

YANGON UNIVERSITY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES



**THE 1ST INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
LANGUAGES AND HUMANITIES**

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THE 1ST INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON LANGUAGES AND HUMANITIES

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The 1st International Conference on Languages and Humanities 2020

One of our missions is to establish and develop a pedagogic and academic environment that fosters intercultural understanding and interaction in society and promotes linguistic, academic and cultural exchanges. To implement this mission, YUFL International Conference on Languages and Humanities 2020 will be held on 6-8 January 2020 at YUFL, Yangon, Myanmar. Although it is a 2 Day Conference, there will be a half-day city tour on 8 January 2020.

The Conference marks the milestone of our Yangon University of Foreign Languages to lay the platform for scholars and students to engage in a multi-disciplinary exchange of ideas on languages and humanities. The Conference aims to contribute knowledge in humanities based on theoretical and conceptual approaches. This wonderful conference highlights to explore effective as well as alternative ways to understand the humanities including philosophy, religion, art, literature, history, psychology and anthropology.

This Conference will create an excellent opportunity for scholars, local and foreign, to exchange information and share experiences and results in all aspects of areas of interest, invaluable for young scholars and students. This will encourage advantages to create more coherent, flexible and responses for scholars.

The Conference will bring together all scholars of languages and humanities from across the world to discuss the new idea and development of their interested fields. It will establish the network to communicate for partners and stakeholders of our YUFL.

In recent years, language has gained more attention than ever before in both language teaching and learning processes. Its role is not only limited to communication but rather extends to vast branches of knowledge and human sciences. Also it is capable of developing human knowledge, extending the benefits of mankind. Learning a language means learning ways to see other cultures from the insider's view so that a learner can cope with a new community and expand his/her personal horizons.

In this globalized era, businesses need workers who can communicate in different languages and understand others' culture so that they can act like a bridge to new clients and customers and more likely to win trust and friendship of people whose languages they know. That is why, all education systems should ensure that they are able to make use of the potential benefits of language to expand access to and enhance the quality and relevance of learning. To this effect, teaching and learning processes should be shaped towards the needs of individual fulfillments and sustainable development.

Universities, as providers of education services to students, need to build their existing education, training and research strengths to meet the needs of students, businesses and industries. In addition, they need to deliver high quality, innovative products and services to students that meet or exceed their expectations. It is also necessary to engage students with advanced knowledge, current knowledge, theoretical frameworks and concepts, and emerging ideas. The learning resources provided and recommended are needed to be appropriate to the level of the course of study, consistent with the expected learning outcomes and modes of participation. To create equivalent opportunities for academic success, regardless of students' background, academic

integrity throughout academic activities are to be maintained and set up quality in education and training. To build excellence, diversity and equity, and to achieve specified learning outcomes, including research training, and professional accreditation of a course of study, quality improvement of higher education activities are to be specified.

This conference intends to invite discussions and deliberations on unique and need-based pedagogical concept. It aims to bring together the views and beliefs widely held among educators and practitioners about the current situation and position of foreign languages teaching and learning processes. It looks into the pivotal role played by academics in the realm of social development, existence of unique and innovative methods and approaches.

This conference, in response to the growing demand for foreign language teaching, opens gates through fruitful interactions for a progressive expansion and exploration, aiming at a better didactical framework and the quality improvement in research area which ensures success in the process of teaching foreign languages. The future perspectives of teaching foreign languages seem to be splendid in view of the rapid demand for learning foreign languages and career prospects across the globe.

This International Conference on Language and Humanities 2020 has its need-based objectives of inviting various field experts to get engaged in discussions, dialogues and transformation of views and ideas via presentations, talks and Qs & As about the area.

