

# *Traditions* 2010



COMMEMORATING THE TENTH ANNIVERSARY  
OF  
SEAMEO Regional Centre for History and Tradition  
( SEAMEO CHAT )



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First Edition

December 2010

1,000 Copies

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# Harrow( Tun) Farming in Bagan\*

Kazuo Ando<sup>1</sup>, Khin Lay Swe<sup>2</sup>, Myint Thein<sup>3</sup>

## 1. Introduction

### (1) Record in Burma Gazetteers of the British Period



Photo1. Te(Myanmar Plough)(Ando 2006, Bagan)



Photo2. Tun(Ando 2006,Bagan)

At present, the local plough (Photo 1), called *Te* or *Hte*, is generally used for preparation of the rice field in lower Myanmar, Ayeyarwady and Bago Divisions and is commonly drawn by a pair of oxen or buffalos. The *Te* is considered to be based on the Chinese Plough or Rectangular -Framed Plough and was called Burma Plough in the Burma Gazetteers published by the British Colonial Government. It has cast iron ploughshare with a moldboard to turn the soil.

After being ploughed, the shallow rice field is harrowed several times by the *Tun*(*Htun*) or comb type of harrow (Photos 2-3). The body and teeth of the harrow are made of wood. The *Tun* is also commonly drawn by a pair of oxen or buffalos. The teeth have several attachments,

such as a ploughshare made of iron, used for different purposes. The harrowing is to break the blocks of soil turned up by ploughing and to level the soil under both dry and inundated conditions. If the rice field is covered

\* This paper is prepared on the basis of the following presentation at the Conference of the Japanese Association of Tropical Agriculture on 21 and 22 October 2006 in Faculty of Agriculture, Meijo University, Nagoya, Japan: Kazuo Ando, Khin Lay Swe, Myint Thein, "Study Note on Harrow (Tun) farming in Bagan, Myanmar-Local Evolution with Historical Perspective." ( in Japanese).

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## Harrow (Tun) Farming in Bagan



Photo 3. Tun Operation (Ando 2006, Bagan)



Photo 4. Settun (Ando 2006, Maubin)



Photo 5. Single Buffalo Ploughing (Andi 2001, Laos)

by plenty of weed, the rotary type of harrow or *Settun* with iron blade ( Photo 4) is sometime applied in addition to the *Tun*.

The Burma Gazetteers record that the harrow was commonly used for land preparation without the plough in some areas of lower Myanmar. For instance, the Pegu District Gazetteer (presently Bago District) recorded (Page 1962:67):

The *Te* was not generally used during the period of settlement survey from 1882 to 1884. The Burmese farmers started to use the *Te* drawn by one buffalo with a demonstration effect by the Shans during the period of re-settlement survey from 1898 to 1900. When use of the *Te* became common in 1915, the use of one buffalo for drawing the *Te* (Photo 5) disappeared.

On the basis of this record, it appears that the *Te* drawn by a pair of oxen or buffalos had become common among the Myanmar farmers at least after 1915. Similarly, the Tharrawaddy District Gazetteer reprinted in 1959 which was originally published around 1920 recorded the following (Grantham 1959:57-62).

The ground is ploughed with a harrow seven or eight times in the first month or so of rain, and sometimes gone over with the setton, in some places it is genuinely ploughed with the Burmese plough.



It clearly mentions that a harrow was still commonly used for ploughing in Tharrawaddy District.

**(2) Royal Ploughing Ceremony with the Harrow**

In the Royal Ploughing Ceremony in Thailand and Cambodia, the plough is used, but it is known that the harrow or *Tun* was used for the Royal Ploughing Ceremony called *Le Htun Mingalar* in Myanmar (*Le* : Rice Field, *Tun*: Tillage, *Mingalar*: Ceremony). This is pointed out by Ito (1984), referring to a painting of the ploughing ceremony performed by King Suddhodana during late 18c to late 19c of Konbaung dynasty. On the basis of this historical fact, we can advance the hypothesis that land preparation using only the harrow or *Tun* was established for a long time in Myanmar.

