

Showing Respect and Bowing Down to *Nats*: Spirit Worship and Gender in a Village in Upper Burma

IKUNI Yukako*

Introduction

Buddhist *Bamah* living on the plains of the the Ayeyawadi River's middle reaches formed what can be called the "Burmasphere" through cultural exchanges with other ethnic or religious groups in the surrounding area. In the Burmasphere, people adhere to the absolute superiority of Theravada Buddhism and conduct a variety of religious practices such as spirit worship, Brahmanism, and witchcraft.

This paper considers the relationship between gender and religious practices, focusing on spirit worship in the Burmasphere and cases from rural communities in Upper Burma. Regarding spirit worship and gender, Brac de la Perrière showed how the feminine dimensions of spirit mediumship involve not only Burmese gender construction, but also the Burmese construction of difference and how it is encoded in the hierarchical system [Brac de la Perrière 2007].

This article will focus on the spirit ritual for the "Spirits of Tradition" (*mizain hpazain nat* or *miyohpala nat*) held in a village in Upper Burma, which is not necessarily needed a help of spirit mediums, as Spiro called a "simple and essentially private ritual" [Spiro 1967:108]. J. Nash and Spiro have carefully discussed the name of the Spirits of Tradition, its succession in their village and ritual occasion [J. Nash 1966:119-122; Spiro 1967:97-

* 飯國有佳子、大東文化大学国際関係学部・講師；Lecturer, Faculty of International Relations, Daito Bunka University

104,126-131]; however, the ritual itself has been dismissed. Furthermore, J. Nash contrasted men and women's religious involvement and attributed it to the religious difference, i.e. Buddhism and spirit worship, saying that "women are more concerned than men about the propitiation of the *nats*...men are more frequently serious Buddhist meditators" [J. Nash 1966:120]. However studies on rural area reveal that, in general, women constitute the majority in most religious gathering, being more preponderant in observing Sabbath and keener on participating in daily religious practice than men [Spiro 1982(1970):218; Kumada 2001:67-68]. How reverent Buddhist women concern spirit worship?

In this paper, After showing that most women in the village practice Buddhism piously throughout their lives, the succession and ritual of the Spirits of Tradition are analyzed. By examining these religious phenomena, gender-based inclinations manifest in the ways that people interact with the spirits, due to gendered innate Buddhist protective powers which human bodies have. Finally, it is shown that such gender-based tendencies on interacting with the spirits should be attributed not to gender categories but to individual differences.

I . Outline of the Setting

Thaya Village⁽¹⁾ is located in Thaya Village Tract in Shwebo District in the northern plain referred to as Upper Burma in Myanmar.⁽²⁾ Thaya Village is a rural, medium-sized village of about 160 households with a population of approximately 700, and almost all residents identify as *Bamah* and Buddhists. It is in a typical dry-zone, and nearly all households are involved in a rain-fed agriculture system based on irrigation ponds. Not only does Thaya Village have a long history with deep connections to the Kingship;⁽³⁾ it was also once a wealthy village inhabited by prosperous landowners. Even now, there are four monasteries which belong to *Shwekyin* Sect and 45 pagodas in the village.⁽⁴⁾ As a result, various organizations were created in Thaya Village to support the monks in the four monasteries and to assist with managing the numerous pagoda festivals.

The Pagoda Trustee Committee (*gawpaka ahpwe*),⁽⁵⁾ composed of seven men in their 50s and 60s who act as lay representatives, plays a leading role in all Buddhist ceremonies. Furthermore, there is the Four Ward Four Head Alms Giving Group (*leiyat leigaun hsunlaun ahpwe*),⁽⁶⁾ which acts as an auxiliary at the privately sponsored pagoda festivals⁽⁷⁾ by making breakfast for the monks when necessary. These organizations have male leaders and take part in supervising Buddhist ceremonies, primarily the pagoda festivals. In contrast, the Alms Giving Duty Group (*hsunhinhkwet ahpwe*) participates in preparing breakfast for the monks for daily, non-ceremonial occasions, and its members are female representatives from each household,⁽⁸⁾ In Thaya Village there were two *Dhammasekkya* Groups that read the *Dhammasekkya* sutra at Buddhist ceremonies such as *ahlu*, combination of initiation ceremony for young novices and ear-piercing ceremony for young girls. Both have unmarried women among their members.⁽⁹⁾ In addition to these groups for younger members, there is also a group for older members called the Vassa Intensive Retreat Group (*wagyisaun ahpwe*).⁽¹⁰⁾ This is a group of lay observers who spend the three months of *vassa* (*wa*) observing the Eight Precepts,⁽¹¹⁾ the greatest commandment for

laypeople. Over 90% of the group is female,⁽¹²⁾ and the leader is chosen not by gender, but according to how long he/she has observed the precepts.⁽¹³⁾

All religious organizations in Thaya Village take part in Buddhism, and people participate according to age and gender. Men's involvement in religious organizations is relatively infrequent and unusual.⁽¹⁴⁾ In contrast, starting in childhood and for the rest of their lives, women of all generations belong to some forms of religious organizations and accumulate merits (*kudout*) by doing activities such as reading sutras, making daily and occasional offerings, or observing the precepts.⁽¹⁵⁾ Most participants in Buddhist rituals held on Uposatha (*about nei*) are women, and are renowned for their enthusiastic participation in Buddhist activities outside the village. Women are decidedly committed to accumulating merits in contrast to men, who have relatively few opportunities to take part in religious acts. It is clear that women are indispensable for maintaining village Buddhism.

Besides the monasteries and pagodas, the village has shrines for spirits. Villagers divide spirits around the village into two categories: (1) spirits inside the village (*atwin nat*) and (2) spirits outside the village (*apyin nat*); normally, villages in Upper Burma are geographically separated from their outer boundaries by gates and fences. The shrine of Thaya Village's guardian spirit is called *Ywadawshin* (the Lord of Holy Village). It is located in the community's physical center and has a carved white wooden horse inside that symbolizes *Myinbyushin* (the Lord of the White Horse).⁽¹⁶⁾ In contrast, the shrine of *Nedawshin* (the Lord of Holy Land)⁽¹⁷⁾ and the shrine of *Myautpetshinma* (the Northern Female Lord)⁽¹⁸⁾ are outside the village to the east and the north (see Map 1).

Ywadawshin and *Nedawshin* are both called *Bobogyi* (the Big Grandfathers); the villagers recognize them in the form of old men wearing white clothing. Villagers said *Ywadawshin* protects the community's interior, while *Nedawshin* protects the whole eastern area of his shrine. *Myautpetshinma* has a permanent connection to all the residents, but especially protects the women.⁽¹⁹⁾ Thus, shrines are placed based on concepts of inside/outside, and villagers recognize spirits according to specific images. When villagers, particularly women, visit their shrines, they "show their respect" (*ayoahei pyade*) to the spirits by removing their sandals or bowing down (*gadaw*), just as they do when visiting a pagoda or monastery.

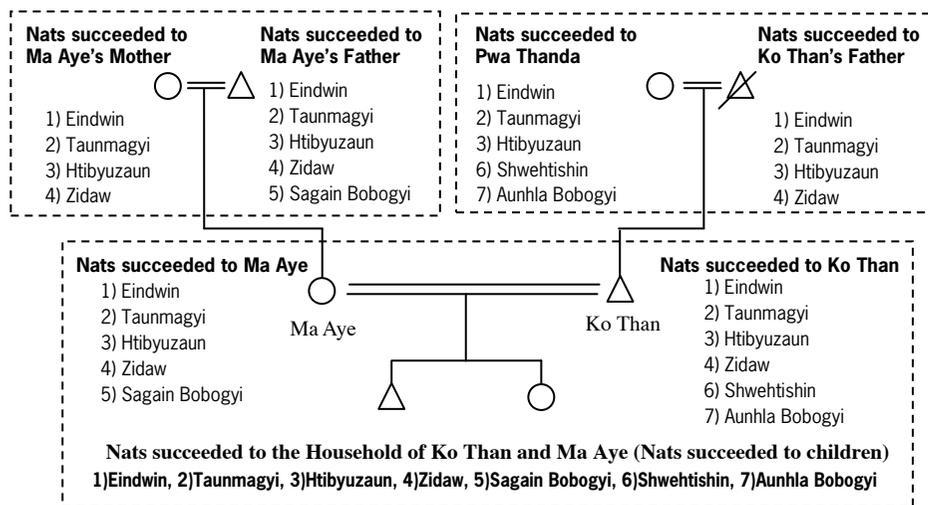
Furthermore, a number of places exist where spirits are said to dwell, despite not having a shrine in the area (see Map 1). Among places called *natkyide neiya* (place with a big spirit), two are especially important. One is a tamarind tree on the banks of Kandawgyi pond to the east of the village, inhabited by *Asheinidaw* (the Elder Brother of the East). The other is also a tamarind tree, located on the banks of Magyi pond to the south of the village, where residents believe two brother spirits live; they are called *Taunmagyi* (Big King of the South).⁽²⁰⁾ Of all the village spirits, *Taunmagyi* is the most formidable because the inhabitants must follow many detailed instructions during their rituals.⁽²¹⁾

