

Believes and practices of Du wei bonfire

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Abstract

This paper is about the traditional beliefs and ritual practices of rural community of Poe Kayin national. They have their own characteristics and different cultural patterns. The objectives of this paper are to understand the ritual, religious beliefs and practices related to their socio-economic life. The study area is Hlaing Kabar Village Tract, Hpa-an Township, Kayin State. The study was conducted with qualitative research methods: key informant interview (KII), in-depth interview (IDI) and direct observation, participant observations were conducted to collect data. The religious rituals and traditional ritual are celebrated every month of their own calendar. In these festive months, the above mentioned festivities are respectively held in the villages, townships and states. Poe Kayin people hold traditional rituals in every season based upon their different assumptions. Among them, Du wei adherents used to pray and say oath at Du wei traditional secret place of Hlaing Kabar village. Du wei bonfire is one of the traditions of Poe Kayin. Du wei bonfire is called “*Mee Si Taing*” in Poe Kayin language and “*Mee Pon Pwe*” in Myanmar language. In fact, Du wei bonfire is based on religious belief of East Poe Kayin people. The purpose of celebrating bonfire is to wipe off bad omens, misfortune and evils. They believe that bad omens and evils are to be gone with the fire. The traditional bonfire is celebrated by Poe Kayin and non Kayin to avert impending misfortune. Everyone can participate in this ritual regardless of age and sex. According to study, Du wei traditional practices play a key role in the life of Poe Kayin race.

Key words: ritual, religion, belief, practice, function.

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Introduction

Anthropological studies have revealed many aspects and functions of religion. Every society has religious systems and customs. It was also found that people accept and believe as true in every subject matter of religion, social activities, economy, and education factor. There are beliefs and practices of Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and other religions, in Myanmar (Census, 2016). Most Myanmar Nationals are Theravada Buddhists. Instead various different kinds of Buddhism and animistic beliefs are mixed and practiced by individuals. Therefore, Poe Kayin is one of the tribes of Kayin races who live in the Union of Republic of Myanmar. The majority of Kayin are living in Kayin State and Ayeyarwady Delta Region, Yangon Region, Bago Region, Mon state and Taninthayi Region. As mentioned above, most of the Poe Kayin live in those states and regions. Among them, present study was attempted to point out religious rituals, beliefs and practices of Poe Kayin from Hlaing Kabar village tract. Although most Poe Kayin are Buddhists, there are many different kinds of religious groups in Poe Kayin. They can be classified such as *Lei Kel* religion, *Du wei* religion and *Kyaik kawi* religion, which each of them have various belief systems. They hold their rituals based on religious beliefs. Moreover, from religious anthropological point of view, this study focused on the religious rituals, beliefs and practices which have influence on their social and economic functions.

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Method

This study was carried out from religious anthropological perspective and conducted by using qualitative and ethnographic fieldwork approaches. Hlaing Kabar village tract was chosen as the study area since most of the natives are Poe Kayin. It is nearly nine miles far from Hpa-an township, Kayin State. Hlaing Kabar village tract is located to the west of the bottom of the Mt. Zwegabin. It includes (11) villages. Among them, the selected areas for this study are Hlaing Kabar, Kawt Theit, and Kawt Dan villages. The reason is that all villagers are Poe Kayin and they have many different types of religious groups and various belief systems. The data and information were collected by way of qualitative ethnographic fieldwork. Ethnographic fieldwork is a research strategy to describe, interpret and explain behavior; meaning and cultural products of people who took part in limited field work. Researchers did the direct data collection from the people who were physically present during the fieldwork. In collecting data, in-depth interview (IDI), key informant interview (KII), direct observation (DO), Individual interview and informal conversation were used. The interviewees were ages from 25 to 70 years old . (157) people of the total population participated in this study as informants. There were (71) Males and (86) females who were interviewed during this study.

Findings

Poe Kayin living in Hlaing Kabar village tract believe in Buddhism and they hold seasonal and religious ritual annually. Among this ritual, some are traditional rituals, while other are religious ones. Everyone can participate in this ritual regardless of age or sex. Everyone from nearby villages comes to participate in some rituals, which are held in this respective village tract. When Poe Kayin holds ritual, some are based on religion, while others are those of customs and traditions that are based upon the tribal unity. It is observed that Taunggalay Sayadaw composed a poem on seasonal festival. According to the Kayin traditional calendar, which is the same as Myanmar calendar, he wrote about Kayin language and how the ritual practices came about. In addition to how the Kayin people celebrate the festivals, he also wrote about how rituals are performed during each festivals in the twelve months calendar.

