



SANCHI STUPA IN INDIAN BUDDHIST ART

Arts

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the historical, architectural and symbolic significance of the Sanchi Stupa – one of the oldest and best preserved Buddhist monuments in India. Originally built during the reign of King Aśoka in the 3rd century BC, the Sanchi complex represents the pinnacle of early Buddhist art and the profound interweaving of religious, political and cultural values in ancient Indian society. The study analyzes the structure and significance of the Aśoka pillars, especially the four-faced lion-headed statues that symbolize the Buddha and the spread of the Dharma. The article also presents the architectural and sculptural development of the Sanchi Stupa through the dynasties – from Maurya, Shunga to Gupta – highlighting the transition from non-figurative art to the representation of the Buddha. The work emphasizes the role of the Mahāyāna spirit in the spread of Buddhism from royal patronage to widespread popular participation, and shows how the architectural model of Sanchi became the prototype for stupas in many other Buddhist countries. In short, the Great Stupa of Sanchi is a timeless testament to the spiritual and artistic achievements of Indian civilization.

KEYWORDS

I. INTRODUCTION

Located in the center of Madhya Pradesh state, spread on a lush green plateau, Sanchi is the oldest, sharpest, and most typical Buddhist relic complex with the gathering of many large pillars, towers, pagodas, and monasteries. Sanchi began to be formed when King Aśoka built the Great Stupa and erected a monolithic pillar in the middle of the hill, then added many other structures to the successive dynasties. With the history of formation and development over 13 centuries (From III BC - XI AD), Sanchi has become an ancient book describing authentic Indian Buddhist history from the early days, through the peak times, The time comes to meditate through his masterpieces of art, worthy of the palace of the pillars, towers, the jewel of Buddhist art.

Because of the above outstanding features, the writer would like to choose the topic: "Sanchi Stupa in Indian Buddhist Art" as his research topic. Because the Sanchi complex is quite large, including over 50 monuments, has not yet set foot on the Buddha's land, has not directly worshiped and paid homage to these relics, so the writer spontaneously considered the architectural features of the Aśoka Stupa and Pillars through textbooks and images obtained from the internet With the desire to recreate the most primitive architectural features of the stupa in India, learn about the changes in shape and structure of the stupa when Buddhism was introduced to other countries. At the same time, it affirms the great role and contribution of Emperor Aśoka, the first patron of Buddhist art, to the spread of Buddhism to all continents.

II. Content

1. Great Asoka And The Building Of Stone Pillars Throughout India

Aśoka was the third king of the Maurya dynasty, who ruled a vast empire that included most of the Indian peninsula, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Afghanistan today, in the period from 268- 232 BC. To unify the country, Asoka repeatedly launched wars, including regaining power and land, sowing disaster and death. The final battle at the Kalinga is the bloodiest and most devastating one in Indian history, but also a major turning point "to change the heart of the victor from the heart intentionally inflicting suffering on others, the highest love heart". Regretting this battle, Aśoka took refuge in the Buddha-dharma, "considering the highest victory is the victory over the human heart with loving-kindness". Since then, the king has implemented country governance policies built based on Buddhist teachings and encouraged the entire population to practice by carving his decrees on the pillars of the kingdom built everywhere in the country.

Imbued with the spirit taught by the Buddha in the Great Nirvana Sutra, the king organized pilgrimages to the "four relics of the faithful to be admired and revered" and other places related to the life of virtue. Buddha. In these places, the king erected stone pillars with the intention of "marking the relics with essential signs for the benefit of future generations". In addition, to spread the Dharma, the king also performed a famous act of entering the legend, which was to recover the relics of the Buddha at the eight towers built right after the

Buddha's death, divided into 84,000 equal parts each other is located in 84,000 built stupas throughout the kingdom of India.

The number 84,000 can be just a numerical symbol, a symbol of wholeness, corresponding to the number of atoms in the human body. Therefore, building 84,000 relic towers is to rebuild the Buddha's body as he is always present in all parts of India. That is the logical sense of the body. In terms of the dharmakaya, 84,000 is the number of teachings of the Buddha. Therefore, the 84,000 stupas built are a complete representation of the Tathagata's teachings. Thus, these stūpas are the combination of Tathagata form and dharmakaya, organized in a "cosmic" way throughout the Jambudvpa realm. Although the Tathagata has passed away, anyone who sees the stupa can see the Tathagata in the fullest and most meaningful way. This is the wish of the great Aśoka when propagating and promoting the Dharma.