Land preparation using only the harrow or *Tun* can be still observed in the villages of Nyaung-Oo Township, the semi-dry upland crop growing area where there are so many temples and pagodas. We visited the village of Pauk Seik Pin in the Kone Tan Gyi Village Tract on 25-27 February and 22-23 July, 2006, in order to conduct the field work of interviewing farmers about present farming practices and observing the cropping systems as well as the agricultural tools. Beside this work, we made an analysis of depictions of land preparation for farming in the terracotta reliefs and mural paintings in the pagodas and temples. This paper reports briefly on the result of our field work.

**2. Results and Discussion**

**(1) General Description of Agriculture of Kone Tan Gyi Village Tract**

The village tract under study consists of three villages, namely Kone Tan Gyi village and Thant Sin village in addition to Pauk Seik Pin village. In the 1996 Population Census of the Village Tract, there were 607 households and 3,227 persons (male:1,561, female:1,666); upland crops field (locally called Ya-land) 3,223 acres, fruit garden etc 4 acres, fallow land 137 acres and uncultivated land 309 acres. In 1996, only upland crops were cultivated in the village tract. According to the ten years' weather records (1994-2003) at the Agricultural Research Farm of the Government, the monthly average minimum temperature, and the monthly average maximum temperature are 23°C and 36°C. The lowest average monthly minimum temperature is 14°C in January and the average monthly maximum temperature of January is 30°C. The month of highest temperature is April. The average

monthly maximum temperature of April is 40°C and the average minimum temperature of April is 26°C. The average annual rainfall is 513 mm. The lowest monthly average minimum rainfall is 0mm in January. The highest monthly average maximum rainfall is 103 mm in September. Two clear peaks are observed in the rainfall pattern. Except July, rainfall from 50 to 100 mm occurs from May to October. According to Table 1 showing the cropping statistics, there is little irrigation and thus crop cultivation fully depends on the rain. Wet-rice cultivation by canal irrigation has been newly introduced in the 2005-2006 cropping season.

**Table 1 Cropping Statistics of Kone Tan Gyi Village Tract (Unit: Acre)**

Crop season	Sesame	Sesame	Peanut	Peanut	Green	Pigeon	Vegetables	
	Early var.	Late var.	Spread Type	Erect Type	gram	pea		
1995-96	Pre-monsoon	645	0	70	7	12	80	0
	Monsoon	0	0	326	90	547	41	99
	Post monsoon	0	425	0	0	0	0	0
2005-06	Pre-monsoon	39	0	391	0	45	11	33
	Monsoon	0	0	346	280	129	96	9
	Post monsoon	0	1199	0	0	0	0	0

Note: The crops: Cotton (41 acre). Wet Rice (349 acre), Sunflower (100 acre), Green gram (Local var 432 acre) were cultivated beside the above in 2005-06.

Source: Field Work of the authors.

**(2) Agricultural Tools**

We observed the agricultural tools and also discussed cropping systems and the use of tools with some farmers in the house of Mr. SM in the Pauk Seik Pin village. In this village, wet rice field and irrigation have not been introduced yet. However, the use of the plough has been started at a village 2km away from this village along the Ayeyarwaddy River to till soil in weedy fields.



Photo 6. Six kinds of Tun Thwa (Ando 2006, Bagan)

Currently, the *Tun* or Comb Type Harrow is the basic common tool for land preparation. The *Tun* is of two types: the *Tun Don* is used for land preparation; the *Tun Swe* is for sowing seed, covering with soil, thinning, inter-tillage. The tooth of a harrow is called *Tun Thwa*. The width of the *Tun Don* is 148cm and four *Tun Thwa* are attached. The width of the *Tun Swe* is 195cm and five to seven *Tun Thwa* are attached.



Six kinds of *Tun Thwa* are used in the village (Photo 6). No.1 is attached to the Myanmar ploughshare made of cast iron, which was introduced six years ago. No.2 is attached to the beaten iron ploughshare with a pan, which was introduced twenty years ago. No.3 to No.5 have a beaten ploughshare just like the Bengal Plough (Photo 7), which is traditionally used in Bangladesh. Besides these six kinds of *Tun Thwa*, three other kinds of iron *Tun Thwa* are used for inter-tillage and the harvesting of peanut.

