

Title	Traditional Beliefs on West Pwo's <i>Nat Sar (Anhyein)</i> in Nyaungpinseik Village, Magyichaung Village Tract, Einme Township, Ayeyarwaddy Region
All Authors	Aye Aye Pyone
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9.5 RELIGION, TRADITIONAL BELIEFS AND SOCIAL LIFE

**Traditional Beliefs on West Pwo's *Nat Sar (Anhyein)* in Nyaungpinseik Village,
Magyichaung Village Tract, Einme Township, Ayeyarwaddy Region**

Aye Aye Pyone

Department of Anthropology
University of Mandalay
Myanmar

Abstract

The Kayins are one of the main ethnic groups in Myanmar, and the Pwo Kayin is one subgroup of them. There are two different groups of Pwo Kayin, namely: West Pwo (*Flone:*) and East Pwo (*Flon*). This paper is an attempt to find out the traditional beliefs of the West Pwo Kayin's ritual 'Nat Sar Chin' (*Anhyein*) in Nyaungpinseik village, Enme township, Ayeyarwaddy Region. The population of the West Pwo Kayin in Nyaungpinseik village is 517 (2015). The ritual Nat Sar Chin (*Anhyein*) has been held for 100 years at Nyaungpinseik village. In this research, the data was collected by ethnographic research methods. The research period is from 2018 to 2019, and the research subjects are villagers who have experience in *Anhyein*, and the practitioners (Shamans) or *Phusayar*. The ritual of *Anhyein* is usually held, when all the family members return to the parent's house. The ritual is held for six days. In the month before the ritual, family members have to avoid foods such as eggs, pork and chicken, which will be included in the ritual (*Anhyein*) offering. In addition, there are foods which are forbidden during the ritual. Holding the ritual is connected to their economy, health and education. But some families do not want to hold the *Anhyein* because of the practice of killing animals, concerns over its expense, and the rarity of meeting family members for rituals.

Keywords: Ritual, Shaman, Tradition

Introduction

The Kayins are one of the major ethnic groups in Myanmar and Pwo Kayin is one of its subgroups. The Pwo Kayin may be divided into two main groups, namely West Pwo (*Flone:*) and East Pwo (*Flon*). This paper aims to describe a west Pwo Kayin ritual, namely ***Nat Sar (Anhyein)*** in Nyaungpinseik village, Magyichaung village tract, Einme Township.

The population of Nyaungpinseik village is 517 (2015 census) and all are Buddhists. The ***Nat Sar (Anhyein)*** ritual has been held for 100 years. Research subjects are the villagers who have

experiences in **Anhyein** and the religious practitioners (shaman) **Phusayar**. The total study populations were (23) people. The study was conducted between 2015 April 20 to December 2017.⁴³

A seminar organized by the Kayin on Kayin culture was held in Yangon, 12-14 October 1967, attended by 218 representatives of Yangon, 26 townships of Ayeyarwaddy division, Tharyarwaddy and Kayin (Kawthuelae) State. They discussed and decided to write down monographs about six subjects to do with Kayin, namely on their literature, religion, fine arts, dress and coiffure style, archaeological materials and their traditional customs.

Twenty nine Kayin representatives discussed “Which kinds of traditional customs are there among the Kayin” and determined 10 central points among Kayin ethnic’s customs, namely:

1. Paying homage to the parents
2. Taking out the bones (*A- Yoe -Kaut -Chin*)
3. Spirit eating (*Nat-sar-chin*)(*Anhyein*)
4. Astrological thinking
5. Propose and marriage
6. Paying avoidance (*A-Shaung-Pay- Chin*)
7. Transferring to New Year
8. Calling the spirit (*Late Pyar call chin*)
9. Offering to the *Koe-myoe-shin*
10. Living and working together in any places.

Among these customs, I would like to focus on no. 3 Spirit eating (*Anhyein, nat -sar-chin*).

Advance Preparation for Anhyein

Anhyein celebrations last six days duration in total. Kaying distinguish between three types, namely (1) worship (*kogweya*), (2) dependence (*ahmaya*) and (3) custom (*yoya*). The *Anhyein* itself takes four days, but including no. (2) may take 6 days in total. The extra two days are devoted to the spirits.

