Buddhist Architecture of Buddha Shrines in Thailand and Myanmar
during the 14th – 15th Centuries

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This paper aims to compare the architecture of Buddha shrines in Thailand and Myanmar during the 14th to 15th centuries when Theravada Buddhism was widespread in Southeast Asia.
The comparison will focus on the architecture of Buddha shrines known as **mondops** and **viharas** in **Sukhothai and Chiang Mai**, Thailand; and **cave temples**, **tazaungs** (a pavilion established near a pagoda), **wuts** (an image shrine), **hpaya-hsaungs** (Buddha hall), and **dhammasalas** (a preaching hall) in **Myanmar**.

*Photo: A. B. Griswold, *Wat Pra Yun Reconsidered*. 

**Mondop**
Martaban (13th-14th centuries)
Pagan (11th-13th centuries)
Pegu (14th-16th centuries)
Chiang Mai (13th-16th centuries)
Si Satchanalai
Sukhothai (13th-15th centuries)
Martaban (13th-14th centuries)
Chiang Mai

Maps of Thailand and Myanmar
**Mandapa**, a Sanskrit term, means a pillared outdoor hall or a pavilion for public rituals in Indian architecture. Mandapa can be established next to an image shrine, *garbha grha*; or precede an antechamber of an image shrine; or be separate from a temple. Mandapa can be enclosed totally with walls or partly with walls or without any walls.
The architecture of *mandapa* in Southeast Asia also shares similarities to that in India; for instance, *mandapas* in Cambodia and Vietnam. These had a rectangular floor plan, were the site of ritual ceremonies, and were located to the front of an image shrine.
However, the term, *mondop* in Thai architecture referred to a square building enshrining a Buddha image or sometimes multiple images.

It is likely created later and developed from the term *mandapa*. Its role was parallel to an image shrine (*garbha grha*) of Hindu and Buddhist architecture in India and Sri Lanka.
Mondops were found in both Sukhothai and Si Satchanalai, the twin city of Sukhothai. Si Satchanalai was located to the north of Sukhothai and was emerged before Sukhothai was founded.
Wat Sa Patum, Si Satchanalai

Vihara [assembly hall]

stupa

mondop
1. Wat Si Chum
2. Wat Chetuphon
3. Wat Traphang Thong Lang
4. Wat Ko Mai Daeng
5. Wat Si Thon
6. Wat Tuk
Mondop, Wat Si Chum, Sukhothai
Mondops, Wat Si Chum and Wat Chetuphon = equivalent to cetiya [memorial], the oldest term for a stupa, which can refer to other objects of worship, a bodhi tree and a Buddha image.

During the Anuradhapura period, Buddha images were popular among Mahayanists; however, image houses became more popular in period of Polonnaruwa (11th-13th cent).
Chiang Mai in northern Thailand or Lanna also had *mondop* called *khong* or *khong prasat* or *khong phachao*

*Khong* refers to boundary or area or a shrine of a Buddha image; *phachao* means a Buddha image parallel to the term *hpaya* in Burmese. The term *khong* probably shares the same root with the words *khon-lwa* in Mon and *khan-wa* in Burmese meaning abode or dwelling place.
Furthermore, it likely relates to the term *khan* and *a-khan* in Burmese and *a-khan* in Mon influenced by the Burmese referring to a room or a chamber. Thai and Khmer also have a term *a-khan* meaning a building.

*khong phachao,*

*khong prasat*
A Buddha shrine called *hpaya-khan* at a Burmese brick Buddhist monastery in Pagan is likely parallel to *khong phachao* in Lanna, they refer to a chamber or a shrine of a Buddha image.
Khong Phachao as a miniature shrine
Butsabok (small so that only one person or nobody can enter)

prasat
(with porticos)

Butsabok, prasad, mondop,
traditional Thai architecture crowned by a pyramidal roof
mondop (without porticos)

pyathat

gu-hpaya; bhut or wut; tazaung; hpaya-hsaung; and dhammasala
(Gu-hpaya, cave temple), Pagan (dated 11th century)

Naga-yon Temple
1. hall
2. gandhakuti taik
3. circumambulation path

Pahto-tha-mya Temple

Myinkaba Kubyauk-gyi Temple

Abe-ya-dana Temple
Bhut, Kado Taik Kyaung, Kado Village, Moulmein

Bhut or Wut
Bhut or Wut, Myatheindan Pagoda, Martaban
Tazaung was usually built to the front or surround a stupa as a place to worship a stupa and to protect devotees from the sun and rain.
Tazaungs later enshrine Buddha images or a bell or a Buddha footprint.
Hpaya-hsaung, Buddha hall

Taikdaw Monastery, Mandalay (19th century)
Hpaya-hsaung,
Taikdaw Monastery,
Mandalay (19th century)
A Sukhothai mondop and a vihara or a pillared pavilion to the front were like a brick monastery of Pagan.
A brick monastery of Pagan included a small brick dwelling for a monk with an attached open pillared pavilion to the front to receive guests and deliver dharma.
Jetavana Monastery in India during the Buddha time also had mandapas; for example, Karerimandapa [Kareri pavilion], a mandapa made from Kareri (varuna) trees.

It was built next to the front door of Karerikutika, which was named after the mandapa. Karerimandapa to the front of Karerikuti probably was its reception area as Karerikuti was small.

**Dhammasala of Minnathu Le-myet-hna Monastery, Pagan**
Dhammasala of Minnanthu Le-Myet-Hna Monastery completed in 1223.

The term dhammsa appeared on the inscription of the Minnanthu, derived from dhammasala and originated from dhammamandapa. The inscription described the dhammasa as a hall built of brick for people to listen to dharma.
Minnanthu Le-Myet-Hna
Monastic complex

1. Le-myet-hna gu-hpaya
2. Ordination hall
3. Monastery for the chief monk or senior monks
4. Dhammasala or dhammamandapa

After Pierre Pichard, *Inventory of Monuments at Pagan*, vol. 2
Big Buddhist monasteries of Pagan had a separate building called *dhammasa* or *trya em* [house of dharma] or *trya kyaung* [school of dharma] for dharma preaching held on every sabbath day during the Buddhist lent, once in the morning and again in the evening.
Dhammasala have also been found in Sri Lanka dating from the Anuradhapura period (c. 250 B. C. E. to 1029 C. E.). It was known as dhammamandapa, which later became dhammasala. It was a pavilion or a hall where dharma was delivered and located either at a monastery or a public area.

Dhammamandapas continued to be constructed during the Polonnaruva period, King Parakramabahu I (c. 1153 – 1186) erected five dhammamandapas in Polonnaruva; however, none have survived.
Dhammasala still exist at present Sri Lanka and Myanmar; in the former, it is a multi-purpose building for dharma preaching, the paritta chanting ceremony, and sometimes as a monastery school.

In Myanmar, dhammasala is called dhammayoun, which becomes a community hall for religious purposes, including dharma preaching, and is erected at several monasteries, pagoda compounds, and villages and towns.
The comparison study of Buddha shrines in Thailand and Myanmar can provide indigenous architectural characteristics as well as links to the history, culture, and religion among the people in two countries. It can lead to better understanding of traditional Thai architecture as well as that of the Burmese and Mon and the history of architecture in Southeast Asia as the whole when Sinhalese Buddhism replaced Buddhism from India after the collapse of Pagan, when the Mon in Lower Burma gained independence, and Sukhothai emerged in the 13th century.