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The objective of this research is to maintain the Myanmar Traditional Lacquer ware Art in Bagan and reveal their social life and to get international interest for the distinct tradition and custom of Myanmar Lacquer ware Art. In this research, desk review, library survey, field research, Key Informant Interview, Participant observation, taking photographs recording with video were performed for special activities associated with the Lacquer ware Art. Moreover, these data will be studied by Economic Anthropology and Cultural Anthropology point of view. In this research presentation, nine themes were described. These were: Introduction, Methodology, Historical background of the Myanmar Lacquer ware Art, Production, Distribution, Consumption, Division of labour and their daily income, Social value and function related to Myanmar lacquer ware and Conclusion. Expected impact of the research is to maintain the Myanmar tradition and culture based on Lacquer ware and how to ensure the continuity of their art. And then, expected outcome is to prolong and become famous for Myanmar Traditional Lacquer ware Art and Technology among the world and to do advanced studies with international research institutes. Moreover, this research will need to learn in details and cooperate with the other interesting scholars.

Key words: distinct tradition and custom, the continuity of their art

Introduction

According to the program of Asia Research Centre, the research team of Anthropology Department, University of Yangon did this research. The objective of the research is to maintain the Myanmar Traditional Lacquer ware Art in Bagan and reveal their social life and to get international interest for the distinct tradition and custom of Myanmar Lacquer ware Art.

In this research presentation, nine themes were described. These were: Introduction, Methodology, Historical background of the Myanmar Lacquer ware Art, Production, Distribution, Consumption, Division of labour and their daily income, Social value and function related to Myanmar lacquer ware and Conclusion.

Expected impact of the research is to maintain the Myanmar tradition and culture based on Lacquer ware and how to ensure the continuity of their art. And then, expected outcome is to prolong and become famous for Myanmar Traditional Lacquer ware Art and Technology among the world and to do advanced studies with international research institutes.

Methodology

In this research, desk review, library survey, field research, Key Informant Interview, Participant observation, taking photographs recording with video were performed for special activities associated with the Lacquer ware Art. Moreover, these data were studied by Economic Anthropology and Cultural Anthropology point of view. Therefore, the research team did the library survey and field research on Bagan Nyaung -Oo area during September-October, 2010.
Findings & Discussions

Historical background of the Myanmar Lacquer ware Art

Each country of the world has its own culture, art, traditional custom and beliefs. These cultures do by the generation after generation and stand as their cultural heritage function. Therefore, each country love and value upon their own cultural heritage and maintain to prolong.

Union of Myanmar is famous for its various cultural heritage and cultural arts among the world. Most of the Myanmar people maintain their own cultural heritage. There are two ways to maintain their culture and these are: maintain the remains of cultural heritage things era after era not to be damaged and maintain their traditional technology and continuity of their art and technology for generation after generation. Among these technologies, Myanmar Lacquer ware art is one of them. Lacquer ware making is one of the Ten Myanmar Traditional Arts which have long been existed in the country. It is called in Myanmar “Pan Yun”. The names of other nine arts also have the prefix “Pan” which is the same word for flower. The art or craft that creates aesthetic beauty is prefixed with the word “Pan” which is an ornamental word. It is also a name with a loose meaning. Any article or object covered with a hard bright and smooth varnish called lacquer which is a vegetable product is called lacquer ware, because this varnish can be applied to plain or carved surface of paper, bamboo, wood, brick, terra cotta, stone fabric even metal. Recently glazed objects covered have been produced.

The historical background of the Myanmar Lacquer ware art was studied by various aspects and expressed. Some of the researchers said that the lacquer takes its origin in China for a few three thousand years, and then developed in all the Southeast Asia. In Myanmar the tree which one takes the resin is called “thit-si”. These trees push naturally in whole forests almost in all Myanmar in light altitudes. One takes the resin, a little like one does it with latex, by notches at the base of the trunk on which one fixes small bowls in bamboo. The sap of the lacquer tree has a very strong adhesive quality and splendid brilliance. It has many qualities as to make impermeable the objects which it covers. It adheres on many surfaces, bamboo, woods, sheets of palm tree, metal and leather. It resists the insects and guards on all occasions its flexibility.