(1) *Yoya* - In the *Anhyein*, relatives gather to eat in hierarchical order. Since there is no feeding of the spirits, but as it is purely a ritual of obeisance parents, the term *nat-sar-chin* is slightly misleading, and it would be better translated as ‘paying homage ceremony’. *Anhyein* serves to apologise to one’s parents for past transgressions (*Parr-hyein*) that may otherwise lead to hell. It involves expressing gratitude for having taken care of them from birth. Those who participate in the ritual are called *Nat-sat Kayin* because they were born by combining the *Mann-thu-kha-note* (male spirit) and *Nant-naung-kha-ri* (human).

(2) *Kogweya* – As part of the Buddhist custom, Buddha, Dhama, Sanga, parents and teachers are worshiped as one category.

⁴³ This research uses ethnographic research methods. In this research, I used information from library research and field research. Qualitative method was used to get data. Therefore observation, key informant interview (KII), in-depth interview (IDI) were applied to collect data. To collect the data for *Anhyein*, it was done by taking photographs, recording with video, tape recorder and notes-taking.

(3) *Ahtaya* – Kayin rely on U Shin Gyi and Koe-myoe-shin for protection. U Shin Gyi is a spirit whose domain is the entire village whereas Koe-myoe-shin spirit's domain is the nine cities and nine districts. These spirits have the power to drive away evil spirits. They are entitled to offerings for protection, especially at the beginning of the New Year and at various times during the year. Offerings are especially made before the *anhyein* to request protection for this event. After the *Anhyein*, they thank the spirits and pray for them to look after in their daily life.

The Requirements for *Anhyein*

The five offertory sets (*kadawpwe*) are required to make the *Anhyein*- one offertory set for U-shin-gyi, one for Koe-myoe-shin, one for *Mwee-shar* (the great grandparents) and two for both parents.

According to the speech of the shaman (*Phusayar*), *Mwee-shar* controls the spirits of the dead parents and the spirits can attend to the paying obeisance ceremony only when they have permission from *Mwee-shar*. Because of this, they request to *Mwee-shar* for the permission of spirits by offering a set of offertory.

Moreover, two pigs (a castrated boar and a virgin sow), four chickens (two hens and two cocks) and candles are required for the offering. The pigs must be wholly black. The chicken must be virgin. The intention of using the chickens and pigs are that they are long familiar with these animals.

Byat (tree branch stems flat enough to eat from as if they were plates) and *War-kyi-tauk* (bamboo bottles) are required as eating utensils by family members.

Moreover, an iron bucket is also required to cook pork and chicken. The iron bucket is intended to help cook quickly and to have the capacity for all of the meat.

The main point of the *Anhyein* is to gather all family members. If the whole family cannot gather, they assume any missing persons are travelling.

At the time of *Anhyein*, they use only natural customary utensils. The ancient Kayin do not use chemicals. They live off the forest where the trees and bamboo are plenty. In ancient times, Kayin brothers and sisters used to eat jointly directly from *Byat* whenever they found food without serving it up onto separate plates. They loved each other. They together drank the water from the *War-kyi-tauk*. They have paid obeisance to the parents by showing all family members to be living in harmony in full understanding of one another.

The Style of Having the Food During *Anhyein*

On the first day of *Anhyein*, they boil a hen and a cock, cook the rice and then prepare the foods in the *Byat*. *War-kyi-tauk* is filled with water and placed near the *Byat*. If both parents are alive, they put hand-washing water of their parents as the drinking water for the children. If both parents passed away, the shaman recites verses to turn this water into parental hand washing water. This ritual aims to escape from transgressing their parents. And then, the shaman invites the parental spirits and blesses the foods so that family can enjoy it with the same ritual efficacy.

At first, the oldest family member eats the first piece of what he/she likes from the rice and chicken. The oldest person starts the meal by taking the first choice, eating happily to the point of spilling. All family members have their foods in descending order of age in the family.

After eating rice and chicken from the *Byat*, they drink water from the *War-kyi-tauk* also until water spills over. Before eating rice, they have to sprinkle fragrance and pay obeisance to their parents. If the parents passed away, the fragrance is dedicated to them and they have the foods after paying obeisance.