The Great Stupa of Sanchi is one of the stupas built under the Aśoka period and is preserved almost intact to this day with the ancient stupa still in its shape and the lion's head pillar.

2. Aśoka Stone Pillar At Sanchi

In 1851, under the leadership of Alexander Cunningham, the British head of archaeological research in India, the Asoka stone pillar was found, but not intact. The stone pillar is 13m (42 feet) high, made of sandstone, and is perfectly polished. Includes 2 parts: the cylinder body and the head of the cylinder are made from two different stone blocks, assembled with metal pins.

a. The Body of the Pillar

A rotating cylindrical block, carved from a polished monolith, weighing about 50 tons, was mined from quarries at Mathura and Chunar and moved to the site. need to erect water pillars, and then be erected in a very sophisticated manner. On the body of the pillar is engraved the edict of King Aśoka about the prohibition of division of the Sangha (similar to the stone pillars found at Sārnāth and Kauśāmbī) in the ancient Brāhmī language, translated into English as follows: "the path is prescribed both for the monks and for the nuns. As long as (my) sons and great-grandsons (shall reign; and) as long as the Moon and the Sun (shall endure), the monk or nun who shall cause divisions in the Sangha, shall be compelled to put on white robes and to reside apart. For what is my desire? That the Sangha may be united and may long endure".

When excavated at Sanchi, the body of the pillar was broken into 3 segments, the lower part of the body still standing on the ground, located near the southern gate of the Great Tower. The remaining two sections are located nearby, under a roof built to protect the monument from extreme weather conditions.

b. The Head of the Pillar

The head of the stone pillar consists of 3 parts carved from a sandstone

rock and polished to the sophisticated finish from top to bottom, each part has a distinct meaning:

- (1) Statue of four Asian lions facing 4 directions, with their backs facing each other, above there is a parasol in the shape of the Dharma wheel. The lion represents Buddha Shakyamuni (the lion of the Shakya clan), and the four directions of the world shine from the pillar on which the Dharma and the Dharma of the Maurya dynasty spread everywhere. Dharma is represented by a large circle of wheels called dharmacakra placed on the backs of four lions. The 24-spoke wheel represents the pros and cons of the 12 conditions, with the meaning of the Buddha's truth explaining to people about the cause of suffering originating from ignorance and the way to end suffering and achieve resolution. escape is the elimination of ignorance, attaining Nirvana. This wheel also represents the Wheel of Life and is a sun symbol. Because like the sun, it brings light to the world. That revolving car, the ruler of the sun, was an important symbol of the universal power of Buddha and of the Maurya kings. At the time of the Buddha's teaching, he made the wheel of dharma move and he became Chakravartin (Universal King or Exalted One).
- (2) The base of the circular stone pillar has an engraved figure of four honeysuckles separated by a pair of geese. Honeysuckle is a familiar motif used in Greek sculpture, propagated through India and popularly used during the Aśoka period, on the stone pillars or castle columns in the citadel of Pataliputra. The geese represent the Buddha's disciples, who study and practice according to the Buddha's teachings and then give them to everyone.
- (3) The pedestal is an upturned bell-shaped lotus, an important symbol in Buddhist painting and architecture. This is the pedestal of the above sections, meaning that Dharma is the foundation used by King Aśoka to rule and build the country. The lotus is also a symbol of purity, rising from the mud as the Buddha was born as a human but transcended ordinary humans to become Enlightened beings.