II. The Spirits of Tradition and Its Succession

The religious institutions of Thaya Village have been introduced, next, the spirit

worship seen in Thaya Village will be explored. This religious observance can be divided into two different types, depending on the organization responsible for it. One is the ritual arranged and sponsored by the village called *ywabon nattin* (the whole village spirit worship) for the community’s tutelary spirits.⁽²²⁾ The other is the ritual, called *shingyitin* (the big lord ritual) in this area, coordinated by each household to propitiate the Spirits of Tradition to which every household member transmitted individually.

In Burmese, the phrase *hsainde* describes a special bond between a particular spirit and a human being, as the Spirits of Tradition is called *mizain hpazain nat* (spirits related to mother and father). However who is connected to which spirit varies widely depending on the person and the region. Concerning the transmission of the Spirits of Tradition, J. Nash suggested that some say that women receive their *nat* obligations from their mother, men from their father, others say that they received their *nats* both parents, however if the parents’ *nats* differ, the women’s *nat* is the one likely to be inherited [J. Nash 1966:120]. On the other hand, Spiro reported the mode of inheritance seems patrilineal and it is only in very rare cases that the offspring of parents with different *mizain-hpazain nats* inherit the *nats* of both parents, because the vast majority have only one spirit, and no one has more than two [Spiro 1967:100-101].



Remarks : [dashed box] range of household

- 1) : the Household spirits concerning to every household, 2) and 3) : the spirits concerning to whole Thaya Villagers,
- 4) : the tutelary spirit of Zidaw village, 6) : the tutelary spirit of Shwehti Village, 7) : the tutelary spirit of Aunhla Village

Figure 1: Succession of the Traditional *Nats* : a case of same village marriage (case 1)

Figure 1 displays the succession of the Spirits of Tradition in Ko Than,⁽²³⁾ and Ma Aye’s household both from Thaya Village. *Eindwin* is a spirit related to every household in the Burmasphere and symbolized by the coconut called *natsweoun*. *Taunmagyi* and *Htibyuzaun* (Guardian of the White Umbrella) are the spirits connected to all Thaya Village residents. Thus every Thaya Villager has these three spirits as his/her Spirits of Tradition. Ma Aye’s Spirits of Tradition are 1)*Eindwin*, 2)*Taunmagyi*, 3)*Htibyuzaun*, 4)*Zidaw*⁽²⁴⁾ and 5) *Sagain Bobogyi* (the Big Grandfather of Sagain). Similarly, Ko Than’s Spirits of Tradition are 1)*Eindwin*, 2)*Taunmagyi*, 3)*Htibyuzaun*, 4)*Zidaw*, 6)*Shwehtishin*, and 7)*Aunhla*

Bobogyi.⁽²⁵⁾ Case #1 shows that both parents pass on their Spirits of Tradition to their children. However, while the succession of spirits is restricted to individuals, the ritual is conducted by each household. Therefore, the Spirits of Tradition is sometimes mentioned by household unit and this household has 7 Spirits of Tradition.

Ko Than and Ma Aye have three spirits in common, since they are from same village. In case #2, U Zaw Ya from Hsinbyu Village (the neighboring community to the east of Thaya Village) migrated to Thaya Village after marrying Daw Thein Win from Thaya Village (see Figure 2). Daw Thein Win's Spirits of Tradition are 1)*Eindwin*, 2)*Taunmagyi*, 3)*Htibyuzaun*, 4)*Aunhla Bobogyi*, 5)*Thalain*, 6)*Magyihpyu*, and 7)*Shwepwehla nat*. U Zaw Ya originally inherited 1) *Eindwin*, 8) *Mabyan Bobogyi* (the Big Grandfather of Mabyan), 9)*Zidaw*, 10)*Kanyi*⁽²⁶⁾ from his parents. Among them, *Eindwin* and *Mabyan Bobogyi* are the spirits connected to all Hsinbyu Village residents. It is after migration that he added *Taunmagyi* and *Htibyuzaun* to his Spirits of Tradition. Their household has up to 10 Spirits of Tradition. Thus people around Thaya Village receive their *nats* from both parents without lack.

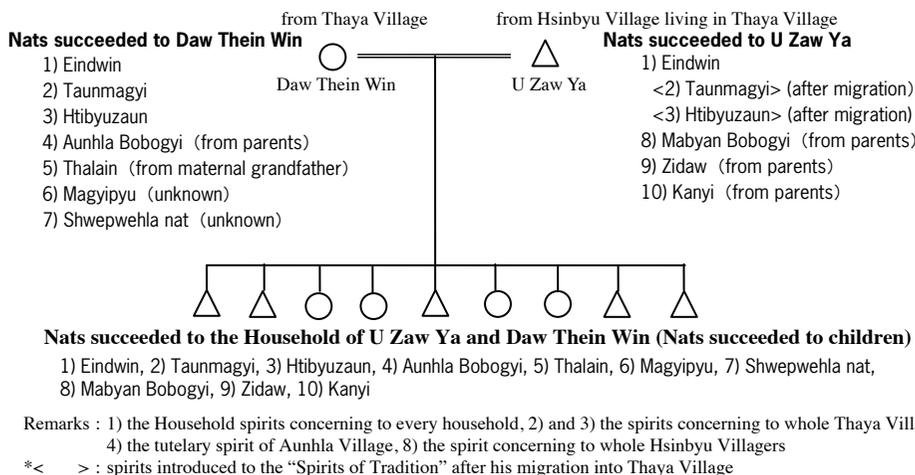


Figure 2: Succession of the Traditional *Nats*:
a case of migration into Thaya Village by marriage (case 2)

These cases suggest two important facts. First, case #2 indicated that once a "connection" is made with a certain spirit by living in a particular village, the spirit becomes a Spirit of Tradition, even if the resident did not inherit it from his/her parents. However, Spiro suggested that the basis for the propitiation of *mizain-hpazain nats* is descent rather than residence, as an immigrant continues to propitiate the *nat* associated with his region of origin, rather than the *nat* of the region to which he has migrated [Spiro 1967: 98]. On the other hand, case #2 showed that the propitiation of the Spirits of Tradition is both hereditary and territorial. The Spirits of Tradition represent the relationship between the land and the people, and the bonds are passed down through blood lines, as these spirits are the lord (*ashin*) of their own territories where the people and their ancestors live or once lived.