**(3) Ritual Offering**



Photo 7. Bengal Plough  
(Ando 2002, Bangladesh)



Photo 8. Offerings of Ritual  
(Ando 2006, Bagan)

The ritual of *Pone ma gyi Tin De* is performed in the village on 3<sup>rd</sup> day of *Tabaung* month of the Myanmar calendar (March in the Western calendar). This ritual, conducted in each house, is still practiced in the townships of *Magwe*, *Myingyan* and *Naung-oo* in the semi-dry zone of central Myanmar. The *Tun* with a pair of oxen, *Si Sone* (Oil Mill) and other items are made of sticky rice flour (Photo 8). These offerings are put on a table in the eastern corner of the room. The wife of Mr. SM demonstrated the ritual to us with a preparation of offerings on 22 July 2006. Around 10:00-11:00 a.m, the wife gave the offerings, facing toward the east and putting both hands together in prayer with the following words.

*Pone ma gyi. Thu kywe ma gyi.  
Shwe Oh. Ngwe Oh. Htah Ke Ba  
De Eik Pa. De Sar Pa. Thouk Pa.  
(Pone-ma-Gyi, Rich Lady. Gold Pot, Silver Pot,  
Please Bring. Here Sleep. Here Eat and Drink)*

In this ritual, a miniature of the *Tun* and not the *Te* is offered. The ritual is conducted at the beginning of the first land preparation of the year. As

in the Royal Ploughing Ceremony in Myanmar, the *Tun* is used instead of the *Te* in the offerings of the ritual and also as a tool in land preparation.

**(4) Farming Practice Recorded in Terracotta Reliefs and Mural painting.**

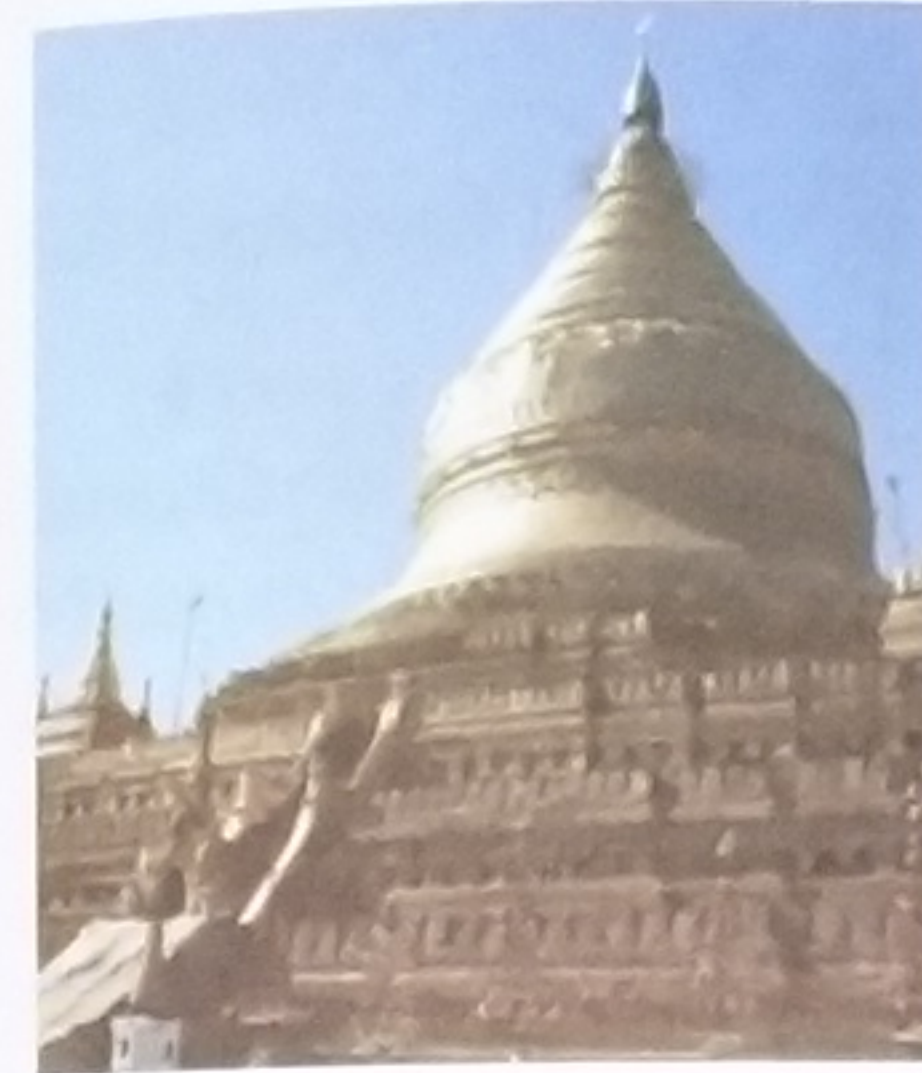


Photo 9. Shwe Zigon Pagoda  
(Ando 2006, Bagan)