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RITUAL PRACTICES CONCERNING MYANMAR BOATS

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Abstract

Food, shelter and clothing are essential for human being. Transportation and conveying for the commodities are also important and necessary. Therefore, people invented wheels which became carts for land transport and raw rafts which became boats and barges for waterway transport. Nobody could infer the use of boat in Myanmar at what time or the form of boat or watercraft which was used primitively. But, mural paintings of Bagan period proved that boats were widely and commonly used for navigation of that time. From the time onwards, Myanmar people, especially in coastal regions and deltas are used the boats in their daily lives. They are skilful in constructing and using assorted types of watercrafts. In construction of boats, techniques are modified according to the ages and places. Ritual practices concerning boats are still performing regularly persist and following till today. This paper examines the facts on dos and don'ts of the construction of boats, of the launching ceremony after constructing boats, and of journey with boats. It also evaluates when and why ritual practices concerning boats are followed in Myanmar and how do boatmen observe ritual practices and explores which occult science associated with these ritual practices.

Keywords: ritual practice, boat, boatmen, spirit

Introduction

Lord Buddha preached since 6th century in the *Dīgha Nikāya* that human worshiped because they were frighten by the various threaten able, torture able and frighten able nature obstacles or dangerous phenomenon. They established pantheons far or near intending gods or spirits of the forest, mountain, rivers, big trees or plenty gods, goddesses, or spirits whichever the thought those were greater in power than human and they had supernatural power.²

Hindu merchants arrived at the ports of Southeast Asia by maritime trading before Christ. The Brahman accompanied with them to recite Veda verses. Those Brahman were clever also in fortune telling, sacrificial offering, making amulets, reciting mantra and medical knowledge. Some of them left behind in Myanmar and they were popular in the court of Myanmar as the advisors.³ The kings of Myanmar used to discuss with them when and how to march the army and where, how and when the new palace should be established or when solving other important problems. Omen, fortune prediction, some tradition and some ritual believing concerning with Brahmanism prevailed into the commoners from the government officials before the arrival of Buddhism at Myanmar.

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² *Dhamma Pasāda Kathā*, Vol. 2, Yangon, Thitsar Mandaing Press, 2002, p. 159

³ Min Sithu, *History of Nat Worship in Early Period of Myanmar*, Yango, Myint Swe Book House, 1992, p. 97

Some people discussed, accepted the Brahman rituals for the success and improvement of their political, economic and social problems even in the modern days.

Materials

All the data used in this research are collected from the Yangon University Library, Universities' Central Library and National Library. Interviewees had done in Dawei, Phyapon, Pathein, Sittwe, Thanlyin and Thounywa. Moreover, some of the sources are received from U Ko Ko Naing @ Maung Naing (Philosophy).

Discussion

In this paper, the believes, observances, and ritual practices when the boatmen are building, repairing, launching the boat, travelling by boat and taking part in regatta and boat festivals from the times of Myanmar kings still nowadays were discussed.

Practices for the Construction and Renovation of Boats

In Myanmar, there are plenty of navigable river and stream like the networks or a spider-web and important for the transportation. Boats are essential crafts for daily social life of the people who live in the coastal, delta areas and who live near the rivers of Myanmar. They are skilful in navigation, construction and maintain of the water-crafts, Although the technology is advanced through the ages, they do not neglect the religious, traditional and ritual practices, still perfect and obey.

There were some customary practices to be followed for the building a new boat, docking for renovation or repairing and at the time of starting a voyage. Boatmen had some believing for their boat in particular that what they called nature or habit of their boat. It was the kinds of superstitious, what the boat like and dislike by doing something for example some boat like to bring pork on the boat and some boat dislike, and some boatmen prohibited to wear the shoe on the boat and etc.

Choosing Timber

In inhabited areas in Myanmar and especially within villages or towns, they believe that almost every large tree has a spirit. For constructing the boats or other buildings, they offered food and drink to please the guardian spirits before cutting the trees.¹ When they start to enter forest, woodcutters offer food and drink to the guardian spirit of the forest at first. When they find the well-tree to use, they put their cutting tools in vertical position at the tree, and offer food, drink and candle at the spirit of tree to please. While they are cutting the tree, they offer to the spirit of tree again if the candle-light went out or the tree they cut fall on the other tree.² Although this ritual is still practised in some regions, most of the men ignore this traditional ritual.