Some researchers believed that the lacquer’s origin may come from Bagan about 12th - 13th century in Myanmar. One of the oldest lacquers was discovered in Mingalazedi pagoda, one of the last built with Bagan (at the 13th century). The manufacture of the lacquers acquired its letters of nobility in Bagan. Moreover, there are isolated references to the lacquer ware in ancient epigraphs. In the lithic inscription of Pawdawmu Pagoda and also that of Shinpin Bodhi Pagoda at Bagan, there are mentioned of alms bowls dedicated to monks and these are mostly made of lacquer, bamboo and wood. These references suggested that the lacquer ware art and technology were made in the Bagan era about A.D 1044-1287 (King Anawratha’s reign). According to the chronicle, when the King Anawratha conquered Thaton in A.D. 1058, he took with him not only Buddhist relics, scriptures and learned monks but also many artists and craftsmen including lacquer ware makers whom he settled at his Capital.

Some researchers believed the theory that since the Mon kingdom neighboured with Chiangmai with which there was an island trade route, the Mons must have acquired the lacquer art from Chiangmai. The exponents of this theory were Taw Sein Ko and U Lu Pe Win. The former was the Superintendent of the Epigraphic Office of British Burma and latter the Director of Archaeology Department of Myanmar, U Tin, the Sub-divisional Offices of Bagan in the British Colonial Period supported this theory.
According to U Lu Pe Win, the lacquer ware technology was derived from the northern Thailand to Myanmar at 14th Century A.D. and at that time Bagan was the main area of the lacquer ware industry. Therefore, Myanmar lacquer ware art arrived from Thailand to Myanmar before 16th Century A.D. King Bayinnaung (A.D.1551-1581) conquered Chaingmai at 1557 and took about 40000 home artists and artisans including lacquer artists to Bago. This assumption was supported by Mr. H.P Morris.

These assumptions were analyzed by Dr. Khin Maung Nyunt and his conclusion is that the technology of lacquer ware existed in Myanmar very ancient time and the lacquer ware art was put into Myanmar social role and used as domestic utensils. In Myanmar Era 532 Year, the chief monk of King Narapatisithu, Sayadaw Utaraziwa paid homage to the Thein-ko (Thi-ho) island across the Pa thein with ship and carried with religious objects of lacquer ware for the people of Thein-ko (Thi-ho) island. Therefore, the technology of lacquer ware was flourished since Bagan era.

Ancient Myanmar was high-standard culture people and their technology of the lacquer ware was also developed gradually. Most of the domestic objects, royal objects and religious objects were varnished with thitsi and vermilion for long endure, wonder and beauty. These lacquer ware objects’ use were traced in stone inscriptions in Bagan Era.

When studied to the Bagan Archaeology Museum, one of the wooden Buddha image dated to 13th Century A.D., Inn-wa Era was found and inside the image, there was an evidence of varnished thitsi and gilded gold.

In the Second Inn-wa Era, also called Nyaung-yang Era, Hni Daunglan was used as ordinary family lunch table, a circular tray which was putting on rice and curry. Therefore, one can learn the fact that Hni Daunglan was continued to use from 13th Century A.D., Bagan Era to 17th Century A.D., Nyaung-yang Era. In addition, in Nyaung-yang Era, the lacquer ware utensils were made not only varnished thitsi (called plain lacquer ware) but also incised lacquer ware stage. That can be found at the poet of Sein-ta-kyaw-thu U Aw (pdeÁausmfoIOD;jo), stanzas no.752 at Myanmar Era.1113.

