

**Western Elements in 'low-country' Buddhist Art and
Architecture of Colonial Ceylon**

2009

**The dissertation is submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the
University of Kelaniya in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree
Master of Philosophy in Fine Arts (Visual Arts & Design)**

J.A.V.N. Jayathilaka

FGS/04/02/02/2006/01

University of Kelaniya

ABSTRACT

The factors that influenced the choice of Western elements for Buddhist monastic art and architecture in the low-country were studied. Six specific hypotheses that derived from a general hypothesis that Western elements were chosen as a result of particular socio-political conditions in the colonial period were examined. The six specific hypotheses were that the Western elements were chosen; as a result of the ethnocentric knowledge; as a survival strategy; to please the patrons; to break away from the Kandyan tradition; as a result of 'cultural diffusion'; and to convey specific moral messages to society. Details of the wall paintings, polychrome sculpture and architectural features, and decorations in thirty two randomly selected temples were carefully studied. Furthermore, information about the monk, artisans, patrons who were responsible for the contribution and decoration were gathered from the primary and secondary sources. It was found that modified coat of arms, portraits of Queen Victoria, temple names in Latin characters, royal or elite family members dressed in Western costumes, figures with Caucasian features, Western-style furniture and utility objects, weapons and musical instruments with European origin, painted architectural backgrounds with Western features, floral or foliage designs inspired by Baroque or Rococo decorative motifs, Western form of vessels, and guardian figures in Western garments etc., were very popular in Buddhist art in the low-country. Also, found that Western architectural features such as gables, pediments, archways, verandas, columns, porticos, doors & windows etc., were abundantly used in the temples. Additionally, layouts or certain architectural components of Christian churches were found in several temples of the study sample. Some of the artisans of temples were found to be influenced by the western social norms and values. It was also found that the monks had to innovate new strategies to gain the support of new influential native elites and to control the resistance of colonial rulers for the survival of the Buddhist establishment. The study also found that the patrons of temples who were under the control^{of colonial} rulers admired and imitated Western values and social codes. Therefore, it is suggested that presence of Western elements in the Buddhist monasteries are the results of the ethnocentric knowledge propagated by the colonizer, strategic-social adaptation method of the monks, cultural diffusion, religious co-existence, and reactions of Buddhists against colonialism and missionary movements.