¹ Than Tun, Dr. (ed) *The Royal Orders of Burma, (AD. 1598-1885)*, Part. VI. (AD 1807-1810), Kyoto, Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, 1988, p.593 (Hereafter cited as *ROBVI*)

² Interview with U Ko Ko Naing , (Mg Naing (Philosophy)), The Author, (16.5.2019)

Not only for the construction of boats, but also for building a house or building a monastery or constructing a pagoda Myanmar practiced the traditional occult science. They also obeyed the principles of dos and don'ts. There were some beliefs in choosing timber for their boats or carts as follows:¹

- (1) The timber which was found by a Sunday born or collected it on Sunday and if that tree grew near a mound or dug by a wild boar, it should not be use. If it had been used the owner of it could meet death.
- (2) If it was concerned with Monday, it could be used. The owner would be glorified.
- (3) If it was concerned with Tuesday, it was called vulture timber. The owner could meet death.
- (4) If it was concerned with Wednesday, the owner could be destroyed.
- (5) If it was concerned with Thursday and Friday, the owner would be rich.
- (6) If it was concerned with Saturday, it was called decayed or ruined timber. The boat which was made with that timber ought not to tie at the port.

If there were some knots on the timber which was intended to make a boat, owner of the boat ought to offer for the guardian spirits as follows:²

- (1) Baked and cleaned Nga Zin Yaing – striped dwarf cat fish (*Corydoras hastatus*)
- (2) Nga Khone Ma (puntiuschola) or Nga Poke Thin – croaker (*Micropogonius udulatus*)
- (3) Nga Phyin Thet (*Tricogaster fasciatus*) with balls of cocked rice.

Although this ritual is still practised in some regions, most of the men ignore this traditional ritual, and use to buy and build their boats with fibre or teak or other according to their wealth.

Choosing the auspicious times

In making the secular works, Myanmar chose the auspicious time. When the boat builder liked the timber log to make the boat, he had to choose the auspicious time under the advice of the fortune teller. In ancient times, there were records for making the secular works in the auspicious days and avoiding the ill-fated days.

During the Nyaung Yang Period King Anaukpetlun(1605-1628), the king consulted with astrologers and chose the auspicious time for building the ten war boats. At the time of building *Hlaw-ka* boats for Thado Min Hla Shwe Taung, Prince Sagaing and Thado Min Ye Shwe Taung, Prince Nyaung Yan, by the astrologer's calculation construction started at 11.00 a.m on 3 June 1795 facing to the northwest. The work should undertake by a Sunday born in the prow, a Thursday born in the middle part and a Wednesday born in the stern of the boat.³ Similarly, for the construction of *Pyi Gyi Mon* Royal Barge started at

¹ Verse of Choosing Timber for Boat and Carts. Palm- leaf Manuscript No. 392624. Yangon Universities' Central Library. (Hereafter cited as; UCL. Palm- leaf Manuscript No. 320624.)

² UCL, Palm- leaf Manuscript No. 320624.

³ Than Tun, Dr. (ed) *The Royal Orders of Burma, (AD. 1598-1885), Part. V. (AD 1788-1806)*, Kyoto, Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, 1986, p. 500 (Hereafter cited as *ROB V*)

auspicious time 8:45 am on 16 June 1795 by a Sunday born in the bottom of the barge, a Thursday born in the stern and a Wednesday born in the forepart facing north. The renovation of boat started during the month of December 1820. A Sunday born and a Monday born men started the work facing towards east.¹

In modern times, the owners of boats still practice these rituals in building their boats according to their desires. Most of the boatmen are avoid the ill-fated days and Wednesday in building or renovation of their boats. But now boats are built by anybody born who was hired to build the boats by boat owners.

Ritual Practices

Offering Flowers and Tendrons

Boat builders have used to worship and offer food and drink to three Gems (Buddha, *Dhamma*, *Sangha*), and Nats who were preserving the *Sasana* before constructing or renovation of boats. When boat builders built their boats, they offered flowers and tendrons to three Gems, and Nats and recited the *Paritta - Sutta* to ward off evil or harm from environment. They believed that no one could not disturb in construction and renovation after offering and reciting *Paritta*.