When the specific months of the ritual come, they hold the ritual collectively at the levels of villages, townships and states. Such traditional ritual includes Hill-side cultivation propitiation ceremony, Hill-side ground-clearing ceremony, Harvest ceremony and *Phi-bu-yaw* ceremony, *Bone collecting* ceremony, *New Year* ceremony, etc. Among these rituals, white thread festival held in the month of Wa Kaung is one which reveals the Kayin identity. The host village people usually invite those of neighboring villages to come and participate in the festival, which are usually alive with a teeming crowd of people. In terms of religious ritual every year, Poe Kayin Races living in Hlaing Kabar village tract always hold two religious rituals to show their veneration to lord Buddha in a special ceremony. Although they are Buddhists, they still follow the custom of worshipping Shin Du wai, the traditional spirit. In fact, worshipping Shin Du wai is based on their most serious religious belief and it reflects their appreciation for customs and traditions. According to their belief, Shin Du wai is regarded either as a Venerable monk or as a traditional spirit (*Nat*). Some people even think that “Du wai” is a type of Monk. It is also thought that “Du wai” Spirit (*Nat*) is the one with serious appreciation for truthfulness. Worshipping Shin Du wai is not only a religious practice of Buddhists Poe Kayin living in Hlaing Kabar village tract, but also that of all Buddhist Poe Kayin living elsewhere in the Kayin State. It is found that Poe Kayin adopts this practice just as their ancestors did in the past. They worship Shin Du wai traditional Spirit (*Nat*) depending on their health, social and financial conditions. Shin Du wai traditional belief is still well accepted by Poe Kayin and it is seen as a part of their social life and their custom.

Activities of Shin Du wai bonfire

According to the belief of Shin Du wai traditional worshippers, one of the tradition they follow is the traditional bonfire. Actually, Shin Du wai bonfire is based on religious belief of Poe Kayin who live in Hlaing Kabar village. The aim of celebrating it, depends on the concept of individuals. Some celebrate the bonfire to get rid of bad omens and to escape from the ill-faiths with the burning fire. As the month of January (*Tabodwe*) is much colder than the other months, they offer fire to warm up the lord Buddha. One of the most significant thing about the bonfire is that not only Poe Kayin ethnic people, but also non- Kayin celebrate it to wipe off all evils.

Preparation of the kind of wood

In selecting the tree to be used for Mi- Si taing (မီးစည်တိုင်) (central burning pillar) at this collective ceremony of wiping off the evils, formerly Inn-bin tree (အင်းပင်) and Thet-yin bin tree were mainly used. Why they select this type of wood, is that it is for the benefits of the mankind. As this kind of wood has been selected and used since the time of ancestors, the trees have become rare, therefore they substitute it with other wood.

The substituted tree must be easily grown and durable in harsh climate and straight. Some use bamboo instead of wood. Some think that although bamboo is beneficial, it easily cracks when burnt and harm the environments. So, few people use bamboo. So Du wai traditional worshippers usually grow the small trees that are durable in three seasons at their hedges with the purpose of using them as main burning pillar.



Bonfire plants

When the kind of wood is selected in accord with the Shin Du wai belief, the small tree is free from kraals and the branches are cut to keep it straight. The importance of cutting the tree is that the height of the small tree must be as exactly same as the person because the small tree has to bear the person's ill-faiths on behalf. The tree with such height is mainly selected. When the tree is cut, its height must be as the same as that of the household members. After cutting the tree the outer bark of it must be cleared and it is to be soaked in the turmeric water.

Turmeric is used because Poe Kayin believes that turmeric has the power to get rid of all evils. The tree to be selected is often sprayed with turmeric water, and smeared with turmeric paste in many ways. Beside the fingers-nails and toe-nails of the family members are also cut, wrapped in paper and used to wipe off evils. They believe that the stem of tree is body of man and the nails of hands and legs are limbs, representing perfectly the whole body. In feature that

will bear ill-faiths of the worshipper. On the full moon day of Tabodwe, the worshippers bring the substitute tree with nails to the Du wai Zedi. They fix the site for removing evils on a space within the precinct of the Zedi. They say prayers to remove the ill-faiths that fall on their bodies as soon as it is burnt and send loving kindness. In saying prayers, they recite the words according to their previous experience. When the time to start celebrating the ritual, the older concerned and worshippers collectively invite Buddhist monks that give summons to them to keep precepts. They share their good deeds with their traditional guardian –spirits. Finally the pile of wood is burnt. After that they walk around the bonfire for three times, in this way their omens are taken away with the flames. Finally the chief who leads the ritual shouts out “We’ve won!” For three times and all happily dance around the bonfire until the ritual is successfully finished. According to the interview, one of the worshippers gave his opinion on the bonfire ritual.



