

A study on the transformation in the traditional monastic management and its impact on the buildings of Buddhist monasteries in Kathmandu, Nepal

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1. Background and objectives

The Kathmandu Basin, which is located nearly the centre of Nepal, was listed as a world heritage site owing to its cultural specificity—2000 years' lively Newar culture. Buddhist monastery has an intimate relationship with Newar Buddhism which is developed independently in Nepal. It is also considered as a “living heritage” which still holds a variety of local gathering regional events. This thesis identifies and reveals the ideal way to maintain the lively cultures which are the inheritance of Buddhist monastery and the management body of monastery called sangha, due to the relationship of the change of the monastic management (according to the decrease of Buddhism's influence) and the preservation of the Buddhist monastery.

2. The transformation of Buddhist monastery

Buddhist monastery is a two-storey building which has the basic plan surrounding the courtyard. The main shrine falls on the axis from the entrance into the courtyard and it is usually paid respects due to its special role to the Vajrayana rituals related to their identity of their Caste. There are only 5 monasteries including the entire monastery are being preserved well. Those former Buddhist monasteries were rebuilt freely as houses and stores. The original appearance of the monastery which just left the shrine part can also be seen.

3. The transformation of monastery management

During the fifth to eighth century, the Buddhist monastery was protected by royalty and had enormous power. But after entering the Caste system in the middle Ages, most of their lands were lost. The ownership of monasteries started to move from sangha to individuals. Traditional monastery management depends on the income of the profit from traditional land crops. In 1960's, according to the land reform policy, monastery management was affected strongly. In a matter of fact, it was difficult for them to hold any monastery events. It was confirmed that there were few or even none priests existing in the monasteries. On the one hand, there are monasteries which cancelled the traditional events because of short of funding. On the other hand, there are also monasteries but very few maintaining their religious activities following the traditions continued, but the number is extremely limited.

4. The impact of the transformation of monastery management on the preservation of monastery

Under the influence of urbanization, the urban area in the center of Kathmandu city is developed into the high-rise buildings. For many Buddhist monasteries which are located in those areas, the management ability to just keep the traditional appearance of the monasteries by the sangha is fading. It's not possible for those Buddhist monasteries which no longer possess the property in land and short of donation members to reconstruct shrines and monastery buildings anymore. On the other hand, such as at the high prices section in the centre of the city, sangha rebuilt the monasteries into high-rise buildings and collect the rent as income. This transformation solved the funding problem. This is always considered as one of the changes of Buddhist monastery. In terms of understanding the value of regional architecture as the practice of Newar Buddhist in modern days, we can conclude the conflict between the respect of tradition and the realistic such as the preservation of traditional monastery appearance, management of monastery under the pressure of urbanization and the solution of raising fund which is increasing high-rise problem.