The flowers and tendrons offered to the three Gems and Nats in constructing of *Hlaw-ka* on 3 June 1749 and *Pyi Gyi Mon Barge* on 16 June 1795, and in renovation of boat in December 1820 were showed with table as follow:

The Flowers and Tendrons offered to the three Gems and Nats

Construction of <i>Hlaw-ka</i> on 3 June 1795	Construction of <i>Pyi Gyi Mon Barge</i> on 16 June 1795	Revonation of boat in December 1820
Ohn – Coconut (leaves)	Ohn – Coconut (leaves)	Ohn – Coconut (leaves)
Gangaw - Cobra's Saffron (leaves or flowers)	Gangaw – Cobra's Saffron (leaves or flowers)	Gangaw – Cobra's Saffron (leaves or flowers)
Myayza – Bermuda grass	Myayza – Bermuda grass	Myayza – Bermuda grass
Chaya-(<i>Amoora rohituka</i>) (leaves or flowers) and	Chaya - (<i>Amoora rohituka</i>) (leaves or flowers) and	Thee –Wood Apple (leaves)
Thabyay - Java Plum or Eugenia (leaves) ²	Thabyay - Java Plum or Eugenia (leaves) ³	Thabyay - Java Plum or Eugenia (leaves) ⁴
	Dhan – Henna or Common Garden Balsam (leaves) ⁵	Muya – Maya Gyi (<i>Justicia adhatoda</i>) (leaves) ⁶

In the reigns of Myanmar Kings, offerings of flowers and tendrons to three Gems and Nats were usually the same. But today the boat owners offer flowers and plants of trees at the head of prow

¹ ROB V, p. 505

² ROB V, p. 500

³ ROB V, p. 500

⁴ ROB V, p. 500

⁵ ROB V, p. 500

⁶ U Tun Yi. (ed) *Treatise on Royal Vehicles, Furniture and Variety of Court Affairs*, Yangon, Yarpayae Press, 2011, p.277 (Hereafter cited as: Tun Yi, *Variety of Court Affairs*)

until they finished the boats to dedicate the three Gems and Nats. They usually offer flowers and tendrons of Ohn – Coconut (*Cocos nucifera*), Gangaw – Cobra's Saffron (*Mesua ferrea*), Myayza – Bermuda grass (*Cynodon dactylon*), Malaca - Guava (*Psidium guajava*), Thabyay, as the wish of boat builders to finish their boat construction without difficulties.¹

Offering Food and Drink

Boat builders offer three Gems and other local guardian spirits with offertories as their traditional in construction or renovation of boats. When new Shwetone Hlay was building in 1882, the chief builder prepared to offer for three Gems, four guardian spirits of Sasana and nats. Those were usually prepared the complete sets of coconut and banana including cooked rice and curry, assorted jam and sweet cake, white and red cloth, and fine reed mat, each article in nine numbers to offer. Those were the main and important offerings. In Sinma Village of Pathein, they pour Shweye and Ngweye (water with gold, silver and jewellery immersed in it for auspicious use) at the prow of boats firstly to get auspicious occasion of prosperity and then they build their boats.

The Nats are traditionally the protectors of homes, villages, towns, mountains and forest although they have also been given Buddhist connotations. They believe that Nats can bring danger and misfortune to people who do not respect them or don't believe in them. The rest guardian spirits including Myanmar traditional thirty-seven Nats, boat guardian spirit La-maing-shin-ma was paid respect by offering suitable articles. During the renovation of boat started during the month of December 1820, There needed to make offering for another female guardian spirit named *La- maing Shin- ma nat* (female guardian spirit of a boat) as follows:²

- (1) 3 Cool drinking water pot with assorted flowers, inside the middle of boat
- (2) A Towel
- (3) A New upper garment
- (4) A Silk woman's skirt consisting of three parts (sash, skirt and hem)
- (5) A Hairpin
- (6) A Comb
- (7) A Mirror
- (8) 30 Joss sticks
- (9) Bottle of fragrance liquid
- (10) White cloth and Red cloth
- (11) A Mat woven with outer rind of a kind of reed in fine texture
- (12) Bolt of Chintz

In upper Myanmar, boatmen usually worship and offer *U Min Kyaw Nat*.³ In Phyapone Regions, they offer Amay-yin-yin and U Shin Gyi at the time of constructing or renovation of boats.