In the Kone-baung Era, the technology of the lacquer ware was more advanced. There could find incised lacquer ware (Yun ware), gilt lacquer ware (Shwezawa ware), relief moulded lacquer ware (Tha-yo), glass mosaic and gilt lacquer ware(Hman-si Shwe-Cha Yun) etc and produced with numerous designs. These designs and decorations were sophisticated and exquisite. Moreover, most of the Buddhists people of Kone-baung Era, donated the big lacquer ware mail boxes to the monasteries for putting some palm scripts. These big lacquer ware mail boxes were made strongly and decorated with incised lacquer ware, gilt lacquer ware, relief moulded lacquer ware, glass mosaic and gilt lacquer ware depicting the Buddha past life. These big lacquer ware mail boxes could be found every ancient monastery in Myanmar. One of the most significant lacquer mail box was made and decorated by incised lacquer ware depicting the life history of Buddha from birth to death on five upper faces and it was possessed by Min-lat-wa-gyi (rif;vufög;juD;) in the reigns of King Min-done and King Thi-baw. Now, this lacquer ware mail box exists in the Myanmar Lacquer Museum, Bagan and exhibits for the interesting local and foreign guests. Moreover, the lacquer mail box about six feet high was made by relief moulded lacquer ware which was used by Queen Su Paya Latt, wife of the King Thi-baw was also exhibited in the National Museum of Yangon. The ancient lacquer ware objects could be found in every Museum of Myanmar country.
Artistic ancient lacquer wares were displayed among the famous Museum of other countries. In Pit Rivers Museum Oxford, London, the lacquer container about 12" high called “Kyup” which was put the distinctive fillet worn by royalty of King Thi-baw and decorated with glass mosaic and gilt lacquer ware. Moreover, the lacquer kyup which was used as fragrance container of King Thi-baw decorated with relief moulded shwesawa yun with geometrical shapes, motif design can be found at Victoria and Albert Museum, London and they took it when the British conquered Myanmar in 1885. In England, Myanmar royal lacquer wares, human utensils made by lacquer wares and Manpayas were arrived. This was recorded in “Burmese Lacquer ware” by Frazer Luce.

Myanmar lacquer ware art was flourished from Kone-baung period to Earlier Age of British Colony period. Not only plain lacquer wares (using only thitsi and vermilion) but also incised lacquer ware, shwesaza lacquer ware, gilt lacquer ware, relief moulded lacquer ware and glass mosaic and gilt lacquer ware of high quality were produced according to their regions. Incised lacquer ware, gilt lacquer ware, relief moulded lacquer ware were mostly made in the Bagan area. In Kyaing-ton and Myauk-Oo area, the relief moulded lacquer ware was made. In Kyaukka, Maung taung, Inn-wa area, plain lacquer ware was mostly made. Among them, the design made by Bagan area was the most famous for the earlier times to nowadays. They get the tourist attraction. These designs were sold to Myin-chan, Mandalay, Pyin-mana, Pyay, Pathein and Yangon and even to the Vietnam and Singapore as export objects.

After 1923, the competition and exhibition of Myanmar traditional art for maintenance and long life celebrate every year at Jubli Hall, Yangon. Most of the artists who considered themselves that some of them were their ideal objects of lacquer ware included in the competition and got the prizes and certifications of honour. These data could be learnt in “Myanmar Pan Yun” by U Khin Maung Gyi. In 1924 and 1925, Provincial Arts and Crafts Exhibition, 1923) celebrate and Maung Phoe Sai from Maung Htung village got the prize of 15 dollars for his black plain lacquer ware. Moreover, the lacquer ware objects were competed with local earthen ware, wooden ware and copper ware. In addition, the porcelain objects called “Kywe hte”, earthen ware and glaze ware from China were also competed.

Myanmar lacquer ware has been studied both by native and foreign scholars from artistic and historical points of view. Bagan lacquer is thriving as a result of increase in tourism and demands from abroad.

Bagan Minister U Tin and the lacquer artists opened the school of the lacquer ware for the intention of the maintenance and long lasting of the lacquer ware art in the main area of the lacquer ware’s function, Bagan at the time of the British control and the first school head master is U Sein. The main teaching lacquer ware art subjects were: plain bamboo ware, plain wooden ware, the black ware, incised lacquer ware, gilt lacquer ware (Shwezawa ware) and relief moulded lacquer ware (Tha-yo). Now, this school is famous and called as the Technology School of Myanmar Lacquer ware and gives the degree for the students.

By studying these data, Myanmar lacquer ware art and technology stands its own style and own culture since the ancient time to modern time and spread to the other countries of the world. In spite of their long lasting, usefulness, high quality and artistic of the lacquer ware objects, they stand grace fully as one of the famous art and craft in the world and record as “the origin of the Myanmar lacquer ware comes from only Myanmar”.

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Production

The production of Myanmar lacquer ware art varies according to the raw materials it used. Most of the types of the Myanmar lacquer ware are: bamboo lacquer ware, wooden lacquer ware, horse hair lacquer ware and Japan lacquer ware.