On the second day, they perform the *Anhyein* with a virgin sow. Family members clear the dead sow of bristles and cut the breast, clean with the shaman and take out the all parts of the pig, including the head. They boil the head and all its parts by placing it in the iron bucket. They use two bamboo sticks to carry the bucket to prevent the heat from affecting the hands. They take the bucket from the stove and continue preparing the meat in the *Byat*. The head and all parts of the pork are placed with the rice in the *Byat*. At one end, *War-kyi-tauk* is also filled with water as in the first day. They eat the foods by the mouthful and take turns in descending order of family members like in the first day.

On the first day of *Anhyein* they offer rice and two chicken (hen and cock) to the parents of the house wife. On the second day, they offer a virgin sow to the parents of the house wife. On the third day, they prepare rice and one hen and one cock for the parents of husband. On the fourth day, they pay obeisance with the rice and a castrated pig for the parents of the husband. The eating on later days are as did on the first day.

If their parents died, they have to prepare the bed-sheet, the pillow, the blanket and mosquito net for them. Family members prepare food that dead people used to eat while they were living at home, for example; green tea, tea leaf, palm sugar, betel, tobacco, pipe, etc.

At the time of performing *Anhyein*, they used to eat in separate rooms with doors and the curtains closed (*Done-keit*). They are anxious to be disturbed and it can bring about dissension among family members if other people see them. If they eat at the house, they have to eat after closing the main door of the house. They do not use to let the stranger come into the house.

Mannas and Taboos

In the *Anhyein*, they can use only entire black castrated pigs and virgin sows. If they decide to perform *Anhyein*, they have to make *Sone-pha-la-zo* (pre-making of *Anhyein*) in advance for one month. They buy the pork and prepare the offertory and making the *Sone-pha-la-zo*. They must not eat related foods such as egg, pork or chicken before performing the *Anhyein* since the time of *Sone-pha-la-zo* because they intend to pay obeisance to the parents and they avoid these foods before parents eat these foods.

During *Anhyein*, they have to avoid eating prawn because prawns move backward. They do not want to go backward but forward. They have to avoid also eating animals living underground, such as snake, eel and frog. They do not want to sink into such places where these animals live. Moreover they refrain from eating crabs as these do not move straight to their intended place but move sideways. They do not eat animals renowned for their bad character. Within the four-day period of

performing the *Anhyein*, they avoid bad things that may bring bad luck. They endeavor to make and say things that can bring good luck. Moreover they have to avoid drinking alcohol, quarreling and speaking obscene language or impolite speech. They can receive cash but they must not use it during this time.

The chickens and pigs they use for *Anhyein* are bought as whole animals from places elsewhere. Kayin aim for a pure heart and mind in paying obeisance to the parents and a pure donation. They must avoid crossing over the pigs and chicken that they intend to prepare for making *Anhyein* and not to eat leftovers. They must be on their best behavior- no scolding, kicking, shouting or abusing. Because of this, they only purchase whole pigs and chickens from other places for making *Anhyein*. If they purchase from elsewhere, the people who make *Anhyein* do not concern themselves with how these animals are bred. The most important point is not to make any faults oneself.

When first preparing for the *Anhyein*, if they do not mix pork with any other foods (such as potatoes) they cannot in future mix any either. If they begin by selling pork then they are allowed to sell again afterwards. If they start by using the whole pig, then they cannot sell them in parts. The people who used to make *Lat-ta- kai* (the leg of pig limited by a handful) make *Anhyein* when the weight of pig reaches 90/100 viss they take out all part of the body for *Anhyein* and serve everything to the other people. Then they can sell any surplus pork from these.

At the time of *Anhyein*, the shaman has to ask women whether they are pregnant if there are couples among the family members. If there is pregnancy in the family, she has to eat more limit for the baby. Some women do not know as she is pregnant and if she did not eat more than one person's meal for her baby, they assume this *Anhyein* is not successful. Moreover, if there are bachelors and virgins among family members, the shaman has to ask them whether they have boy or girl friends and whether they have lived together or not. If single persons have boy or girl friends and they have broken the etiquette, they have to call and eat together in the place of *Anhyein*. Although they are not married but they intend to marry within a year, they can eat together at *Anhyein*. After having the *Anhyein*, they can leave the house and get married later. In that case, the assumption is that *Anhyein* was successful. Some married couples do not put the sub-wife or sub-husband (seconds, lesser wife and lesser husband). If they have lesser wives or husbands, these people also have to eat together in *Anhyein*. If they not participate in *Anhyein*, the making *Anhyein* is not successful. At the time of *Anhyein*, the shaman judges whether the *Anhyein* is successful by inspecting the food: e.g. if not cooked properly the *Anhyein* is not successful.