Second, most spirits counted as the Spirits of Tradition in the area around Thaya Village are tutelary spirits of particular villages or areas. In both cases, *Shwehtishin*, *Aunhla Bobogyi*, *Mabyan Bobogyi* and *Sagain Bobogyi* are the guardian spirits of Shwehti Village,

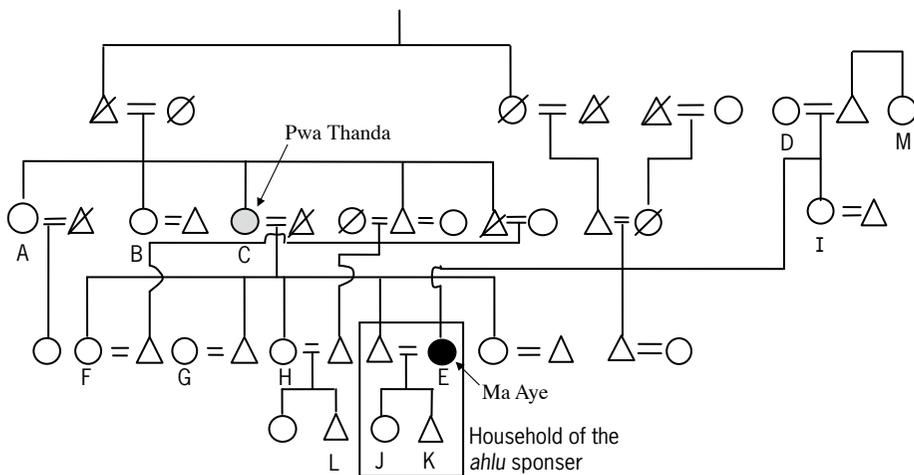
Aunhla Village, Hsinbyu Village and Sagain Town respectively,⁽²⁷⁾ while *Zidaw* and *Kanyi* protect fairly large domains as their own “territory”.⁽²⁸⁾ If a person knows the name of the area’s guardian spirit, he/she can deduce a rough history of the local people’s migration, as well as that of their ancestors. Furthermore, previous studies classify the Spirits of Tradition as exclusive category to house or household *nat*, village *nats*, regional *nats* [M. Nash 1965, 1966; J. Nash 1966; Spiro 1967]. However both cases suggested that the Spirits of Tradition are not exclusive category, including a household *nat*, village *nats* and regional *nats*.

The Spirits of Tradition guard places such as houses, villages, or larger territories, and are deeply connected to land usage. These spirits are passed on to individuals on a systematic basis in the Thaya Village area, regardless of gender. Next, the author shall examine the ritual for the Spirits of Tradition, called *shingyitin* (the Great Lord’s Ritual).

III. *Shingyitin*: Worshipping the Spirits of Tradition

Shingyitin is performed on two occasions. One is a regular ritual held once a year,⁽²⁹⁾ while the other occurs prior to specific ceremonies. The annual rite, which prays for the health, safety, and tranquility of the family, can be held at any time during the year except for *vassa*.⁽³⁰⁾ The other is held either for a rite of passage (birth, *ahlu*, *yahanhkan*, or marriage) or before large Buddhist rituals such as *kathina* etc.⁽³¹⁾ In Thaya Village, people, especially women, believe it is absolutely necessary to hold *shingyitin* before any ceremony to accumulate merits, and so that the spirits will not interfere it.⁽³²⁾

Let us consider the case of Ko Than and Ma Aye (Case #1), who held *shingyitin* prior to the *ahlu* ceremony for their child. The couple was to perform *ahlu* in mid-February 2003, so they performed *shingyitin* 10 days before *ahlu* to prevent the spirits from intervening in the ceremony and to pray for its success. The couple coordinated *ahlu*, but Ko Than’s mother Pwa Thanda was the main performer of *shingyitin*.



Remarks: A~L participants of the *shingyitin* ritual
 * This is an extract of a part of relatives who attended the *shingyitin* ritual.

Figure 3: Participants of the *Shingyitin* Ritual

Figure 3 shows the family participants in the *shingyitin* ritual. It shows female relatives from both sides of the family joined; non-relatives do not participate usually. However, those skilled in performing spirit rituals, such as professional mediums called *natgadaw*, can take part at the organizers' request. Because there was no professional *natgadaw* in Thaya Village at the time, a "natgadaw" who lived nearby⁽³³⁾ and a distant relative who were able to perform the ritual well (called *tindattelu* or *nat ma naindelu*), were asked to assist.⁽³⁴⁾ Inviting non-relatives relates to the unique characteristics of the *ahlu* ceremony.⁽³⁵⁾ Only *ahlu shingyitin* requires worshipping not only the Spirits of Tradition but also the village guardian spirits, namely *Ywadawshin*, *Nedawshin*, *Myaupetshinma*, and *Ashei nidaw*. Time constraints necessitate extra help.⁽³⁶⁾

Table 1: The Process of the *Shingyitin* Ritual

Ritual Place (see map 1)	Time	Nats offered Large Offering	Nats offered Small Offering	Location and direction	Participants (see fig. 3)	Notes
☆1	6:30	worship Buddha alter and offer sacred rice to Buddha		(in)(*10) Toward alter of Pwa Thanda's house	Pwa Thanda(C), "natgadaw", Ma Aye(E), D	
	7:00~ about 10 minutes	[1] (*1)Eindwin offering: <i>gadawbwe</i> A (*2), <i>pwegyi</i> (*3), a glass of water, sour soup, paste of <i>thanakha</i>	nil	(in) Toward a coconut hung on pillar near the Buddhist alter	"natgadaw", <i>tindattelu</i> (*12) Pwa Thanda(C), Ma Aye(E), D, I	
☆2	7:15~ about 15 minutes	[2] Shwehtishin offering: <i>gadawbwe</i> A, <i>pwegyi</i> , a glass of water, sour soup	nil	(in)Toward small private shrine of the Lord of Shwehtishin.	"natgadaw", Ma Aye(E), J, A, later B	
☆3	7:45~ about 20 minutes	[3] Zidaw offering: <i>gadawbwe</i> B (*4), <i>pwegyi</i> , a glass of water, sour soup, steamed glutinous rice	(N)(*6) gardian spirit of mountain (N) gardian spirit of forest	(out)(*11) At a field in the north of the village. Toward the palace of Zidaw Village	<i>tindattelu</i> , D, I, M, later "natgadaw", Ma Aye(E)	
☆4	8:20~ about 10 minutes	[4] Aunhla Bobogyi offering: <i>gadawbwe</i> B, <i>pwegyi</i> , a glass of water, sour soup, (main offering is offered only for <i>ahlu</i>)	(F)(*7) Nattaunbaw (F) Ngahkedaw (F/P)(*8) Outkangyi (F/T)(*9) Pyun u magyibin	(out) At a field in the north of the village. Toward Aunhla Village	"natgadaw", <i>tindattelu</i> , Ma Aye(E), D, M	
☆5	8:45~ about 10 minutes	[5] Myauthpet shinma offering: <i>gadawbwe</i> B, <i>pwegyi</i> , a glass of water, sour soup, steamed glutinous rice	nil	(out) At the shrine of the Northern Female Lord.	"natgadaw" <i>tindattelu</i> Ma Aye(E), D, M	worshiped only for <i>ahlu</i> ritual
☆6,7,8	9:20~ about 10 minutes	[6] Htibyuzaun offering: <i>gadawbwe</i> B, <i>pwegyi</i> , a glass of water, sour soup, a special offering made of white paper umbrella with yellow cloth stucked into basket filled with sand	nil	(out) At the left bank of Magyi pond in the south of the village. Toward the west	Pwa Thanda(C), F, G, H, later "natgadaw", Ma Aye(E), D, M, J, <i>tindattelu</i>	
	9:30~ about 5 minutes	[7] Sagain Bobogyi offering: <i>gadawbwe</i> B, <i>pwegyi</i> , a glass of water, sour soup,	nil	(out) Same place as above. Toward Sagain town in the south of the village	"natgadaw", Ma Aye(E), <i>tindattelu</i> , D, M, J, Pwa Thanda(C),	