There are altogether seven processes for production of the lacquer ware. These are: making the inner parts, lacquering, drying, washing, polishing, 7 layers of lacquering and decoration. Four main basic styles of Myanmar traditional drawing are applied in lacquer ware decoration. They are: Kanou', Kapi, Gaza and Na-ri. All are Pali words.

Distribution

For the distribution of the lacquer ware, some lacquer ware are sold in the compound of famous pagodas as lacquer ware shops; some are sold in the industry of the owners as lacquer ware show rooms and some are only distributed and exported throughout the country and overseas. Moreover, lacquer wares are sold at the pagoda fairs in Upper Myanmar. The pagoda fairs are held regularly throughout the year. During the festival, the villagers from the surrounding villages come to the fair to buy different products from all over the country including the lacquer wares. The pagoda fairs regularly held in Upper Myanmar are Shweguni Pagoda Festival at Kyaukka, Pakkoku Yezagyo Festival, Ma-oo Pagoda Festival, Ayardaw Pagoda Festival, Paungwa Pagoda Festival at Myinmu, Myotaung Pagoda Festival at Shwebo, Sutaungpye Pagoda Festival at monywa, Monyin Pagoda Festival at Monywa, Ananda Pagoda Festival at Bagan and Alone pagoda Festival at Alone. And then, lacquer wares are sent to shops in Yangon, the wholesale dealers from Mandalay and Bagan.

Most of the craftsmen did their best and sold their excellent lacquer ware to the various markets. Moreover, the lacquer ware which is made from good quality of every process could get high price and the lacquer ware which is made from a few processes could get low price. But these low price lacquer ware could be bought by the pilgrims of Bagan as remembrance.

Most of the rich owners of the lacquer ware open their show rooms with their industries. In these show rooms, they arrange to learn the process of the lacquer ware making methods for the attraction of the visitors. So they can get more attention to buy the lacquer ware and attain better income.

By this way, Myanmar lacquer ware is popular and gets the high standard of the lacquer ware art and technology not only in the country but also among the Southeast Asian countries and other European countries.

Consumption

By doing the lacquer wares, the native people of Bagan can get the jobs. Most of the people and families in Bagan skilled in the lacquer ware technology since the ancient time and they can depend on their daily income from this function. Moreover, they can send their children to school and universities and can get their household expenses from these incomes.

Division of labour and their daily income

For the sex division of labour, the splitting of bamboo into thin strips, coiling the strips into containers, gilding and decorating, making of wooden lacquer ware raw materials and other difficult raw materials are mostly done by men. Applying the mixture of wood oil and sawdust on the plain bamboo ware, polishing the surface of the lacquer and applying the wood oil are done by the women. And then, for the making of basic raw materials like bamboo cup and horse hair cup are made by men or women. For these workers, their daily income is about 1500 kyats and they can go home to take their lunch or they can take their
lunch with lunch box. For the making of wooden lacquer ware, the basic step for coating thitsi, smoothing and washing were done by men. Their daily income is about 2000 kyats.

Actually, the main attraction for Bagan lacquer ware is its artistic decoration. Therefore, for the drawing of lacquer painting is difficult and one has to study this technology for at least three years. Some attend the Technological School of Lacquer ware in Bagan and some study according to their appropriate teachers. For this reason, the one who can draw the lacquer painting can get the highest income. They can get their income daily or once 5 days or once 10days or once 15 days. Their maximum income is about 4000 kyats to 5000 kyats. Most of the outline drawing of lacquer ware painting is made by men and colouring of the painting is made by women. For this function, the daily income of women is about 1000 kyats to 1500 kyats. For the making of gilt lacquer ware and relief moulded lacquer ware, putting gold foils and the first lacquering the interior covered with “thayo” are done by men and get 2500 kyats for a day.

Finally, one can learn the fact that most men have to do more difficult and hard work and get more income and most women have to do the detail works such as decoration, colouring, painting, etc and get less income.

Most of the lacquer ware shops open daily. The best time of selling the lacquer ware is between the months of November to March. During the summer and rainy season, there is less income. In one of the lacquer show room, their daily income of selling is about 500,000 kyats to 1000,000 kyats per day. They make the lacquer ware functions the whole year and only close their industries only the time of pagoda festivals and days of significance. The social dealing between the owner and the workers is good and the owner helps their workers’ social affairs. Sometimes they send their workers for vocations’ trip to other cities such as visiting to the Yangon, Mandalay, Kyikhtiyo pagoda, etc annually.