The difference between the head of the pillar found at Sāñcī and Sārnāth is the sole. The base at Sārnāth carved four animals, elephants, horses, bulls, and lions, in a moving position, separated by the four wheels of dharma, meaning the great Aśoka used all power to propagate the Dharma. In addition, each animal has its own meaning, showing the stages in the life of the Buddha: the elephant represents the period when Queen Mayā was pregnant with the Crown Prince; the cow indicates the period when the Prince grew up in the palace; the horse is the stage to go in search of truth; and the lion showed his mighty determination to attain full enlightenment during the practice period. The 4 wheels represent the teaching period of the Buddha. The Aśoka pillars are found with the sophistication of sculptural art and the decoding of the metaphors engraved on them, proving that India has a culture of the highest level of humanity, worthy of the cradle. world civilization. Moreover, the policies of governing the country, taking care of the lives of people and all species, protecting the natural environment, living peacefully with other countries, are by the motto of replacing the victory of the army with the victory of the Dharma, Aśoka's religious equality proposed and effectively implemented from more than 23 centuries ago are real policies by the people and for the first people of humanity, more advanced than the modern, civilized countries today. In the world. These policies are formed based on Buddhist ethics, raising the living culture and behavior of the Indian people to the highest level of mankind in all ages of human history. Demonstrating the greatness and honor of the Indian people. That is why, starting on January 26, 1950, the Indian government used the image of the head of four lions as its official emblem, below the motto written in Sanskrit: "Satyameva jayate," meaning "Only truth wins." And the 24-spoke (Aśoka wheel) was selected as the centerpiece of the Indian flag on July 22, 1947.

3. Great Sanchi Stupa

a. Name, Geographic Location, And History Of Development

The name Sanchi (Sāñcī) has only been popularly used since about the ninth and tenth centuries after the Western calendar. Before that this location was named Kakanaya (2nd century BC). From the fifth century, it was named Kakanada-bota, to the 7th century Kakanaya changed to "Bota-Sri Parvata", and then became "Santi - Sri Parvata". The term Santi (meaning bliss) is used after a process of transformation into Sanchi.

Located in the state of Madhya Pradesh, Central India, Sanchi is located on a hill rising out of the plains just north of the Deccan Plateau, 40 miles from Bhopal. Sanchi had no direct connection to the life of the

Buddha, but remained a major Buddhist center operating for more than 10 centuries. The reason may be near Vidisha, a thriving commercial center, and the hometown of Queen Devi, the wife of King Aśoka. Therefore, the king wanted to honor that area, so he built this place into an important Buddhist center. In addition to the stupa containing the relics of the Buddha, Sanchi also preserves the relic of the two great Buddha disciples, the Venerable Sariputta and Mogallana. The great historical king of Sri Lanka also noted that Prince Mahinda, son of King Aśoka, stayed at a monastery built by Queen Devi in the town of Vedisa (Vidisha) a month before leading the mission. Buddha's message to Sri Lanka in the third century BC.

The Sanchi Great Stupa began to be constructed during the Asoka (III BC) era in a cosmic style, the arched structure approximately 12,2816.46m (54.0 ft) in diameter with baked bricks, the center containing the relics of Buddha, along with the pillar engraved with the decree forbidding harmony increasing 13m above there are 4 lions. During the Shunga dynasty (II B.C), Pushyamitra (187-151 B.C) persecuted Buddhism, this stupa was damaged and restored by King Agnimitra (151-143 B.C), doubling its original size. Respecting the sacredness of the ancient brick tower, the builders did not demolish the old architecture, but built a new upside-down arch surrounded by stone, bound together with white stucco. The fences around the tower's jamming path and the corridors surrounding the base of the stupa are also built with stone, 9 ft high.

At the end of the first century, the Satavahana Dynasty, King Satakarni II (50-25 BC) built four gates (torana) made of ivory white stone, polished and carved extremely delicately and beautifully, lasting longer. 100 years after the first century after the Western calendar was completed, making the Great Tower of Sanchi a masterpiece of architectural art and sculpture.

At the beginning of the Western calendar era, the races of the Scythoparthians and Kushans invaded, forming a foreign government. Political instability leads to the stagnation of art activities. After that deadlock period, Buddhist art was revived during the Gupta dynasty (320-550), reflected in the stone sculpture. Right behind each gate of the stupa is a statue of the Mathura art school. The Gupta dynasty is a new era of architecture, appearing with a symmetrical layout and an elegant ceiling. After the glorious days of the Gupta dynasty, an uprising force extended the envoy status until the end of the 6th century to the 7th century. Until the reign of Harsha (606-647), the unified North Indian Buddhism was favored by devout kings.

Sangha in the 7th and 8th centuries were all wealthy, people racing to carve images on the exterior of the architecture. From the ninth century through the Middle Ages, Sanchi was still thriving. The documents do not allow us to know how Sanchi died, not to mention exactly what year he became wasted. But in general, we know that in the thirteenth century, Buddhism reached the end of its decline in India, and Sanchi shared the same fate with other Buddhist relics, falling into oblivion and ruin for more than 600 years.