Ritual Place (see map 1)	Time	Nats offered Large Offering	Nats offered Small Offering	Location and direction	Participants (see fig. 3)	Notes
☆6,7,8	9:40~ about 30 minutes	[8] Taunmagyi offering: <i>gadawbwe C</i> (*5), two sets of <i>pwegyi</i> , two glasses of water, two cups of sour soup, two dishes of dried beef, two glasses of palm wine * <i>gadawbwe C</i> may be substitutes by <i>gadawbwe A</i> , but not <i>gadawbwe B</i> .	(F/P) Hsinmigan	(out) Same place as above. Toward the south.	Pwa Thanda(C), F, G, H, "natgadaw", Ma Aye(E), D, M, J, <i>tindattelu</i> B, I, F, two boys (K, L)	
			(F) Nyaunbinwundaw			
			(F) Gwehindaw Bobogyi	Toward the west		
			(F/P) Tamagyigan Bobogyi			
			(F/P) Thayetkan Bobogyi	Toward the east		
			(F/P) Zitkan Bobogyi			
			(F) Natgyigon Bobogyi	Toward the west		
			[12] Kanyi			
			[13] Inle Mibaya (offered for the Four Big Mother. Guardian spirit of the pond of neighbouring Nyaunbin Village)	Toward the west		
			(F/P) Thegan Bobogyi			
			(F) Leinmyin Bobogyi	Toward the west		
(F) Myethnakyin Bobogyi						
the Thirty-Seven Lords (means other unspecified <i>nats</i>)	Toward the west					
[14] Nyaungyi O Bobogyi						
☆9	10:20~ about 5 minutes	< <i>ywahkya</i> > offer leftovers of offering to a witchcraft (<i>soun or kawei</i>) called <i>ywathami</i>	nil	(in) At the compound of Pwa Thanda's house		
☆10	10:30~ about 10 minutes	[9] Ywadawshin offering: <i>gadawbwe B</i> , <i>pwegyi</i> , a glass of water, sour soup,	nil	(in) At the shrine of the Lord of Holy Village	"natgadaw", Pwa Thanda(C), D	worshipped only for <i>ahlu</i> ritual
☆11	10:50~ about 10 minutes	[10] Nedawshin offering: <i>gadawbwe B</i> , <i>pwegyi</i> , a glass of water, sour soup,	(P) Kandawgyi [11] Elder Brother of East	(out) At the shrine of the Lord of Holy Land	"natgadaw", <i>tindattelu</i> Pwa Thanda(C), D	worshipped only for <i>ahlu</i> ritual
☆12	later day	[11] Asheidaw offering: <i>gadawbwe B</i> , <i>pwegyi</i> , a glass of water, sour soup, a dish of whole fish	unknown [10] Lord of Holy Land	(out)At the left bank of Kandawgyi pond in the east of the village. Toward the east.	unknown	worshipped only for <i>ahlu</i> ritual

Notes: (*1) [1]~[11] *Nats* offered the main offering.

(*2) *gadawbwe A* : one coconut, two bunches of banana, two cigarettes, two packets of betel, fermented tea (*lahpet*).

(*3) *pwegyi* : seven sets of rice, with two kinds of fried pastries (*monni* and *monhpyu*) and fried fish on the each top of the rice.

(*4) *gadawbwe B* : two bunches of banana, two cigarettes, one packet of betel, fermented tea (*lahpet*).

(*5) *gadawbwe C* : three bunches of banana, two cigarettes, two packets of betel, fermented tea (*lahpet*).

(*6) (N): gardian spirits of natural objects such as mountains or forests.

(*7) (F): gardian spirits of farm carrying the name of the farm.

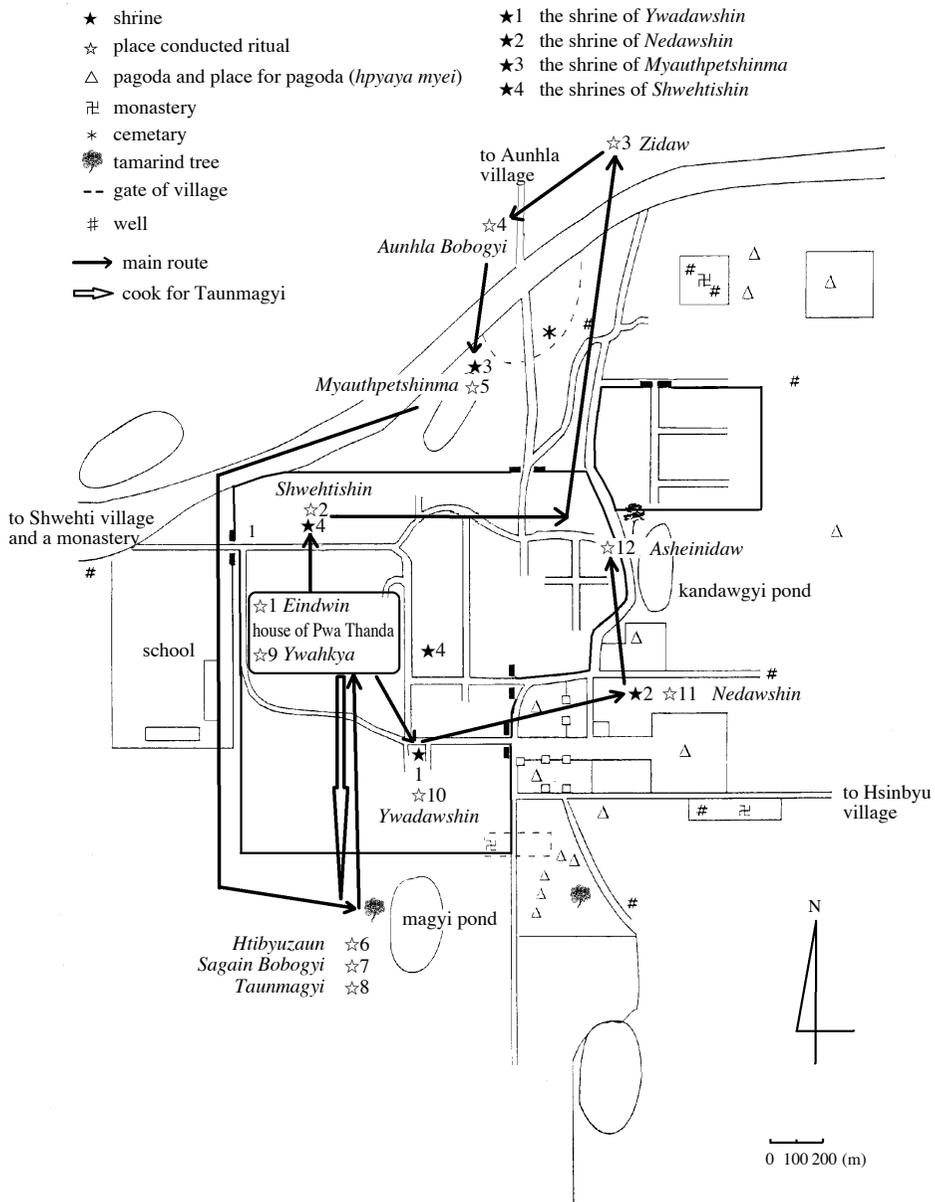
(*8) (P): gardian spirits of pond carrying the name of the pond of farm.

(*9) (T): gardian spirits of tree carrying the name of the farm land.

(*10) (in): inside the village.

(*11) (out): outside the village.

(*12) *tindattelu* : a person who knows *shingyitin* well.



Map 1: Ritual Places of a *Shingyitin* for *ahlu*

Table 1 illustrates the process of *shingyitin*, and Map 1 shows the places where *shingyitin* was conducted. Table 1 shows that a vast number of spirits are worshipped during *shingyitin* along with the Spirits of Tradition, and participants carefully arrange all offerings according to the spirits' preferences.⁽³⁷⁾ However, the offerings prove that the Spirits of Tradition are the main subjects of *shingyitin*. Since offerings are roughly divided into "large offerings" (*pwegyi*)⁽³⁸⁾ and "small offerings" (*pwethei*),⁽³⁹⁾ only the Spirits of Tradition and the village guardian spirits receive the large ones.

Small offerings are given to impersonal, abstract guardian spirits who watch over the mountains and forests, in addition to the guardian spirits that possess the specific name of a

location, such as a field, a pond that provides the field with water or a tree becoming the mark of a field. Such guardian spirits of fields include those of the fields cultivated by the family’s ancestors, as well as fields currently being tilled. Participants choose the nearest place where the spirits dwell for the ceremony and turn in that direction; they call the spirits by name and make offerings one by one, carefully ensuring that none are forgotten.

Thus, the places that support the household’s livelihood, such as fields and ponds, are remembered in detail, along with the land where family and ancestors live or once lived during *shingyitin*. By performing *shingyitin*, participants reaffirm their relationship to the land and pass on their knowledge to the next generation. *Shingyitin* is especially important since the participants are farmers who bond deeply with the land, and rain-fed farming depends on the weather, which humans cannot control.

In the succession of the Spirits of Tradition in the Thaya Village region, both sides of the family pass spirits down to individuals, no matter what their gender. Simultaneously, the *shingyitin* ritual for propitiating the Spirits of Tradition performed in the household reaffirms the ties between household members, their ancestors, and the land; it has nothing to do with gender alone, however, the only bilateral female relatives participate. Why do men not take part in rites, despite inheriting the Spirits of Tradition? In the next section, the relationship between gender and spirit worship will be analyzed while also showing the wide variation in people’s perceptions of spirits.

