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아시아 샤먼유산의 보편성과 다양성 : 샤먼유산의 보호 현황과 과제

*The Diversity and Commonality of Shaman Heritage in Asia:
Current Safeguarding Status and Challenges of Asian Shaman Heritage*

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Presentation 6

**Safeguarding Strategies for Myanmar Shaman
Heritage**

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Safeguarding Strategies for Myanmar Shaman Heritage

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Abstract

This paper intends to describe the role and function of Shaman in Myanmar society. The background history of Shaman, the role and function of Shaman, Natkadaw in Myanmar society, and the current situations of Shaman living in Yangon, are elicited. Especially, what are the essential or key factors to become a Shaman in Myanmar, why Myanmar people believe in Nats (spirits), how they offer to the Nats, when they offer to the Nats, what are necessary, who is essential for this ritual or ceremony and how the Shaman maintains and transmits his or her super power from generation to generation are discussed. Descriptive or exploratory and oral history methods are used as the research designs. Secondary analysis, key informant interview are conducted for data collection. As the result outcomes, why Shaman is important to safeguard as Myanmar intangible cultural heritage, why and how the government safeguard the Shaman officially are explored.

Key words: Nat (spirit), Shaman (Natkadaw), heritage, intangible cultural heritage and believe

1. Introduction

This paper intends to describe the role and function of Natkadaw (Shaman) in Myanmar society. The background history of Natkadaw, why Myanmar people believe in Nats (spirits), how they offer to the Nats, when they offer to the Nats, what are necessary, who is essential for this ritual or ceremony and the role and function of the Natkadaw in Myanmar society, what are the essential or key factors to become a Natkadaw and Nat in Myanmar, and the current situations of Shaman living in Yangon are elicited. Especially, how the Natkadaw maintains and transmits his or her super power from generation to generation and why Natkadaw is essential to safeguard as an intangible cultural heritage will be discussed. Descriptive or exploratory and oral history methods are used as the research designs. Secondary analysis, key informant interview, informal interview and focus group discussion are conducted for data collection. As the field research area, Myanmar, Yangon Region, 13th ward is selected. This covers the role and function of a Natkadaw in Myanmar society.

2. The background history of the Natkadaw

The spirit worship exists in Myanmar from long ago. Thank of spirit worship, the Natkadaw becomes an essential spirit medium to perform as a go-between for spirits and worshippers. According to the history of 37 Nats (Thonesekunitmin nat thamai, the name of a book), all of Nats have their own histories mean that when and why they become the Nats. Most of the people believe these Nats can help and take-care them to be wealthy and healthy. Although Most of Myanmar are Buddhists, animism or shamanism is prevailing among the Myanmar-Buddhists. Sometimes, it is difficult to separate between Buddhists and animists. The Nats believed by the native people and Nats come from Buddha teaching can be found in Myanmar. The Nats come from Buddha teaching differ from the Nats believed by the native people (photo.1).

The Nats believed by the native people can also be divided into three: Yoyar Nats or Misai Phasai Nats, Ywardawshin Nats and Thirty seven Nats. Yoyar Nats or Misai Phasai Nats are the regional Nats or Matrilineal and patrilineal Nats. In other words, Mr.A's father was born in Bago, his father's Yoyar Nat is Nenkarai Medaw (Ms. Nenkarai) or Bago Medaw (Ms. Bago) (photo.2). She can be also regarded as his Patrilineal Nat. All of male descents have to pay respect and offer to this Nat annually or twice a year, one is before July and another one is after October. Sons have to pay respect and offer to his father's Yoyar Nat or Phasai Nat. All of female descents also have to pay respect and offer to his mother's Yoyar Nats or Misai Nats.

They offer Yoyar Nats or Misai Phasai Nats annually or twice a year. When they offer these Nats, the role of the Natkadaw becomes important for the Nat worshippers. Some people conduct the offering and pay respect to these Yoyar Nats or Misai Phasai Nats by themselves. Most try to get the help of Natkadaw who is an expert in this offering process not to be any mistake. They believe that "if some procedures are absent to do, they will be faced with the Nat's anger and punished".

Ywardawshin Nat is the male spirit. They believe that he guards the all of the villagers or Yatkyawwthu Yatkyawwthu, people live in a ward. At the head of the village or ward, they build the shrine for this Ywardawshin Nat and held the ritual annually. At that time, some celebrate

Thirty seven Nat Pwe all together. Some people go to visit to this shrine to pay homage everyday or every week. When they go to this shrine, they bring some candles, flowers, and foods to offer to the Nat. They put these on the place in front of the Nat statue and pray to help and guard (photo.3 and 4).