On some boats, there were spirits who died on the boat during he served on duty. They did not get away from the previous life and they guarded the boat dutifully to ward

¹ Interview with U Maung Swe, Boat Owner, Phyapone (25.5.2019)

² Tun Yi, *Variety of Court Affairs*, pp. 250 - 251

³ Interview with Daw Sein Tin, Natkadaw, Kyemyindine, Yangon (3.6.2019)

off evil but brought danger and misfortune to those who made mistake on the boat. If the person who made the mistake, he or she offered the spirits and asked to excuse him or her. The renovation of *Shwe Tone* Royal boat was made two times in 1820 and 1882, respectively. The following table shows the offertories that repairers gave to guardian spirits named *Nga Daw Kun nat* and *Nga Daw Ta nat* who are Mon nationals died on the boat.

The Offertories to Guardian Spirits¹

Sr.	Offertories of 1820	Offertories of 1882
1	Fabulous white robe or white <i>Pu-so</i> (sarong)-two	two fabulous white robe (<i>bwe-phyu</i>)
2	<i>Dak- pan Oat</i> (? A kind of necklace or cover clothe for the breast)	<i>dak-pan</i> and cotton cloth- three
3	Cotton cloth – three bolts	three bolts printed cotton cloth
4	Painted cotton or chintz – one bolts	two pink coloured shirts with wide sleeves
5	Pink coloured shirt with wide sleeves – two	two foreign made Sarong or <i>Puso</i>
6	Foreign made <i>Pu- so</i> (sarong) – two	fourteen candle sticks
7	Candles – fourteen	two bottles of rose water
8	Rose water bottle – two	two copper tray
9	Copper tray – two	two bottles of liquer
10	Liquor – two bottles	two swords with scabbard
11	Sword in scabbard slung from the shoulder – two	two fried chicken
12	Fried chicken in complete – two	seven kinds of cake each in seven number
13	Seven kinds of cake – seven each	seven fried large Hamilton's carp with head and tail
14	Fried big fish in complete with head and tail – seven	coconut, sugar cane and banana in complete set
15	Banana, sugar cane and coconut, in complete set - three	three cups of water

Occult Science Arrangement

Everybody wants to be prosperity and live as long as he could. Some body tried hard themselves but some followed treaties on worldly affairs to avert impending misfortune or to realize what they wish.

Before a new boat launch or going maiden voyage boatmen used to do some occult science to cover the protection for the boat and to get success and prosperity of the boat. They used to recite *Paritta* and some *mantra* to ward off evil or harm. Some owners of the

¹ Tun Yi, *Variety of Court Affairs*, pp. 249-251

boat prepared (*in:*) cabalistic square or signs composed of mystic figures and characters in a grid and after reciting respective *mantras*, they put inside the boat at calculated time by a suitable and respective person.

For example, *Shwe-tone Hlay* which was famous for its occult science arrangement was copied for the replica in second time in 1882. After it was constructed cabalistic squares, they were put inside the boat as follows:

- (1) Figure of *Zawana Nat*, writing around it was an important *Mantra* was drawn over the cabalistic square and put inside the place of 4.5 ft from the prow of the boat by Gun Minister *Min Gyi Min Thado Thu Dhamma Maha Thet Taw She*.
- (2) Figure of *Waruna Nat*, writing around it was an another *mantra* was drawn over the cabalistic square and put at the right side of the prow of the boat by *Mingyi Min Thado Mingyi Maha Min Htin Sithu*.
- (3) Figure of *Matali Nat* writing around it was an another *mantra* was drawn over the cabalistic square and put at the right side of the prow of the boat by *Min Gyi Min Gaung Maha Kyaw Htin*.