IV. Gender and Interacting With Spirits

There are various negative opinions about spirit worship, but criticism from a Buddhist standpoint is particularly frequent.

Example 1 (U Than Zin, a 42-year-old man): “Spirits are those who wander the world after they die without being reincarnated, right? And sure, they died a violent death (*aseinthei*), like being killed or burned to death, but isn’t that because they did something in a past life to deserve it? Why should we bow down to them? *Ko Gyi Kyaw* is a gambler and a drinker. He’s nothing special.”

Ko Gyi Kyaw is one of the most famous spirits in Myanmar, and gambling and drinking he loves violates the Five Precepts.⁽⁴⁰⁾ According to mythology, many spirits of the Thirty-Seven Lords threatened the kingship or the Buddhist order due to their supernatural powers when they were alive, and were put to death by royal decree. Karmic justice is a fundamental tenet of Buddhism, but to become a *nat* by dying an unnatural death means to wander without being reincarnated. In other words, the supernatural and ambivalent power of *nats* derives from the deviation from order or norm created by kings or Buddhism. U Than Zin quoted above is saying that there is no need to worship those who disobeyed the Buddha’s teachings and died horrible deaths.

Buddhism acknowledges the existence of spirits. For example, the most well-known division of spirits in the Burmasphere is the distinction between *ahtet nat* (higher spirits)⁽⁴¹⁾

and *aut nat* (lower spirits);⁽⁴²⁾ From the Buddhist perspective, spirits are caught in the cycle of reincarnation and, like living people, aim to have a better future life by accumulating merits that they cannot obtain on their own.

Next, the standpoint of a Buddhist monk shall be examined.

Example 2 (U Zawtika, a monk who is preaching during a pagoda festival in the village): “Do not worship spirits. It seems that there are many spirits, such as *Ko Gyi Kyaw* and *Ma Ma Ne*, for whom rituals are held...[Before sharing merits.] We will send loving kindness (*myitta pode*) and transmit the merit (*ahmya weide*) to the tutelary spirit of the pagoda (*payasaun nat*), the ancestors who built the pagoda, and the ancestors who are connected to the pagoda.”

The monk is preaching in the first half of the quote and tells his audience, mostly women, to stop worshipping spirits. Yet in the second half, he states that loving kindness and accumulated merits from the audience should be transmitted to the pagoda’s guardian spirit and the ancestors who helped build it. In other words, the monk regards the approach for dealing with spirits as a problem, rather than their mere existence. He believes that the deceased and spirits should not be worshipped, but rather should be treated in a “Buddhist approach” with loving-kindness and transmitting merit so that they can receive them. The monk is not the only one with this attitude; most men think this way as well.

Example 3 (U Bha Thein, 72-year-old man and former member of a *gawpaka ahpwe*): “There isn’t any need to do anything special for the spirits or to prepare coconuts [etc.]. Men don’t participate in spirit worship because women say they want to do it anyway. Women do it on their own; it has nothing to do with us. Like the Buddha says, you don’t have to do anything special for spirits; just treat them with loving kindness.”

Like the monk in example #2, U Bha Thein sees a problem in how people deal with the spirits, not the spirits themselves. However, his view differs slightly from the monk’s in regard to rituals. Unlike the monk who forbade spirit worship, U Bha Thein tacitly consents to it, half-heartedly criticizing women by stating that women “say they want to do it anyway.” Furthermore, he categorizes spirit worship as a gender-based issue when he says it has “nothing to do with” men, and that everyone should take a “Buddhist approach” to spirits.

These examples view spirit worship in a critical light and consider the real issue to be how the spirits are treated, not the existence of it. However, individual interpretations vary, as shown by the aforementioned quotes.⁽⁴³⁾ How do women who conduct spirit rituals see their practice? Three women’s opinions will now be analyzed.

Example 4 (Daw Nyun, a 57-year-old woman, from a conversation during *shingyitin*):

Daw Nyun: “When we observe the Eight Precepts during *vassa*, we show our respect (*ayoathei pyade*) to the spirits at their shrines, but we do not bow down

(*gadaw*) before them. We don't have to. It's not just the men. The monks, and of course nuns (*thilashin*) don't have to either."

Author: "Why don't the men have to bow down?"

Daw Nyun: "Men have strong *hpoun kan* (cumulative result of past meritorious deeds) from the time they are born, so they don't have to bow down. If we follow the Eight Precepts, we don't have to either."

Author: "Even if men break the Five Precepts by drinking alcohol or something else, they don't have to bow down to pray?"

Daw Nyun: "No. Because men have strong *hpoun kan* from birth."

Example 5 (Ma Khin Aye, a 37-year-old woman, from a conversation during *shingyitin*): "If we don't hold *shingyitin*, who knows what would happen? It's not bowing down (*gadaw*) to the spirits. It's just showing them our respect (*ayoathei pyade*)."

Example 6 (Pwa Mya Sein, a 61-year-old woman, from a conversation about her Spirits of Tradition): "Honestly, I don't want to hold *shingyitin*. It's not cheap. You have to buy a lot of bananas, betel, tobaccos and fried foods. You need coconuts and even snacks for *Taunmagyi* too. And you have to go a palm farm to buy palm wine for them. That's why we get permission from the spirits to do it every three years, even though you're supposed to do it once a year.

But you have to hold the ritual. It can't be helped. The men don't do it, so the women have to. Because women have less *hpoun*."

These examples make some essential points. First, not all women involved in rituals are willing to perform them. However, they think they have to because men don't participate. Secondly, Daw Nyun and Ma Khin Aye distinguish showing respect to spirits from bowing down to them. Not only do men not have to bow down to spirits because they have a large amount of *hpoun kan*, but both male and female Buddhist renunciators don't have to either. It is only lay women who must bow down, however there are exceptions. As long as they follow the Eight Precepts, they don't have to bow down, however they must show the spirits respect. Thus, Buddhist powers such as *hpoun kan* dictate whether people must bow down to spirits or not. Why do the Eight Precepts allow women to not bow down? And why do women differentiate bowing down from showing respect?

To answer former question, we should explore how spirits are recognized in the Burmasphere. Spirits are said to provide protection if properly approached; however, spirits can also cause misfortune, disease or calamity when treated incorrectly. By offering food that symbolizes sacrifice, rituals serve to make spirits protect people. Such manipulation is especially important for women and children, who are said to be susceptible to spirits due to their souls' inherent "smallness" (*leikpya ngede*) and "softness" (*leikpya nude*), and have few powers, such as *hpoun kan*. Here, *hpoun* (power, glory, virtue, influence) and *kan* (karma, luck) are recognized as a kind of protective power found primarily in male bodies.⁽⁴⁴⁾

Hpoun in particular is contrary to female reproductive power, symbolized by menstrual blood,⁽⁴⁵⁾ which diminishes the strength of *hpoun*.⁽⁴⁶⁾ Because of insufficient innate protective

power and holding reproductive power which diminishes the strength of *hpoun* that women bodies have, women need strategy to resist spiritual attacks. One is a way of spirit worship, such as showing respect, bowing down to spirits or performing rituals, the other is a Buddhist approach to observing the Eight Precepts, as *hpoun* can be increased through Buddhist asceticism.⁽⁴⁷⁾

For increasing innate protective power, why women must keep the Eight Precept not the Five Precepts which lay people recommended to observe? The difference between these codes of conduct is especially significant. The Eight Precepts include the Five Precepts, but the each prohibition differs slightly. The Five Precepts prohibit adultery, but do not forbid sexual intercourse.⁽⁴⁸⁾ However, the Eight Precepts forbid it even for married couples.⁽⁴⁹⁾ This means that women can gain Buddhist protective power only by controlling their sensuality and reproductive power by asceticism, while men's sensuality regarded to be natural and nothing to do with their protective power. Thus, it is not the Five Precepts but the Eight Precepts which allow women not to bow down to spirits.