In 1818, Sanchi was discovered by British officer Henry Taylor (1784-1876) and proclaimed to the world. The relic was in a wasteland, covered with trees, the gates were broken into many pieces, and the Aśoka pillars were smashed by the local people to make the sugar cane shaft. Antiquities traders, amateur archaeologists also come to dig to make the fairy even more ruined.

In 1881, restoration work was initiated, and the West and South gates were restored. Between 1912 and 1919, the Great Towers were restored to their present state under the supervision of John Marshall, director general of the Indian Institute of Archeology. Since then, the restoration work continues to be performed. The Sanchi complex was recognized by UNESCO as a world cultural heritage in 1989.

b. Architectural Artistic Characteristics

The Great Stupa of Sanchi is a unique architectural work blending seamlessly with the art of sculpture built according to the cosmic structure. On a square floor is a giant solid hemisphere made of ancient bricks, surrounded by stone and stucco, shaped like a bowl upside down, a slightly flat cap called anda, 36.6m in diameter, 16 m high. A unique pillar rising from the top of the tower called Yasti is followed by the Chattrā (umbrella) consisting of three stone floors, representing the Three Jewels: Buddha, Dharma, Sangha. Under the umbrella is the location of the chest containing relics, considered seeds. Outside is built a square fence called Harmika derived from the custom of

wrapping worship objects like sacred trees or the Temple fence in ancient Indian thought. The overall architecture reflects the realm of the gods on top of the cosmic mountain. As the cosmic axis, the stupa unites the three realms of existence: the Sexual Realm, the Form Realm and the Formless Realm.

Around the mound, people make a way for pilgrims to come to the relic to do the ritual of going around the stupa clockwise, going the Life Path around the Universe Mountain following the Mandala shape. This direction is also the direction of the sun's movement, making people in harmony with the universe, integrating into a great three-dimensional mandala, bringing people from the mundane world to the spiritual world. This road is surrounded by a large Shunga-style fence, built in the model of a wooden fence with the doors at the right corner like a swastika, consisting of 120 octagonal pillars carrying the ribs. Horizontal stone slab, the head supporting very large crossbeams is also made of stone. The rock used here is sandstone quarried on the spot, in the mountains where the Sanchi tower is located.

The four entrances built in the first century BC are the masterpieces of the Andra period sculptors. Each gate is carved from monolithic stones weighing more than 400 tons, facing the four main directions East, West, South, North and there is a Buddha statue sitting at the entrance to the gate, below the frame arch. The general structure of these toranas consists of 3 parts:

At the top are three bow-shaped acroter bars, sculpting the Buddha's precursor stories, in which the Buddha has not yet been portrayed in his identity, replaced by symbolic images such as bodhi trees, drum throne, the lotus, the wheel of dharma. The ends of each bar have a spiral shape representing the wheel. The space between these acroter is sculpted with images of beasts and humans, including legendary animals, in Persian style. On the top momentum there is a symbol of the wheel of justice in the middle, raised by elephants, flanked by a three-pointed symbol called triratna, representing Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. Triratna is supported by lotus dharma wheels.

The second part is the pillar ends to connect the horizontal bars with the 2 main pillars below. The pillars are engraved with 4 elephants, 4 lions, or 4 big bellies facing 4 different directions. In addition to the head of this gate, a key beam was added according to the structure of a wooden gate, however it does not have a support effect but only a decorative effect. The key beam is engraved with the image of the goddess of fertility, one hand holding the branch, the other hand wrapped tightly against two branches, the left heel resting on the tree, presenting the traditional marriage ceremony of the virgin and the tree. The goddess's body stretched out as if supporting the horizontal momentum above. These statues of Yaksha and Yakshi are primarily religious rather than architectural, making it comfortable for those who do not understand the Buddhist teachings to feel welcome to be welcomed by local guardian gods and goddesses.

The third part is the two vertical columns supporting the entire gate, embossed on all three sides, facades carved with forerunners, carved sides can be carved with large patterns or images of the yakshas., yakshi and shalabhanjika near the bottom of the columns create a friendly intimacy with the gods of indigenous Indian culture. Jataka's story carvings are depicted separately. Each part is framed below by a barricade fence, and the two sides have curled vines, creating a soft movement of the border and showing strength. of plants in life. The story's content is meticulously presented, arranged from near to far, including images of landscape architecture and human activities in the picture-telling style of the Andra period. This is the masterpiece of the ivory carvers from Vidisha, shown on stone materials.