Likewise, Ministers, *Wuns* and Senior Officers put the cabalistic squares into the boat fifteen each side of the boat and one at the prow, one at the stern altogether thirty-two.¹ Although occult sciences are not widely used at now, they are still practiced as amulet in some boat workshops in Patheingyi and Inlay Regions according to the boat owners.²

Moreover, they put sacred soil (ground from *Buddha Gaya*) in the golden casket and put in the bow-store of boat to be free from evil or harm.³ Now boat owners put the sacred soil from pagodas or monastery in the bow-store of the boat. In some cargo boats, sacred grounds are put on the high shelf for the shrine. This ritual practise still practice in some boats of Phyapone regions.⁴ In some boats of Inlay region, *Naga Gamon* (one of the species of orchid) is kept in the bow-store.⁵ We should keep our traditional of technology of our traditional occult sciences and use in useful works.

Practices in Boat Launching Ceremony

At a launching ceremony after the renovation works or the construction works finished for a new boat, there usually made an offering for the goddess *Mani May Kha-lar*, preserver of the ocean or water and female guardian spirit of boat *La-maing Shin-ma*.⁶ *Ka-wa La-maing* is the guardian spirit of boats and carts. It is offered with fragrance liquid at the four corners of boat and recited some mantras to be free from evil or harm.

In modern times, the articles of offerings for the guardian spirits were changed, but the reverence still existed. Believing in *Nats* or spirit worshiping is accepted traditionally through past generations. Myanmar boatmen believe that goddess *Mani-may-kha-la* preserves the river or ocean

¹ Tun Yi, *Variety of Court Affairs*. p – 259 - 265

² Interview with U Ko Ko Naing (16.5.2019)

³ Tun Yi, *Variety of Court Affairs*., p. 259

⁴ Interview with U Maung Swe (25.5.2019)

⁵ Interview with U Ko Ko Naing (16.5.2019)

⁶ Tun Yi, *Variety of Court Affairs*., pp. 266-267

or waterway and *La-pai shin-ma* or *La-mai shin-ma* Lady Nat preserves the boats or water-crafts. Moreover, in lower Myanmar where tidal water reach is governed by U Shin-gyi Nat who is worshipped by the people who work in the waterways and even who stay in the towns and villages in those areas.

The boatmen of the small boats around port of Yangon usually worship *U Shin Gyi*, *Kwin-paing Bo Bo* (Grandpa, the owner of the field) and *Yay-gyaung Bo Bo* (Grandpa of the maritime). Actually they do not know who they are and what are they, but they worship and offer by tradition. Offertories for those guardian spirits are as follows: steamed glutinous rice and banana for *U Shin Gyi* nat before and after the Buddhist lent, and only fried chicken and *A-yet* (alcohol) for the *Kwin-paing Bo Bo* and *Ye-gyaung Bo Bo*, but they do not need to offer daily or monthly. Usually they do the ceremony of offering before maiden voyage.¹

In some regions of *Thanlyin*, *Ye-gyaung Bo Bo* is also called the *Phay-gyi Bo*, and is usually offered with fried chicken and alcohol in *Tagu* or *Kason*. In some regions of *Thanlyin*, boatmen offer rice, *ngapi.jei* (sauce of fish) with chili powder, the boiling egg and *ngami.bou'* (baked of fish) to *Thakinma Shwe Kyar Oo*. Sometimes they cut the neck of the hen and applied the blood of hen at the corner of fishing trap and pray for *Phay-gyi Bo* to be free from any evil. In some villages of *Phyapone* which are related with sea, fishery boatmen worship the *Shwe Kayin* nat to be free from evil. They offer the *Shwe Kayin* nat with soda, *thin-dain* (smock-like garment), comb, mirror and comestic. They offer mainly *U Shin Gyi* nat before and after the Buddhist lent but they offer and worship the *Shwe Kayin* nat before fishing and when they show their new boats and their new fishing gear or fishing trap.