Activities of bonfire

“ My daughter comes and lives with us after getting married. No separate business. She lives and eats together. But my son-in-law is not a believer of Shin Du wai. So there arises a problem. He is non-believer. My daughter is follower of the belief. They quarrel with each other every day. We never interfere with their problem. We actually dislike the son-in law who insults tradition. But in the face of daughter, he is accepted. He has never paid homage to the Buddha and the Dhamma. He never respects the elders. Gradually, they have troubles in business. Family’s health is poor. That is followed by motorbike accident. Everything is inconvenient. At least, they believe in Shin Du wai and propitiate him by tradition. Now business runs smooth. They have own houses. He said to us about the story of his son-in-law”.

Based on theories of anthropology, the matters concerning traditional festivals and ceremonies which are related to belief and practices and their associated issues in the religious beliefs of Poe Kayin who live in Hlaing Kabar Village were explored and identified.

Discussion

In Myanmar culture, spirit believers' donate things in many aspects. At this point, every man and woman, regardless of their positions or status, turn on to the spirits when they are solving their everyday obstacles in business and social duties. Most Myanmar Nationals from different parts of the country believe in spirits. Every national believes in traditional spirits. The spirits is vital for National races such as Kachin, Kayah and Chin...etc. In the world where all the living things live, it is believed that there are spirits. And it is believed that spirits make the good and bad interest of the people and create, destroy and care the living and non-living things.

Similarly, in this study, among other traditions and beliefs of Kayin state, Shin Du wai is the most believed tradition. Shin Du wai tradition is a place for saying oath and prayers. At every village, there are houses with traditional shrine. While celebrating these rituals, they obey and preserve their rules and regulations, affairs, and beliefs. Among the rituals that are held by Du wai believers, bonfire is one of the rituals that they express the value of their worshipping practices. When this ritual is celebrated, the believers from different regions come and wish collectively.

Conclusions

To sum up , it has also been learnt that, Hlaing Kabar rural administrative unit is composed of eleven village tracts and Poe Kayin living there have faith in different types of religious beliefs. The religious beliefs include Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Leikel, Kyeikkawi and other traditional types of belief. It is remarkable to find out that the people there respect and abide by the customs of other people who have different faith. It has also been found that those people even help one another and participate in the other's religious rites because they have the policy of peaceful co-existence. Therefore, it can be observed that no religious discrimination is found in Hlaing Kabar administrative unit, but only the deeds of helping one another, dealing with the matters concerning the benefits of their native villages with the concerted efforts of the local people are clearly seen. To put it all in a nutshell, by studying the religious rites of Poe-Kayin, one can vividly see the values that they typically place on their religious beliefs and their traditions and customs. With the aspect of social organization, it can be observed that they make social dealings among themselves in harmony with the traditions and customs laid down by their ancestors. It has also been found that their community has endured for a very long time because of the unity among the community members.

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References

- စင်ကြယ်၊ မောင်၊ ကရင်ဘဝလေ့ ၊ ခေတ္တရာပုံနှိပ်တိုက်၊ ရန်ကုန်မြို့
- ပါတီ၊ မြန်မာ့ဆိုရှယ်လစ် လမ်းစဉ် တိုင်းရင်းသား ရိုးရာယဉ်ကျေးမှု ဓလေ့ထုံးစံများ ကရင်၊ စာအုပ်ထုတ်ဝေရေး ကော်ပိုရေးရှင်း။
- ပညာ၊ ဦး၊ ကရင်ရာဇဝင်၊ ဇွဲပုံနှိပ်တိုက်။
- ဘုန်းမြင့်ဦး၊ ဗုဒ္ဓဘာသာ ပိုးကရင် သမိုင်း၊ ၁၉၇၅ခု ဇန်နဝါရီလ သီဟရတနာပုံနှိပ်တိုက်။
- လင်းမြတ်ကျော်၊ မန်း၊ ကရင်ရိုးရာ သုတပဒေသာ၊ စာပေလောက ပုံနှိပ်တိုက်၊ စာပေဗိမာန်။
- လင်းမြတ်ကျော်၊ မန်း၊ သိမှတ်ဖွယ်ရာ ကရင်ရိုးရာ ပြည်တောက်ကျက်သရေ ပုံနှိပ်တိုက်၊ ရန်ကုန်မြို့။
- သင့်နောင်၊ မန်း၊ အရှေ့ပိုးကရင်၊ စိုးမိုးမိတ်ဆက် ပုံနှိပ်တိုက်
- ဂုဏသမိ၊အရှင်၊ ဘာသာရေးနှင့်ယဉ်ကျေးမှု၊ကရင်တိုင်းရင်းသား၊K.T.A Raiso Graphic Sasana University(MDY)။