Social value and function related to Myanmar lacquer ware

There are various social value and function related to Myanmar lacquer ware. Every Myanmar household has at least one piece of Myanmar lacquer ware object since the ancient time to even nowadays. For this reason, one can learn the fact that every Myanmar value upon the traditional Myanmar lacquer ware and believes as it shows the social dignity of Myanmar. Most of the objects of lacquer ware that can be seen in Myanmar household are: the lacquer ok which is used to put the pickle tea leaves, the lacquer betel box, the lacquer tray, the lacquer cup, etc.

The lacquer ok (tkyf) of the pickle tea leave is important and useful item for the Myanmar family. They use it as their daily affair and entertaining their guests. Most of Myanmar likes to eat the pickle tea leave since the ancient time to modern time. They want to eat the pickle tea leaves after the lunch and even when they go to abroad, they take it with them. Therefore, when the visitors came to their house they put the pickle tea leave within the lacquer ok and eat it with pleasure. Moreover, we can see the very big lacquer ok in front of the Parliament Hall in Nay Pyi Taw using the glass mosaic and gilt lacquer ware (Hmansi Shwecha) (rsEfpDa&GScsS )technique. This big lacquer ok is made by one of our research project key informants who live in New Bagan area. Sometimes, near the traffic jam in Yangon City, we can also see the very big lacquer ware ok figure decorated with flowers. This custom stands as the social dignity of Myanmar and the eating habit of the pickle tea leave maintains as the cultural heritage of Myanmar since the Bagan period to nowadays.

The lacquer betel box is also important item of Myanmar family. In the ancient time, most of the Myanmar men and women like to chew the betel every day and use the lacquer
betel box. Now, this custom can be seen in the some areas of the country and the lacquer betel box is existed as the ornament of Myanmar traditional custom in the household. In some lacquer ware shops in Bagan, the lacquer betel box is decorated with the letter of the stone inscription because they want to get the tourist attraction and show the tradition of Myanmar culture. Therefore, the function of the lacquer betel box shows the hospitality, friendship, generosity and social dignity of Myanmar culture. The chewing habit also stands as the cultural heritage of Myanmar.

The lacquer tray is also useful for Myanmar family. It is used as the entertaining for the guests with putting cold drinks or water. Moreover, when they celebrate the ceremonies, they use the lacquer tray putting with some prizes. Therefore, the lacquer tray is also the ideal item for the traditional Myanmar art and craft.

The lacquer cup is also important object for the Myanmar family. It is used as the daily utensil and religious affair. When the Myanmar Buddhist people worship to the Buddha, they use the lacquer cup. Moreover, in the upper area of Myanmar country, the smell of thitsi (opfap;) from the lacquer cup changes the flavour of water.

Moreover, in the Bagan area, various kinds of lacquer ware objects could be found. Among them, Daunglan( a'gif;vel;) is the important trade mark of the social value of Myanmar family and it shows the unity, love, sharing and caring for one family member to another. Because it is the circular tray and when the Myanmar family takes the breakfast or lunch or dinner, they put rice and curry on the Daunglan and eat together with their hands. By that time, they share their rice and curry equally and care each other and love each other. They drink the soup together and their hands are stained with soup and curry but they don’t loathe each other. In Myanmar proverb, it is called as “Le’ jei dabjin zi:” (vufa&wpfjyifpD:). Therefore, among the Myanmar lacquer ware objects, “Daunglan” was more important and useful for social and religious affairs. It is the shallow stand on which the dishes are arranged at meal time. Moreover, when ancient Myanmar worshipped to the Buddha daily, they used Daunglan by putting rice, water, candle lamp and fruits, etc.

Other lacquer items have their own social values and functions. The lacquer mail box is also the significant object for the Myanmar religious affair. As mentioned above, the big lacquer ware mail box could be found every ancient monastery in Myanmar. The lacquer mail box is useful for the monks by putting their ancient palm-leaf inscriptions and bundle of palm-leaf writings and keep for the long time. Moreover, it can be used as the royal affair in the ancient time.