Practices before Leaving from the River Bank

If a boat was intended to leave the harbour tomorrow boatmen used to pay respect or worship and offer *U Shin Gyi Nat* today, especially in the evening. *U Shin Gyi* guardian spirit preferred to offer the edible on a new altar. By using a big bamboo an temporary altar is built easily by the man who will invite the *U Shin Gyi nat* and his followers. The offertory were also very sample just preparing steamed glutinous rice, bananas, jaggery balls, some sugar, and some fresh kernels. This spirit was a devotee Buddhist and he disliked alcohol and meat to eat. Therefore offertory for him is no alcohol and only vegetable. Master of the boat, crew and the person who would travel by that boat must be attended the ceremony.²

Usually, the boatmen offer and worship another female *Nat* or guardian spirit is called *La-maing Shin-ma*. They make the ceremony especially in late evening by offering only cooked rice and curry. The boatmen put the offertories on the fifth or middle segment of the boat where it collected the water to throw. At that time boatmen used to pray to keep the boat afloat and when they meet shallow water to lift the bottom of the boat upward not to touch the shoal.³ Some boatmen offer the rice and curry to the respective guardian spirit before they have their meal.

Moreover, the boatmen who travel along the coastal voyages they used to pay respect for the guardian spirits when they start each voyage by offering *Ka-daw-pwe* especially in the wheel-house and five plants of sugar cane are fixed at the prow for the good omen. It means to get success whatever they have planned; in Myanmar it is to say *Kyan-taing-aung*.

¹ Interview with U San Myint Maung, Boat Owner, Thanlyin, (2.6.2019)

² Ludu U Hla, *Kyun-daw-hlay-thu-gyi, (I am Master of the Boat)*, Mandalay, Kyi-pwar-yay Sarpay, 2016, P. 53 (Hereafter cited as: Ludu U Hla, *Master of the Boat*)

³ Ludu U Hla, *Master of the Boat*, p. 53-54

If the owner of the boat who was from Upper Myanmar, he used to do offering to the *Nat* or guardian spirit named *Ko Gyi Kyaw* before from leaving home port. The main offertories are fried chicken and alcohol and boatmen also drink and feast happily. In the late evening, they make a devotional offering to the *La-maing Shin-ma*, but when they arrived Pyay or Kyangin, they offer and worship to *U Shin Gyi* without fail.¹

Bamar, Mon, Rakhine and Karen Buddhist who earn their living concerning with the boat pay respect for the local guardian spirits. In the environ of Sittwe harbour the boatmen and even the residents of Sittwe, pay respect or worship the female guardian spirit called *Bu-daw-maw ah-shin-ma* by offering candles, joss sticks, flowers and sometimes with scarf.² In Dawei, boatmen and traders who travel by the coastal waterways they used to pay respect or worship *Shin-gyi-Ein, Shin-gi-ei, (U Shin Gyi)*.³ Its shrine can be found at the front of the every house in most of the villages and at the entrance of the villages in some villages of Dawei. The offertories are as usual with a coconut, two or three bunches of banana, candles, joss sticks, three or five quids of betel and a packet of preserved tea leaves which are gathered in a bowl or basket which is called *Ka-daw-pwe*.⁴ Those were the main and important offerings, but for the rest guardian spirits including Myanmar traditional thirty seven Nats and boat guardian spirit *La-maing-shin-ma* were paid respect by offering suitable articles.⁵

Dos or Don't in boats

The boatmen and the travellers had to obey the rules of the boat what to do and don't. Mostly, it is prohibited wearing footwear when they go up on the prow of the ferry boats, and when they enter into the bridge or wheel-house. And ladies are not allowed to enter the wheel-house. When they are travelling they dislike asking estimated time of arrival to the port of call. Moreover, some small boats or coastal going schooners have habits or nature as follows: some boats dislike to put pork inside the boats, some boats dislike using excessively obscene language, some boats, some boats dislike sexual intercourse on the boats, but some like this. When the boatmen repair the boats they used to offer *Ka-daw-pwe* for the *Taung-pyon Min-nyi-naung* and mechanic or the engineer of the boat usually does not eat pork because they had worshiped *Min-nyi-naung*.⁶ Before they start each voyage, they use to pour the pure water at the prow to get prosperity. They must not catch the big fish which weight has about 100 viss or older than the boatman. If they catch it, they let it in the river after pouring liquid of fragrant.⁷