Thirty seven Nats are prevailing among the Myanmar. When most of Myanmar builds a new pagoda, they celebrate the Thirty seven Nats Pwe to get their collaboration at least one day. After celebrating Thirty seven Nats Pwe, they continue the other necessary processes for pagoda building. When a Natkadaw celebrates Thirty Seven Nats Pwe, first she or he invites the Buddha's sons, monks to their Natkanna Pwe (the ritual place) to pay respect and learn Buddha doctrine and offer with alms (photo. 5). And then, they continue their Nats Pwe.

3. Why people believe in Nat

There are so many needs in the human's daily life. They always struggle to fulfill their needs especially for economy, social affairs, education and health. Human needs can be divided into two. They are physical needs and mental needs. As the people always try to fulfill their needs, the people's strategies are very important. Sometimes, they have some problems to consult by themselves. At that time they try to find out the suitable ways to pass over these problems. Some people approach to the Nats who can save and help them. Some admire and believe the spirits who possess the supernatural power can help and guard them.

These Nats cannot be seen by human eyes and cannot be touched by human hands but people believe these Nats are in their surrounding and can see and guard them. Their belief makes them to offer to these Nats. Furthermore, some created these Nats as human being figures by using wood, stone and plastic to be seen and offered some foods and drinks to these statues. Some use coconut as a symbol of house guardian spirit named Minmahagiri (male spirit) (photo.6 and 7).

Furthermore, they believe the human's soul can be possessed by Nats which is called Natpude or Natwinde in Myanmar. When the human's soul is possessed by Nat, he or she can eat and drink as a human being, and predict other people's fortune. People also can ask and request directly to help their needs to this Nats (photo.8).

When Myanmar or Bamar's Nat worship is studied, they believe two kinds of Nats: the Nats living in heaven and the Nats living in human's surrounding. According to my experience, most of religion is based on the human needs. However, how they try to fulfill their needs is very important. For this reason, how the people who believe in U Shin Gyi (the name of spirit) celebrate the ritual in A Street, B Ward, South Okkalapa Township, Yangon region was conducted as an anthropology departmental research in 2010-2011 academic year. At that time, the following questions were applied to analyze the belief and worship of this Nat.

Why the people pay attention and offer to the U Shin Gyi Nat annually or twice a year, If they offer U Shin Gyi with some foods which are regarded the necessary raw materials (coconut, banana, glue rice and so on), what sorts of benefits can be get for them, if they absent to offer to him, what kinds of difficulties can be occurred in their society or in their daily life. They believe that U Shin Gyi Nat who is a regional Nat, guards and helps the people living in coastal and delta regions (photo.9) as their economies are based on fishery, water products and sea

route. In my research area, 13th Ward, South Okkalapa Township, Yangon Region, although most of their economies do not rely on fishery and concern with the water products, they believe in U Shin Gyi and held the offering to him once a year or twice a year.

For offering to the U Shin Gyi, the Natkadaw' role is very important. Most of the people invite the Natkadaw to prepare and offer the foods to the U Shin Gyi. Behalf of them the Natkadaw takes the responsibility for the offering to the U Shin Gyi. They also pay respect and honorable fee (1500 Kyats ~50000 Kyats) to the Natkadaw.

By doing so, it can be concluded that human believe in Nats based on the human's mental and physical needs, in other words, for their social, economic, educational affairs and health to become successful.

4. The role and function of the Natkadaw in Myanmar

4.1 The essential or key factors to become a Nat in Myanmar

According to the Myanmar Miyoephalar Dhalei Nat thamati, there are four characteristics to become a Nat registered in the history of Nat. They are 1) Famous one in his or her region, 2) his or her superiority or distinguished performance for the people, 3) death in accident or in violent accident, and 4) face with misfortune. They can be king, prince, princess or lay man.

For example, Shwephyin Gyi and Shwephyin Lay Nats had been killed by King Anawyahtar because of their false. After death, they told the King that they became the Nats. So the king ordered them to live in Taungpyone and the people who live in this region to pay attention and celebrate the ritual for them annually. Taungpyone Nat Pwe becomes the most famous and biggest Nat Pwe in Myanmar from AD 12 century to the present time (photo.10). This is the one of Myanmar traditional Nat Pwes and so many cultural phenomena can be found in this Pwe.

4. 2. The essential or key factors to become a Natkadaw in Myanmar

According to the interview, the essential or key factors to become a Natkadaw in Myanmar are as the following.