The lacquer kyup (usKwf) is the specific item for the Myanmar traditional culture. It is used as fragrance container or container for other materials like the traditional medicine, pickle tea leave, palm sugar, precious stones, the royal orders of appointment etc. Sometimes, it is decorated with the scenes of traditional belief and legend of the spirit (Nat) such as Shwe­oo-­kya-chi (a&TOusm;csD) and used by the traditional medical practitioners. They believed that the medicine they use will be good if the kyup is decorated like this. Moreover, the medical practitioner can get the prestige and impression by using this kind of lacquer kyup.

Another item is the lacquer basket. It is also the common item for Myanmar family’s daily affair and religious affair. It is used as the container for buying things. And then, when the monks going around the village for daily food, the lay attendants of the monks carries the food with the lacquer basket. Like the lacquer basket, the lacquer bowl is used for offering the food to monks since the ancient time. Nowadays, it is used by the village beautiful girls
called Kon-taung-gaing (uGrf;awmifudkif) while they carrying the lacquer bowl in a novitiation procession.

The interesting item of Myanmar lacquer ware is the **lacquer clap**. It is the small circular tray with a stem and use for religious affair and social affair. Most of the Myanmar Buddhists use the lacquer clap by putting a small Buddha image and pray to the Buddha daily. Sometimes, it is used for keeping the precious stone or other valuable items. Moreover, the lacquer clap is used by putting food, water and candle for praying to the Buddha daily. Even in the junctions of the main road in Yangon city, the symbol of lacquer clap putting the ruby stone can be seen for tourist attraction. It shows that the lacquer clap has the prestige and social status of the ideal of Myanmar traditional culture.

The other traditional items of lacquer ware are the **lacquer goblet** and **the lacquer water pot**. They are used and maintained for Myanmar traditional custom. Moreover, the **lacquer partition** is the useful item for the traditional lacquer ware. It is used for decoration at home and sometimes it is decorated at the hotels because it is the favourite item of the foreigners. Therefore it stands as the symbols of Myanmar culture.

Nowadays, some of the lacquer ware shops export their objects to the overseas and make the various items of modern lacquer utensils. These are: the lacquer guitar (use the technique of the wooden lacquer), the lacquer violin (use the technique of the wooden lacquer), the lacquer helmet (only decorated with the lacquer), the lacquer key-chain, the lacquer hand-phone cover, the lacquer tissue-box, the lacquer painting, etc. These items stand as the modernization and global correlation of Myanmar and other countries. It also shows the demand-driven activities for the lacquer ware industry. By exporting overseas market, their income becomes high and their living standard and their social status also gradually high.

By studying most of the workshops of lacquer ware owners, they try to maintain their traditional lacquer ware art and technology and their basic methods are nearly the same. There are various processes to produce the lacquer ware and these processes are carried out by the traditional style and prolong the objects for a longer period. Moreover, they aspect their traditional lacquer ware art to become the international level and export to the world’s market.

**Conclusion**

By studying the Myanmar traditional lacquer ware art in Bagan, one can get the knowledge about the traditional custom of Myanmar culture, how to maintain and ensure their art from generation to generation, how to prolong and become famous for Myanmar traditional lacquer ware art and technology among the world and to do advanced studies with international institutes, how to distribute and transmit the traditional art and craft from fathers to sons. Moreover, the younger generations who have to pay attention to the Myanmar lacquer ware art can get not only their daily income but also can reduce to arrive the wrong roads and promote their creating powers.

To sum up, the functions of lacquer ware correlate with their social values and social life. Moreover, most of the workers and owners of the traditional Myanmar lacquer ware art could get their daily income by producing the lacquer ware as well as promoting their life and maintaining the traditional craft of Myanmar culture not only in the country but also in the world. Moreover, the researcher would like to recommend that this research will need to learn in details and cooperate with the other interesting scholars.
References:

Fig.1. The lacquer oks
Fig.2. The lacquer oks
Fig.3. The lacquer trays
Fig.4. The lacquer daunglan, trays and pots
Fig. 5. The lacquer keychains

Fig. 6. The lacquer workers making their materials

Fig. 7. The processure of the lacquer ware making

Fig. 8. The lacquer shop