V. Gender and Power in Buddhism and Spirit Worship

Regarding another question why do women differentiate bowing down from showing respect, it is necessary to consider the differences in Buddhist constructs of power, how it is used, and spirit worship more precisely. Some may approximate the Buddha's paramount and absolute power through ascetic practices. It is at the point of the ultimate salvation, *nibbana* (nirvana), that Buddhist supernatural power reaches its climax, however, ultimate salvation causes a termination of their existence with attained supernatural power [Tamura 1984: 163-164]. If people have sacred power such as *dago*, they try to refrain from exercising it as much as possible and let others be obedient by the prestige of the possession of power [Tamura 1991: 181]. Thus, power in Buddhism is paradoxical; it becomes absolute when it disappears with a person who stops being reincarnated, and the mere existence of power or a symbol of it matters most, not using it.

In contrast, unlike the absolute power of Buddhism, the power of spirits is arbitrary and ambivalent with both protective and destructive aspects; it can also be used violently and dictatorially like kings. The source of power lies in their marginality, because spirits are not fully included in Buddhist norms or the central royal authority. Their power has meaning when it is utilized; that is why people manipulate spirits by conducting a ritual and "negotiating" with them. Unlike in Buddhism, the power of spirits is considered secular (*lawki*) [Tamura 1987: 50].

Both kinds of power differ completely in terms of their nature and how they are used. The power of spirits is low on the hierarchy of Buddhist values. For those who criticize worshipping spirits, attempting to utilize their power through rituals or pilgrimages can violate Buddhist norms, which restrict the exercise of power.

How does the power of spirits relate to the supernatural forces of the gendered body? The Burmasphere has the concept of mind-body dualism in which humans are composed of the body (*yout*) and the soul (*nam*). In the Buddhist faith, the soul will still exist even if

someone dies and reincarnates according to the merits accumulated over that person's lifetime. There is also a local discourse on the soul called *leikpya*⁽⁵⁰⁾ or *winnyin*. Women are said to be more vulnerable to spirits' attack and easily possessed by them than men, since their souls are inherently "small" (*leikpya ngedede*) and "soft" (*leikpya nude*), which means their souls are less firmly attached to their bodies. Especially the soul is prominent in spirit medium cult, as the key ritual to becoming a professional medium is called *leikpya theit* in which the souls of the human and the spirit connect [cf. Spiro 1967:213-217; Rodrigue 1992:52-55, Iikuni 2013]. Thus spirits are recognized as an external force that can affect the human soul.⁽⁵¹⁾

Gendered human bodies have two kinds of innate power; one is Buddhist protective power *hpoun* which men have much, the other is women's ability to procreate treated as a dangerous and unclean force that can reduce *hpoun*. It is the Buddhist protective power that can block extrinsic attack from spirits, and people need to internalize it, no matter what their gender. Women can counter the effect of reproductive capacity of their body by observing the precepts which control sensuality.

Treating the spirits with loving-kindness and transmitting merit to them are seen as a good deed in the Buddhist context, and it is encouraged regardless of gender. Men who are considered to have a lot of protective power in their bodies need only to do this. In contrast, women are thought to have little inherent protective power in their bodies and need to perform countermeasures against external attacks from spirits; women can do so by observing the precepts or worshipping spirits. However, the process of accumulating Buddhist protective power within an individual body by observing the precepts cannot be used to protect an entire family. Hence, women participate in rituals as representatives of their households.

On the other hand, when women conduct *shingyitin* for their family, it means not only they utilize the supernatural power of spirits but also submit themselves to the Spirits of Tradition whose power deviate from Buddhist norms. Because the practice of *gadaw*, which is conducted not only in *shingyitin* but also in Buddhist ritual frequently, means subordination; that is, kneeling on the ground, clasping one's hands, and touching the head to the ground.⁽⁵²⁾ This is why Ma Khin Aye distinguished showing respects from bowing down to spirits. She intended that if she conducted *gadaw* in *shingyitin*, it meant not subordinating to spirits but just showing respect (*ayoathei pyade*). By interpreting the practice of bowing down as showing respect, this means that women are just submitting to the Triple Gems; Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. Some conduct *shingyitin* not because they genuinely want to, but because they have internalized male-centered Buddhist values which ranked women subordinate in terms of innate power.

Such half-hearted involvement with the spirits can be viewed as respecting them, but also keeping them at bay in order to prevent disasters and pray for safety. Some women are willing to worship spirits, but there are also women who criticize deliberately approach to spirits to request things by attending large festivals such as *Taunbyon*. However even the latter allow holding *shingyitin*, recognizing them as "tradition" which they have already inherited from their parents. In any case, women are forced to submit to the two different powers found in spirits and Buddhism, but are admonished not to actively use the

supernatural powers of spirits as pious female Buddhists.

Conclusion

I have considered the relationship between religious practice and gender in a village in Upper Burma. Relationships between spirits and humans can be roughly divided into three types: 1) related via a place/locality, 2) related through lineage and 3) related through a connection to the soul. Among these types, examples of the Spirits of Tradition in Thaya Village show that land-based relationships are gradually incorporated into people's lineages. In addition, people have various ways of interacting with the spirits, from men who avoid getting involved with them due to the inherent Buddhist protective power in their bodies, to the half-hearted attitude of women, who conduct the ritual and show their respect, but try to keep away from spirits as much as possible as pious female Buddhists.

In practice, the relationship between people and spirits in Thaya Village reveals some gender-based tendencies, but the diversity of the findings should be attributed to individual differences rather than gender categories, as body's innate power to repelling the spiritual attack vary in individuals. Previous studies have shown that Buddhism marginalizes women and regards them as spiritually inferior. However, this view of women is not merely based on Buddhist ideology, but also concerns social inequalities based on gendered perceptions of the body, which have a great impact on people's everyday lives.

In Thaya Village, women worshiped spirits as their role because of societal beliefs about their bodies. On the other hand, they have agency not to bow down to spirits by accumulating Buddhist protective power in their bodies, or apply a different term "showing respect" to the act of bowing down instead. While perceptions of the gendered body serve as the foundation of the existing social order, there is also the potential to influence this hierarchy through practices. It is because anti-spirits tendency is accelerated especially in urban areas, where many people not only stop worshipping the Spirits of Tradition, including *Eindwin* (household *nat*), but also forget the name of them, regardless of gender. Since the gendered body is the nodal point which mediates pluralistic and multilayered social relationship, we need to be careful social authorities or forces in which the body placed.

Notes

- (1) Villages and Village Tract names in this article are listed according to their pseudonyms.
- (2) Village data is based on fieldwork conducted intermittently around the Thaya Village area from early November 2001 through the end of March 2003, and supplementary fieldwork carried out in August 2008 and February 2015. This work was supported by

JSPS KAKENHI Grant Numbers 20720247, 25300054 and the Konosuke Matsushita Memorial Foundation. I also express my gratitude to the villagers and staffs of UHRC. For more detailed informations, see [Iikuni 2009, 2011].

- (3) For example, during the Konbaun period, the village had the role of supplying salt and firewood to the palace and was also counted as a “cavalry village”. A monk from Thaya Village served as the teacher (*yazaguru*) of King Mindon and Thibaw.
- (4) Other villages in the same Village Tract such as Shwehti Village, Nyaunbin Village and Hkinhnin Village have only one monastery and two pagodas each.
- (5) The committee’s main activities are 1) mediating between monks and laypeople; 2) managing the village pagoda festivals, which are held four times a year, by collecting money for charity, holding a lottery, and keeping vigil over the offerings; 3) gathering participants for the rituals; and 4) taking care of the monks during Buddhist rituals.
- (6) The village is divided into quarters, with each taking turns to assist with the privately sponsored pagoda festivals.
- (7) Of the 45 pagodas, the village sponsored just four pagoda festivals, while the rest are privately sponsored. The whole village takes responsibility for food and offerings for the monks and pagodas. These festivals are quite large, with people invited from the neighboring villages. However, for the private festivals, villagers, mostly women, usually only provide the offering for the pagoda and participate in the ceremony.
- (8) In Thaya Village, households were divided into nine sections, and each took turns preparing breakfast for the monks.
- (9) The two groups were distinguished by age. One was a group for girls in primary and middle school, while the other was for unmarried women who have left school. Now, two groups were unified by one.
- (10) Activities during *vassa* are as follows: 1) In the early morning, all members weed the grounds of monasteries or pagodas. 2) Breakfast and lunch are eaten in members’ own homes. 3) Members gather at the pagodas in the evenings, count beads, or read sutras. 4) After sunset, members return to their homes and fast for the evening.
- (11) 1) Refrain from destroying living creatures. 2) Refrain from taking that which is not given. 3) Refrain from sexual activity. 4) Refrain from incorrect speech. 5) Refrain from intoxicating drinks and drugs which lead to carelessness. 6) Refrain from eating at the forbidden time (i.e. after noon). 7) Refrain from dancing, singing, music, going to see entertainments, wearing garlands, using perfumes, and beautifying the body with cosmetics, 8) Refrain from lying on a high or luxurious sleeping place.
- (12) In the *vassa* of 2002, 45 out of 50 observers were women, while in 2008, 67 out of 70 were female.
- (13) In 2002, the leader was a woman in her 60s who had observed *vassa* over 20 years.
- (14) Only a handful of elderly men in the village can become members of the most respected organizations, *gawpaka ahpwe*. For the rest, the only chance to assist with ceremonies is during the four village pagoda festivals and the *ahlu*. Other than assisting in these ceremonies, men rarely participate in daily religious activities unless they become a novice in childhood, dedicate their own son as a Buddhist novice, or meditate during *vassa*, especially if they are pious in old age.