Of the four gates, the South Gate was first built around the 1st century BC, followed by the North, East, and West gates. Reliefs on the South Gate depict the life of Buddha Shakyamuni from birth to Nirvana; the initiation of the 7 tribes demanding Mallas to divide the relics of the Buddha; 7 Buddhas of the past; events related to King Aśoka after taking refuge in the Three Jewels such as his retrieval of the relics of the original eight stupas to divide into 84,000 religious sections in 84,000 stupas, pilgrimage at Deer Park garden, building a temple Bodhi tree at Bodhgaya ... The top pillar of the South Gate uses the image of four lions, representing the Buddha and spreading the Dharma.

The North Gate is the most preserved of the four gates of Dai Thap, with only a little wheel on the top. The main carvings about the life of

the Buddha, His victory with the Maou, his daughter and entourage; Anathapindika, a gold-lined head to buy land and build a Ky Vien monastery; King Pasenadi came to take refuge in the Buddha; His miraculous acts ... The head of the North Gate is shaped like four elephants and has a key-shaped Yakshi standing beside a fruit-laden tree.

The East Gate described the scene of the prince riding on horseback, supported by the gods to cross the city in the dark, determined to ordain; King Bimbisara came to pay homage to the Buddha; two sides of standing pillars, one side engraved the scene of Kapilavasthu to welcome the Buddha to return, the other side engraved the 6 heavens realms of sex. The head of the pillar is decorated with the head of 4 elephants and 2 left and right beams of the goddess of fertility.

The West Gate has sculpted images of the Buddha, the Buddha Nirvana, under two trees of Sala; Mallas people invited Buddha relics to worship; The army of seven countries came to ask for a share of the relics; Maou soldiers flee before the complete enlightenment of the Buddha under the Pippala tree; gods invited Buddha to lecture; Buddha went to heaven Tusita gave teachings to his mother; the stories precursor when the Bodhisattva was the monkey king (Mahakapi Jataka), the son of the blind hermit (Syama Jataka). The head of this gate is the four dwarf gods.

To build these gates, the synthetic rocks were roughly cut with sharp hammers and hook tools, carved and decorated with steel chisels and files before sanding with river sand. Whereas the covering is placed in the dry horizontal masonry layers, the barrier elements use a tenon joint, a technique in carpentry. Even the horizontal beams create a lenticular shape that simulates bamboo. The reliefs are carved meticulously, sharply to every small detail, including the jewelry of the characters in the story. Demonstrating a strong development of Buddhist art from the initial primitive brick period of the third century B.C. to the stone masterpieces of the early Western calendar era.

From this early model, the model Stupa (Stupa) Sanchi was replicated in other regions in India, crossing the border to other Buddhist countries on the continent.

III. CONCLUSION

The Sanchi stupa is the oldest stone architecture in India, an artistic achievement that has not been challenged by time, demonstrating a long-term development of more than 13 centuries of art accompanied by ups and downs. Prosperity of Buddhism. Although built and renovated throughout the centuries, most of the Great Tower of Sanchi sculptures and architecture belong to the non-idolatrous school of art. When the Buddha was not yet manifested by identity, instead were symbols such as the bodhi tree, the throne, or the wheel of dharma. Not stopping there, the sculpture at Sanchi is found to have many similarities with the reliefs of the Gandhara school. Accordingly, the spatial layout, the character is kept almost intact, only replacing the image of the bodhi tree and the throne with the image of Buddha. Show that the model of structure and the art of sculpture at Sanchi is a model for art in other locations in India. From the structure of the Sanchi stupa, other countries have changed a few details to fit with the local culture, but not go beyond the original meaning of lofty.

Sanchi stupa was originally sponsored and built by monarchs, through the period of restoration and expansion, reaching the majority of the population, the people who gathered raw materials to build goods. fencing tower, giving opinions on the sculpture of precursor stories, which are passed on to others. Buddhism went beyond the royal patron cocoon to blend with the masses of the people. This is also a manifestation of the strong Mahayana Buddhist spirit that developed around the beginning of the Western calendar era. It can be said that art, more than anyone else, has truly and vividly reflected the external social situation.

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