- 1) If one person wants to be a Natkadaw or Shaman, he or she must learn the knowledge concerned with Nats. Especially, He or she has to learn the numbers of Nats, The seniority of the Nats, the way of Nats (the drinking Yayzin, attending to the Taungpyone Nat Pwe annually, Yadanagyu Nat Pwe, Phakhan U Min Kyaw Nat Pwe and so on.), the traditional aims of Nat worship, the process of Nat Pwe, and the song, music and dance for the respective Nat. For example, Apyodaw Thichin, Apyodaw Teilone and Apyodaw Aka are for the Apyodaw Nat. The knowledge concerned with Nats can be learned from his or her mother, or grandfather or grandmother or teacher or senior Natkadaw.
- 2) A Natkadaw or Shaman's essential qualification is to be Thila, Thamardj and Pannya. Thila means to keep the precepts which are five, eight and ten. Especially a Natkadaw has to keep the morals or precepts at least five precepts which are the Buddha's basic morals for the every lay man. In other words, Thila means that a person controls himself physically and mentally not to do false. These moral five precepts are (1) the precept of abstaining from killing any living being, (2) the precept of abstaining from

taking what is not given by the owner, (3) the precept of abstaining from committing sexual misconduct, (4) the precept of abstaining from telling lies and (5) the precept of abstaining from taking any intoxicant or drug that causes forgetfulness. These five precepts are also regarded as the basic habitual actions for good person.

Thamardi means that a person practices to be fairness of mind or attitude by doing meditation. Pannya means wisdom to decide what is wrong or true or having the knowledge for the knowing the way of the cycle of rebirth and the way of the escape from the cycle of rebirth or the noble truth to arrive at nirvana.

These three factors are necessary to be a successful Natkadaw in Myanmar. The more he or she tries to keep these factors, the more successful benefit can be get or the more famous and successful Natkadaw life will be possessed. They believe that nearly all of his or her predictions also become truth.

- 3) He or she has to learn Baydin (astrology), ingaweizar (physiognomist) to be a skillful Natkadaw.
- 4) He or she has to understand the human needs or desire which can be changed. For example, 40 years ago, most of the Nat worshippers emphasized on only Nat offering. But nowadays, most of the Nat believers extend their interest not only Nats but also Theik (prophecy). So, all of the Natkadaws need to communicate with the prophecies such as Shwe Joe Phyu and Mulakhe (Sister and brother), Dragon prophecy and so on to perform as the go-betweens or lawyers for the benefit of the believers (photo. 11).

4.3. Maintaining and transmitting Natkadaw's heritage

According to the key informant interview, Ms. A, 70 years old, told that her grandmother and her uncle's wife were Natkadaws. She learned the knowledge concerned with Nats from her childhood. Her grandmother wanted her to drink Yayzin (a cup of water) as her hirer at 1973. She had to drink a cup of Yayzin once a year. This is called "Yayzin taikde", or "Yayzin thoughtde". "Yayzin taikde" means that the senior Natkadaw gives a cup of water to her junior to be a Natkadaw. "Yayzin thoughtde" means that a junior drinks a cup of water given by her senior to be recognized her as a Natkadaw. This ceremony is necessary to held for every Natkadaw. The theme of this ceremony is a senior Natkadaw introduces her or his junior to the Nats to regard and look after his or her junior as a new Natkadaw. After drinking the seven cups of Yayzin for seven Years, she becomes a Natkadaw. She has been attending to the Taungpyone Nat Pwe since 1996. So she is a member of Shwetaik which is a place stored the list of Natkadaws. She is regarded as a Thosaund Miphayar (the honorable remark for the rank of a Natkadaw) after wedding Minyeyawswa Nat at his Natnan, Kyaitthalei Lartapone Village, Twentei Township, Yangon Region at 2007 (photo. 12). The rank of Thosaung Miphayar is higher than Baungdawsaung Amatgyi. She always attends the Talai Minyeyawswa Nantet pwe (the name of the ritual/ ceremony) to pay respect to Minyeyawswa (the name of the male spirit), twice a year: April and November.

According to the key informant interview, Mr. B's father was a Natkadaw. And his father passed away at he was eight years old. Although he was very young, his teacher wanted him to drink Yayzin (a cup of water) as his father's hirer. So he became a Natkadaw at eight years old and he learnt the key factors to be a Natkadaw from his teacher, his father's junior. As he has no child to heir his Natkadaw heritage, he wants to pass his knowledge to his juniors whom are called Nat thar thamee (thar is son, thamee is daughter.). He became a Boungdawsaung amatgyi which refers to his level is higher than a Natkadaw at 1995. Boungdawsaung amatgyi is an honorable person among the Nat worshippers and Natkadaws (photo. 13). The members