- (15) Women who cannot join religious organizations due to agricultural duties usually join the labor organization called *kautsaitma ahpwe*. This group creates opportunities for members to accumulate merits. For details, see [Iikuni 2011: 76-79].
- (16) It is common for villages in Upper Burma to worship *Myinbyushin* as the village's guardian spirit. For more details, see [Spiro 1967:85,95-6,107].
- (17) This spirit is also called *Neleyin* (the Lord of the Central Land) or *Nehleyin* (the Lord of Rotating the Land). This paper will refer to it as *Nedawshin*.
- (18) This spirit is worshiped not only during annual village festivals and the *shingyitin* ritual for *ahlu*, but also during the birth ceremony; it is held seven days after a baby is born and *Medawgyingaba* (the Five Big Mothers), that is *Ameigyan*, *Ameiyeyin*, *Myautpetshinma*, *Hsegadaw* and *Kongadaw*, are worshipped along with the Spirits of Tradition in Thaya Village.
- (19) In addition to this, two personal shrines are built within individual homes, and both honor a spirit called *Shwehtishin* (the Lord of *Shwehti*). *Shwehtishin* is the guardian spirit of neighboring Shwehti Village. In both cases, a previous owner of the house had a personal connection to *Shwehtishin* and built a shrine for him.
- (20) As the names of two brother spirits are *Maun Nyo* and *Maun Hpyu*, *Taunmagyi* could be the *nat* in the list of the Thirty-Seven Lords. However, villagers are not only aware of it but also distinguish *Taunmagyi* from the Thirty-Seven Lords. In *shingyitin*, while a big offering is arranged for *Taunmagyi*, a small offering is arranged separately for the Thirty-Seven Lords which is for all the spirits that villagers cannot remember by their names.
- (21) *Taunmagyi* never accepts offerings prepared at home, since they must be prepared at the spirits' own dwelling place, where people bring kitchen utensils and foodstuffs. Not only are extremely luxurious *gadawbwe* and offerings for the two brother spirits arranged, but these spirits also require alcohol, dried meat. Two men also must attend to make the spirits appear by riding on horses made out of palm leaves (see Table 1).
- (22) The village guardian spirit ceremony (*ywabon nattin*), organized by Thaya Village, was performed by a spirit medium as follows: 1) The *Eindwin* ritual occurs at the headman's house. 2) The ritual for *Ywadowshin* is held at his shrine (also to propitiate two famous spirits *Ko Gyi Kyaw* and *Poutpa Medaw*). 3) The ritual for *Nedawshin* is held at his shrine. 4) The ritual for *Asheinidaw* is held at Kandawgyi pond. 5) The ritual for *Myautpetshinma* is held at her shrine (also to propitiate *Ameigyan*). 6) Fortune-telling, using shells, occurs at the headman's house. 7) A tug of war (men versus women) is held in an open space. This sequence of 7 steps was carried out in 2002, and conducted not only for periodic ritual, but also to bring rain. When the ritual is performed only for periodic ritual, the 7th steps do not take place. For further details, see [Iikuni 2011: 221-256].
- (23) All personal names in this paper are pseudonyms.
- (24) *Zidaw*, a spirit known throughout the country, was originally the guardian spirit of Zidaw Village in Shwebo District, and might become further widespread by becoming one of the king's Spirits of Tradition. For more information, see [Khin Maung Than 2001(1998):101-102].

- (25) *Shwehtishin* and *Aunhla Bobogyi* are pseudonyms, since they have the name of villages in them.
- (26) *Kanyi* is not well known nationally, but is a prominent local spirit; it is passed down as a Spirit of Tradition in many of the region's villages. According to the *nandain* (custodian of a shrine), *Kanyi* is *Myinbyushin*, who was given territory by a king. Those who inherit this spirit must participate in the ritual on the fifth waning day of the *Nayon* month.
- (27) *Taunmagyi* and *Htibyzaun* could be seen as the guardians of Thaya Village, because they are linked to all its residents. However, the villagers recognize the village guardian spirit as *Ywadaushin*, not as *Taunmagyi* and *Htibyzaun*. Not only are these two spirits in the list of the Thirty-Seven Lords, but they are also treated as the most formidable and awesome spirits in the *shingyitin* ritual. Considering the historically close connections with the Konbaung Dynasty, it is possible that these two central spirits were accorded more respect than the village's guardian spirit. Concerning the confrontation between the local and the national ritual, see [Brac de la Perrière 2005].
- (28) Spirits that protect relatively large territories have their own shrine called a "palace" (*nan*). At the "palace", at least one day of rituals will be held per year and people who are connected to the spirits attend the ceremonies obligatory.
- (29) The ritual should normally be held once a year, but many households hold it once every three years since it is expensive to conduct; they request forgiveness from the spirits during the ceremony. The cost of *shingyitin* varies depending on the number of spirits and the quality of the offerings, but is said to range from 2000 to 5000 kyats. In comparison, the cost of hiring the *kautsaima ahpwe* to weed or mow a lawn is 400 kyats per day, and to plant rice it is approximately 470 kyats at that time.
- (30) However, Wednesdays are avoided, and people say the spirits prefer rituals held during the months of *Nadaw* and *Tabaung*. When *shingyitin* must be held during *vassa* (for example a ritual for childbirth), the offerings are changed to vegetarian, and carbonated drinks are offered instead of alcohol in order to follow the Five Precepts as much as possible.
- (31) This type of *shingyitin* is sometimes called by another name: *mingalahsaun nattin* or *yahanhkan mingadaw nattin*. If this type *shingyitin* is held, the annual ritual can be skipped.
- (32) However, there is no need to perform *shingyitin* for the pagoda festivals.
- (33) This woman, who was in her 60s at the time, is not an official *natgadaw* since she didn't undergo the proper ritual (*yeizin thaut* and *sanhkan win*) to become a professional medium. However, the villagers called her a *natgadaw* because spirits possessed her and were able to deliver a revelation to her during rituals, due to the beauty of her soul (*leikpya hlade*).
- (34) While *natgadaw* can communicate directly with spirits through possession, *tindattelu* cannot. However, *tindattelu* who have much experience and knowledge of *shingyitin* can sense the spirits' intent from the relative physical weight of the offering. They sense spirits' will by lifting the *gadawbwe* with both hands and judging its weight, while saying "If you are satisfied, become as light as a flower!" or "If you are satisfied,

become as heavy as a stone!”

