of Buddha images during that period. They are facial shape, *urña*, forehead and temple, eye, ear, nose, and mouth.

In facial shape of the early Konbaung images, we found the upside-down trapezoid shape like Nyaungyan style (fig. 1-11). They were lack of the symbol of the tuft of golden hair (*urña*). Other facial characteristics of the early Konbaung images also are similar to the late Nyangyan style images⁴⁹. They are: broad forehead and temple, prominent eyebrows far from the eyes, slightly bulging and opening eyes and sometimes, dawn-cast eyes, short lips in length and little tick lips, obvious nostril but no bridge of the nose in both murals and statues. The form of the ear in early Konbaung images is vertically straight down. There are two parts of ears: the upper part is for the concave auricles of the ear, and another is for the lower part of the ear. These two parts are separated with the horizontal line in the middle. It also is an imitation of Nyangyan style in murals (fig. 1, 3, 4, 10). On the other hand, during the early Konbaung period, the artists tried to develop their styles in early Konbaung images as the lower part becomes smaller than before and turns slightly aside. This is a distinctive feature in the early Konbaung period (fig. 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12) from Nyangyan art⁵⁰.

Robe

Except for the Hitaw Kyauksa Gu in Bagan, the Burmese artists drew an edge of the upper robe on the right chest with a line falling from the left shoulder. It ends at the base right armpit covering almost the right chest, while the image was shown with the slack edge of the upper robe to open nearly the right chest in the Hitaw Kyauksa Gu mural. These two types of robe display on the right chest can be found in the Ava period: Tilokaguru cave in Sagaing (c1606-1628) and Taung Be Pitakataik Kyaung in Bagan (1706 CE). So, it demonstrates that in early Konbaung images generally, there was no slack line of upper robe on the right chest, robe line covered almost the right chest and ended under the base of the armpit. This feature attempts to develop the art of early Konbaung images from the traditional Nyangyan style.

⁴⁹ They can be compared with the mural images in Tilokaguru cave in Sagaing (c1606-1628) and Taung Be Pitakataik Kyaung in Bagan (1706 CE).

⁵⁰ It can be compared with a stone image from Loka Man Aung pagoda in Burmese Era 1086 (1724 CE) during the Nyangyan period.

Furthermore, the folds of the two kinds of robe on the left chest also are drawn in Nyangyan style. They have two parts: the upper part with the carving line refers to the fold of double robe (*Thingangyi* or *Dukoke*), and the lower part illustrates the upper edges of the upper robe (*Uttarāthanga* or *Apoyone Akathi*). Two types of styles of the wearing robe on the left shoulder of early Konbaung images are found as follows:

1. Ta Sit Choo edge of robe with curved lines.

The parallel lines of the robe on the left shoulder fall first to the sternum with the diagonal shape, bend over to navel with vertical carving lines covering the sternum (fig. 5, 6, 7, 9, 12). Sometimes, these lines do not cover the sternum.

2. Straight diagonal edge of the robe.

In the painting, it falls with straight diagonal lines covering the left chest. Sometimes, it has multi-layers of folds like a towel with stripes, and in that feature, the upper layer indicates the double robe, and the other refers to the edges of the upper robe (fig. 1, 3, 4, 10).

Hand

The Konbaung images' positions were shown in slightly different styles during the early Konbaung period, though there was no difference in *Mudrā*. Hand gestures (*Mudrā* in *Pāli*) of the images were generally displayed with the right hand in *Bhūmisparśamudrā* (Touching earth gesture) and left hand in *Jhānāsanamudrā* (Meditation gesture) for the seated images (fig. 1-12). Stylistically, the right four fingers are longer than the back of the palm in length, but they are of equal size with the back of the palm in width; that is a Nyangyan feature during the early Konbaung period (fig. 5, 6, 7, 12). On the other hand, the four fingers of the right hand, except for the thumb, are identical, and their shape is like a fork. There is an apparent flexion between the left finger part and the upper part of the palm. These two parts are equal in length, and the tip of the fingers is turning up (fig.1-12). These are the different characteristics by the hand of the early Konbaung images.

Āsana

The *Āsana*— the seated position and throne or base of the early Konbaung images, was similar and sometimes slightly different from the Nyaungyan style. According to data analysis, the seated position of the early Konbaung images was mostly with *Padmāsana* (*Padumasana* in Burmese) or *Vajirāsana* sculpted with crossed legs position. The overlapping legs style (*Pallankāsana*), where only one sole is obvious to see but the other covered under one, is rarely found in the early Konbaung period. Moreover, two types of foot form are stylistically

produced in the early Konbaung period: heel and sole of foot horizontally situated on an equal line⁵¹ (fig. 3, 10, 12) and another one with a heel higher than its sole (fig. 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11). The first one relies on the Nyangyang style, but the latter develops the Early Konbaung period.

For the throne that supports the Buddhas (*Āsana*), we have mostly found three kinds during the early Konbaung murals: *Padmāsana*, *Vajirāsana*, and *Muslindāsana*. Some images with *Muslindāsana* can be found in murals. For the statues, they can be divided into three types: 1. *Sa Lin Myaunt* throne 2. Simple double lotus throne 3. *Kha Loke* throne. The first one, *Sa Lin Myaunt* throne, is portrayed with the double louts decorated with small and long blue-water lily petals: one is placed face down, and another is turned upside, and their bases meet in the middle where they combine with a big and flat line (fig. 1, 8, 10, 12). The second one, the simple double lotus, was decked with double lotus turning up on opposite sides and lotus petals are not as long as in the above one but a little bigger in width. These two kinds of bases during the early Konbaung period show the influence of the late Nyangyan period (fig. 3, 4). On the other hand, these two thrones are called *Padmāsana* (*Padumasana*) decorated with the lotus (Hmat Win, 1981. P.82), but the first one's lotus is a blue-water lotus (*Kyar Nyo* in Burmese), and another is a lotus called *Padma* lotus. The third one is the innovative throne developed during the early Konbaung period, known as the *Kha Loke* throne. There, in the throne, are many stubs on horizontal elements, and they are sculptured in the opposite: stubs from upper elements are hanging down, and others from lower parts are sticking up. This design of the throne became a specific feature in the Konbaung period (fig. 5, 6, 7, 9, 11).

The result shows various types, similar and distinctive features of the Buddha images of the early Konbaung period. These similarities and differences in the five important points of the images –Head, Face, Robe, Hand, and *Āsana*, have stylistically demonstrated the innovative evolution of the Buddha images in Burmese Buddhist art of this time.

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⁵¹ The mural Buddha images from Tilokaguru cave in Sagaing (c1606-1628) and Taung Be Pitakataik Kyaung in Bagan (1706CE) were depicted with a heel of equal size with its sole.

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