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*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 Yatkyawttthu Yatkyawtttha, 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