The basement of the *Shwe-Zigon* Pagoda (Photo 9) was constructed between 11th and 12th century. The terracotta relief which is on it shows a farmer using the *Tun* with two oxen. (Photo 10) The *Tun* is drawn vertically in front of the farmer and the four pieces of the *Tun Thwa* can be recognized. Two middle-aged female farmers who came to pray at the Pagoda were asked by us about the figures in the terracotta relief. We asked them what they saw in the terracotta relief. They explained clearly that relief showed a farmer using the *Tun* with oxen.



Photo 10. Tun and Farmer is  
Terracotta Relief  
(Ando 2006, Bagan)

A miniature mural painting showing a farmer using the *Tun* with two oxen is on display at the Archaeological Museum of Bagan. The explanation of this painting is Peasant ploughing with oxen in the field. Bagan Period (early 12<sup>th</sup> Century A.D.). Copied from mural painting of the *Myinkaba Gubyaukgyi* temple (Photo 11). In the explanation, the tool is described as "Plough", but actually the tool in the painting is a *Tun*. We checked the original of the mural painting at the temple. It showed the comb type of

harrow or *Tun* (Figure 1). Dr. Than Tun, the greatest scholar for the study of inscriptions of the Bagan period, has also commented as follows: (Than 2004:29)

For agricultural implements, there were *thwan*-the harrow, *poktu*-the hoe, *puchin*-the axe, *khak*-the fork. There is no mention of the word *thay*-the plough.



Photo 11. Myingaba Gubyaukgyi Temple  
(Ando 2006, Bagan)



*Lhañ*-the cart, drawn by oxen was also a very important means of transporting agricultural product.



Fig 1. Two Peasants Ploughing with oxen in the field. Bagan Period (early 12th Century A.D.). Copied from Mural paintings of Myingaba Gubyaukgyi Temple. (Ando's Sketch)

At this time, we have only confirmed these two evidences of farming practice at the Bagan archeological site. It may, however, be concluded that the plough or the *Te* (*Thay* by Dr. Than Tun) was not used during the Bagan period. The mystery of the absence of the plough in the farming practice in Bagan is a very interesting study theme. We would like to continue our study in order to present a workable hypothesis.

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## The Ponna of Mandalay: The Fading Away of the Brahmins in Myanmar

Mo Mo Thant\*

### Background History of Ponna

Ponna, the name by which Brahmins are known in Myanmar, are much familiar with Myanmar, close to the Myanmar Court and accustomed to the Myanmar culture and traditions. Though Myanmar Ponnas are nostalgic for the good old golden days of Myanmar monarchical times, they are astonishingly able to overcome the drastic change of politico-socio-economic circumstances in the colonial period and a sea change of the milieu in the independent era.

Brahmanism from Central India arrived in the Southeast Asian nations, including Myanmar, about the beginning of the Christian era 2 and spread throughout the whole region. Myanmar kings, for their part, thought themselves, to be descendants of the Sakya dynasty of Central India. Thus



Brahman Ponna

they accepted, adopted and adapted Brahmanistic ideas, concepts and practices since the principal objective of Brahmanism was to make the king and the ruling class more great, grand and noble than the ordinary people. The Brahmin Ponnas who were clever and expert in Brahmanism became important and took an influential role at the court through successive kings and dynasties. They

were honoured and given privileges in many ways. As the time went on, they became accustomed to Myanmar culture, custom and traditions. They came to believe and accept Myanmar as their country and its ruler as their lord. Accordingly they served the king and its people with unbreakable loyalty. In the later period Ponnas lived mostly in Mandalay, the last royal seat of Myanmar kings.

Myanmar feudal social system was destroyed and disappeared with the end of the Myanmar monarchical system brought about by British

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