¹ Ludu U Hla, *Master of the Boat*, p. 68

² Interview with Dr Phru Phru Khine, Lecturer, History Department, Taungkok Degree College (8.6.2019)

³ (a) U Tha Tun Hla, 52-year old, Boatmen, Sittwe, Rakhine State. (2.6.2019)

(b) U Myo Hla, 43-year old, Kawthaung Myo, Taninthayi Region (25.5.2019)

⁴ U Myo Hla, 43-year old, Kawthaung Myo, Taninthayi Region

⁵ Tun Yi, *Variety of Court Affairs*, pp. 249-251

⁶ Interview with U Shin Tate, 62-year old, Schooner owner, Myaik Myo, Taninthayi Region, (25.5.2019)

⁷ Interview with Kyaw Htet Paing, Boatman, Kalawe Village, Thanlyin, (29.6.2019)

Findings

The most spirits are traditionally the protectors of homes, villages, towns, mountains, and forests although they have also been given Buddhist connotations. However, these were superstitions and there are many facts without reasons, those are not much important for the non-believer to the Nats or guardian spirits. But for the believer those are important as the matter of life and death. If everything is fine the guardian spirits satisfied what they had offered and if something wronged during the journey something or somebody was in fault. Those are traditional practice and the boatmen usually do not miss the offering and worshipping. After they had observed, they would like to think that their duty of offering was okay and they had improved self-confidence. The ritual worship and practices are different in individuals who dwell in specific environmental location. Consequently, the names of the spirits and ways of offerings change from one place to another. Although they are named as Buddhists, they still practice the sacrifice offering in fishing. In some regions, their ritual practices and occult sciences are kept as their traditional heritage and as their amulet.

Conclusion

The traditional rituals of choosing the auspicious times are still rooted in social life of Myanmar people. They offer the *Ka-daw-pwe* (a bowl or basket with offertories) to the three Gems and they started the ceremony by reciting *Paritta* from Brahman priests and Buddhist monks to ward off evil or harm. They believe that every fields, mountains, rivers and trees have spirits, and they will be free from catastrophes if they offer them. Most of the spirits have been worshiped since the ancient Myanmar kings but some nats such as *Shwe Kayin* nat were worshiped at the colonial period. Some of the boat owners still practise the occult sciences to make more powerful in rowing their boats and make the guardian spirits of their boats. In starting their journey, they say the auspicious words or auspicious action such as pouring the Shwe-ye and Ngwe-ye at the head of the bow. In ancient times, the preserver of water, Mani-may-kalar, was offered and worshiped, but now the spirits river called in different names are offered and worshiped. Most of the boatmen offer and worship U Shin Gyi before and after the Buddhist lent to be free from evil when they go to water way. Moreover other local guardian spirits are offered and worshiped. There are rules of the boats what to dos and don't like not stepping the bow and catching the big fish which weight has more than boatman. In some regions, ritual practices keep on as their traditional heritage. Some practise the occult sciences as their amulet in making their secular works.

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- U Maung Swe, 63 Years Old, Boat Owner, Phyaone (25.5.2019)
- Daw Sein Tin, 78 Years Old, Natkadaw, Kyemyindine, Yangon (3.6.2019)
- U San Myint Maung, 44 Years Old, Boat Owner, Thanlyin, (2.6.2019)
- Dr Phru Phru Khine, 43 Years Old, Lecturer, History Department, Taungkok Degree College (8.6.2019)
- U Tha Tun Hla, 52 Years Old, Boatmen , Sittwe, Rakhine State. (2.6.2019)
- U Myo Hla, 43 Years Old, Kawthaung Myo, Taninthayi Region (25.5.2019)
- U Shin Tate, 62 Years Old, Schooner owner, Myaik Myo, Taninthayi Region, (25.5.2019)
- Kyaw Htet Paing, 20 Years Old, Boatman, Kalawe Village, Thanlyin, (29.6.2019)