- (35) For the *ahlu* ceremony, special attention is paid to the village guardian spirits, since they are worshiped twice. In addition to *shingyitin*, people visit each monastery and spirit shrines in the village to pray for divine protection during the *ahlu* ritual, which is called *kyaun gadaw nat pya* in Thaya Village; similarly, children in urban areas are always taken to spirits’ shrines during *ahlu*.
- (36) Spirit rituals must generally conclude by mid-morning. However the ritual for *Anaut medaw*, the spirit believed to preside over childbirth, must be held in the evening at the time when she died, according to myth.
- (37) For example, two cups of palm wine and dried beef snacks are prepared, and two boys need to bring the spirits using implement of horses made of *nipa* for the *Taungmagyi* brothers. Meanwhile, the spirit *Htibyzaun*, who is said to be half monk and half spirit, is offered a white paper umbrella, tied with a yellow cloth symbolizing a monk’s outfit, and stuck in a basket of sand.
- (38) Intrinsically, a *pwegyi* is composed of seven sets of rice, with two kinds of fried pastries (*monni* and *monhpyu*) and fried fish on top of the each rice. A set of offering made of *pwegyi*, *gadawbwe* (composed of a coconut and bananas), water and soup is also called *pwegyi* inclusively. This set of offering will be referred “large offering” in this paper.
- (39) *Pwethei* is made of just one set of rice, with two kinds of fried pastries (*monni* and *monhpyu*) and fried fish on top.
- (40) 1) Refrain from killing. 2) Refrain from taking what is not given. 3) Avoid sexual misconduct. 4) Refrain from false speech. 5) Refrain from fermented drink that causes heedlessness.
- (41) This refers to gods from the Hindu tradition such as *Sakka*, *Brahmā*, or the Four Heavenly Kings, introduced to Buddhism as guardian gods.
- (42) This category includes spirits who protect localities, villages, and natural geographical features such as mountains and forests, including the Thirty-Seven *Nats*.
- (43) While there are men actively involved in spirit worship, in Thaya Village it is not proper for a man, as a male Buddhist, to do so in public. For details, see [Iikuni 2011:193-200, 221-256].
- (44) However men innately have a large amount of *hpoun*, because of their good karma from a previous existence, women also have *hpoun* but less than men. Brac de la Perrière shows that *hpoun* locates in women’s hair, while that of men is supposed to be in their right shoulders [Brac de la Perrière 2007:226].
- (45) *Hpoun* and female reproductive power affect everyday life as well as the spiritual realm. Many prohibitions relating to menstrual blood surround the handling of women’s loincloth (*htamein*). Not even new female loincloth can be mixed with the rest of the laundry. Women’s loincloth hangs lower than other laundry so that men do not inadvertently pass under it, and at the back of the house where people do not usually go. However when a woman die, her loincloth can be made into a curtain and donated to monks after sanctified so that she can accumulate merits. Thus female reproductive power is limited within women’s living bodies.

- (46) Since *hpoun* is said to exist in the upper and right sides of men's bodies, when a couple sleeps together, the woman should not sleep on the right side. It is forbidden for a woman to step over a man's head. Just as with *hpoun*, women are also forbidden to come close to a *dagogyi* pagoda or Buddha image, because their reproductive power is seen as dangerous and polluted.
- (47) Although men have a large amount of *hpoun* innately, it can be maximized by renouncing the world, as monks are called "a great virtue" (*hpoungyi*). Monks' *hpoun* are regarded quite large, since some say that spirits may be extinct, if they just touch garbs of monks.
- (48) See footnote 40.
- (49) See footnote 11.
- (50) In Burmese, *leikpya* also means butterfly. Complete separation of the *leikpya* from the body signifies death, but dreams are seen as activities undertaken by the soul when it temporarily separates from the body during sleep. Thus, souls are believed to flutter about like butterflies while people are living.
- (51) Children are given a string or necklace called a *payeit hkyi* in order to strengthen their soul and protect them. When a mother with a young child or a child with siblings dies, a *leitpya khwe* ceremony is held so that the deceased does not take the son, daughter, or sibling along to the next realm.
- (52) Spirit rituals contain subordination to spirits, as Tanabe has shown how the women participating in the *Phi Meng* ritual in northern Thailand submit to their ancestors [Tanabe 1991].

References

- Brac de la Perrière, Bénédicte 2005 "The Taungbyon Festival: Locality and Nation-Confronting in the Cult of the 37 Lords," in Monique Skidmore (ed.), *Burma at the Turn of 21st Century*, University of Hawai'i Press, pp. 65-89.
- 2007 "To Marry a Man or a Spirit?: Women, the Spirit Possession Cult, and Domination in Burma," in Monique Skidmore and Patricia Lawrence (eds.), *Women and the Contested State: Religion, Violence, and Agency in South and Southeast Asia*, University of Notre Dame Press, pp. 208-228.
- Iikuni, Yukako 2009 "Feminism to Shuukyo no Kansei: Kami Biruma Sonraku ni okeru Josei no Shuukyouteki Jissen no Jirei kara" [フェミニズムと宗教の陥穽：上ビルマ村落における女性の宗教的実践の事例から], *The Gaping Abyss Between Feminism and Religion: Religious Practice of Women in a Village in Upper Burma (Myanmar)*, *Bulletin of the National Museum of Ethnology* 34 (1), pp. 87-129.
- 2011 *Gendai Biruma ni okeru Shuukyouteki Jissen to Jendaa* [現代ビルマにおける宗教的実践とジェンダー], *Gender and Religious Practice of Women in a Village in a Contemporary Myanmar*, Tokyo: Fūkyosha.

- 2013 “Shokugyouteki Reibai to iu Sentaku: Biruma Reibai Karuto ni okeru Josei no Kanyo no Tayousei” [職業的霊媒という選択：ビルマ霊媒カルトにおける女性の関与の多様性, To Be a Professional Spirit Medium Or Not: Diversity of Women’s Involvement With Spirit Medium Cult in Myanmar], *Bulletin of Daito Bunka University* 51, pp.1-19.
- Khin Maun Than 2001 (1998) *Yoya Nat Younkyihmu hnin Dhaleihtounsanya* [Traditional Spirit Worship and custom], Yangon: Thawkyia Sapei.
- Kumada, Naoko 2001 *In the World of Rebirth: Politics, Economy and Society of Burmese Buddhists*, Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Wolfson Collage, Cambridge University.
- Nash, June C. 1966 “Living with Nats: an Analysis of Animism in Burman Village Social Relations” in A. Suddard (ed.), *Anthropological Studies in Theravada Buddhism*, Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, pp. 117-136.
- Nash, Manning 1965 *The Golden Road to Modernity: Village Life in Contemporary Burma*, New York: John Wiley and Sons.
- 1966 “Ritual and Ceremonial Cycle in Upper Burma,” in A. Suddard (ed.), *Anthropological Studies in Theravada Buddhism*, Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, pp. 97-115.
- Rodrigue, Yves 1992 *Nat-Pwe: Burma Supernatural Sub-culture*, Scotland: Kiscadale.
- Spiro, M. 1967 *Burmese Supernaturalism: A Study in the Explanation and Reduction of Suffering*, New Jersey: Prentice-hall Inc.
- 1982 (1970) *Buddhism and Society: A Great Tradition and Its Burmese Vicissitudes*, Second Expanded Edition, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Tanabe, Shigeharu 1991 “Spirits, Power, and the Discourse of Female Gender: Phi Meng Cult of Northern Thailand”, in M. Chitakasem and A. Turton (eds.), *Thai Constructions of Knowledge*, London: School of Oriental and African Studies, pp.183-212.
- Tamura, Katsumi 1984 “Biruma no Nat Shinkou” [ビルマのナツ信仰, Nat Worship in Burma], in T. Aoki (ed.), *Gendai no Jinruigaku 4 Shouchou Jinruigaku* [現代の人類学 4 象徴人類学], Tokyo: Shibundo.
- 1987“Biruma no Seirei Shinkou Saikou Josetsu”[ビルマの精霊信仰再考序説, Introduction of Rethinking about Spirit Worship in Burma], *Kagoshima Daigaku Kyouyoubu Shiroku* [鹿児島大学教養部史録] 19, pp. 39-53.
- 1991 “Ouken to ‘Hangyaku’: Biruma no Ouken wo Megutte” [王と「叛逆」－ビルマの王権をめぐる, Royal Authority and ‘Rebellion’: Concerning to Burmese Royal Authority], in M. Matsubara (ed.), *Ouken no Isou* [王権の位相], Tokyo: Koubundo.
- Temple, R. C. 1991 (1906) *The Thirty-Seven Nats: a Phase of Spirit-Worship Prevailing in Burma*, Limited Edition, London: Kiscadale publications (W. Griggs).