The house in which the *Anhyein* takes place has to be owned by the family. If it is not their own house, they cannot perform the *Anhyein*. They have to build the temporary tent or house for performing the *Anhyein*. As soon as *Anhyein* starts other people may not enter the house. When they donate the surplus foods by cooking, they have to serve only outside house. Some people used to make packages of curry and distribute these. If some cannot join in eating these at the house, the *Anhyein* was not successful. The intended cash for performing the *Anhyein* may not be used for other purposes during the *Anhyein*.

If they cannot perform the *Anhyein* yet, they will perform a *Ka-loh-shu*. The *Ka-loh-shu* involves begging for a promise with the offertory before performing the *Anhyein* at a convenient time. They do not need to specify the time limit to perform the *Anhyein* but it could be a day within one month or one year. This protects them from making promises they cannot keep. Moreover, they must promise that they will perform the *Anhyein* in opportune occasion. They pray to gain help at everything for the *Anhyein*. At the time of *Anhyein*, they wait for all family to be gathered. They assume the *Anhyein* is complete and successful when all family members gather in one place. If family members have married and live separately in their own house, they can make the *Anhyein* at their private house. They eat in the descending order of age. If the younger people eat before older people, the older people may not eat or speak or go to the ceremony. The same goes to the younger family members. If they do not eat at the *Anhyein* in hierarchical order of age, siblings do not speak with each other during the ritual. If younger family member ate before older family members, they may not speak with the seven generations within the time of *Anhyein*.

The family members beat gently three times before killing the pig or chicken which they intend to use for the *Anhyein*. So as to prevent evil, non-family members have to be hired to kill the pig and chicken. The shaman and family members do not kill the pig and chicken. The shaman has to prepare and cook the pig and chicken. All parts of the pig and the chicken must be used in preparation.

The Effects of Making the *Anhyein*

The *Anhyein* is a purification ritual upon the parents and prevents evils from befalling the entire family. They assume that merit increases by performing the *Anhyein* and paying obeisance to their parents. All family members gather in one place as in past harmonious times when they lived in unity with their parents. Performing the *Anhyein* allows knowledge of the following: there are relationships of avoidance (Pardu), how many relatives there are, how many relatives who can speak there are, how many relative who cannot speak there are, and how many people who cannot be there.

One informant who performed the *Anhyein* explained how good fortune involved in organizing this ceremony: he won the lottery before the event, his crops fetched high prices, health of family members improved, they were more kind to each other and showed more unity of purpose.

According to another informant, in the *Anhyein*, they gained similar advantages, they felt heavy their problems resolved themselves. Yet another informant claimed that their family's difficulties such as poor health, difficult sales, also resolved themselves.

Because of the widespread adoption of Buddhism, nowadays many no longer observe the *Anhyein*. According to the assumption of Buddhist teaching, the avoidance of killing of other living things goes against the *Anhyein*. Also poor people may not be able to afford an *Anhyein*.

Conclusion

In fact, ceremony of *Anhyein* costs much at the present time in rural areas. Moreover, it is difficult to gather all family members during the ceremony. Killing animals is contrary to the teachings of the Buddhism because all Kayin are devout Buddhist. Although the objective of the ceremony for paying

respect to parents by all siblings in the family is good, most Kayin cannot hold because of high cost and abstention of killing animals. Then the ceremony seems to be rare to see in villages gradually. If they get the chance or choice to buy and get ready-made meats in the market, it is hoped that all the villagers can perform the ceremony easily.

But, rural life is rapidly developing and changing in Kayin villages. Young people are moving to gain an education in urban environments where they pick up knowledge and habits that may be incompatible with village life. Younger Kayin, instead of looking backwards, are developing themselves with an eye on future employment. Although Kayin sense of ethnic identity and language will continue, most are trying to fit in and are using Myanmar or English as the language of communication.

Modernization poses a threat to the old ways of all Kayin's life. Kayin youths study critical thinking in their education and are apt to criticize and comment about the traditional customs that contribute to the social solidarity of the whole Kayin, which traditional customs are not suitable for the modern age and do not contribute to this age. The whole Kayin should tackle with developed knowledgeable thinking by deeply hearing the voice of challenging about the traditional customs of Kayin.

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