

# Preservation of Dawei People's Traditional Customs

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## Abstract

There are many unique traditional customs of the national races of Myanmar who are living in the Republic of the Union of Myanmar. The study of the traditional customs of a national race of Myanmar is the best way to learn about the traditional customs of Myanmar. The culture of a country is its life-blood. If the culture of a country had disappeared, the people of this country will be vanished completely. Today is the globalization age, therefore, preservation of our own culture is very necessary for all. As *Dawei* is situated in the southern part of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, it is far from upper and central Myanmar. As a result, the traditional customs of *Dawei* people are different from the others. As *Dawei* is located at the inner part of *Tanintharyi* coastal region, it is a region where ancient traditional culture, folk songs, traditional dance and dialects can be preserved. The study focused on the unique traditional customs of *Dawei* People which are different from the traditional customs of other national races of Myanmar. This paper emphasizes some traditional customs of *Daweis* and famous religious festivals preserved until today. It will contribute to understand the preservation of traditional customs of *Dawei* people and their preservations.

Key words;      *Dawei people, Tradition, Custom, Preservation, Culture*

## Introduction

*Dawei* region is located in the upper third of *Tanintharyi* Region which is situated in southern most Myanmar. And also, *Dawei* is the capital of *Tanintharyi* Region and it is 230 miles from Yangon as the crow flies. It is bounded with Ye Township in the north, Thailand in the East, *Myeik* District in the South and Andaman Sea in the west.<sup>1</sup> It is composed of four townships namely, *Dawei*, *Longlone*, *Yepyu* and *Thayetchaung* Township.<sup>2</sup> The total area of it is 5407.09 square miles.<sup>3</sup> *Dawei* Region is located in the west of ancient mountain ranges and enjoys abundant rainfall. The climatic condition of *Dawei* is not extremely cold but also hot. The difference in temperature is less but it has much rain.<sup>4</sup> Because of the differentiated natural vegetation and plentiful natural resources, the economic condition of *Dawei* is self-sufficient. And many outstanding and heroic persons had already appeared from this region for our country.<sup>5</sup>

Although there are many sayings about the derivation of the term *Dawei*, It is difficult to have sufficient facts regarding it.<sup>6</sup> There were many different spelling on the word *Dawei* and existing on the historical background of *Dawei*. The present day spelling of the term *Dawei* can be found that they were referred to the natives as well as the place in the ancient inscriptions, historical documents and palm-leaves.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, the term *Dawei* originally derived from the name of the *Dawei* people and it came from the place which is the settlement of *Dawei* people.<sup>8</sup> According to the *Dawei* chronicle, there was a saying that *Dawei* was founded at the crow shouting. In this case, *U Hne Hla* founded *Dawei* which was called *Thayarwaddy* at *Kalineyar* on Saturday, ME 1116 (AD 1754).<sup>9</sup>

*Dawei* people belong to the *Bamar* stock. Unlike the traditions of other national races such as *Danu*, *Taungyoe* and *Maru*, *Dawei* people are the same as in the traditional customs of

Myanmar.<sup>10</sup> However, there are many distinguished traditional customs in the culture of *Dawei* people. Among them, the remarkable customs and famous religious festivals of *Daweis* are the dialects of *Daweis* ( the old Myanmar language), *Dawei Dein Chin* (music) and *Dein, Yain* and *Yan* (Traditional dances) , Pre-lent homage paying, the ceremony for the remittance enquiry in marriage ceremony, changing the white cloth in the Death and funerals rites of *Dawei* people, Festival of Male Frog and Female Frog, *Dawei's* Traditional New Year Festival or Water Festival and the famous religious festivals which are held by grand scale such as Float Down Alms Bowls Festival which refers to *Shin Upagutta* in the Full Moon day of *Thadingyut* (October) and the Procession of 28 Buddha Images Festival of *Tzaung Mone* ( November).

Traditional Customs which can be preserved are the dialects of *Daweis* (the old Myanmar language), *Dawei Dein Chin* (music) and *Dein, Yain* and *Yan* (dance) and Pre-lent homage paying.

### **Dialects of *Dawei* people**

*Dawei* people have lived in *Dawei* region for many centuries and are also an ancient national group of Myanmar. Though they write in Myanmar literary style, they especially speak the ancient archaic words. They are still living as a distinct people who speak the *Dawei* dialects at present. The language and literature of *Daweis* are the same as the original Myanmar language and literature but they are different in intonation according to the differences among places, climate, environment and customs.<sup>11</sup>

There are three significant aspects in the *Daweis* dialect. They are as follows;

- (1) Most of the vowel and pronunciation of it is different from not only the pronunciation of Myanmar but also Myanmar speech.
- (2) Myanmar archaic words and the usages of Myanmar words include in the *Dawei* dialects as the other national races of Myanmar
- (3) Some usage of *Daweis* dialects which do not exist in Myanmar words.<sup>12</sup>

*Dawei* people who live in *Dawei* Township, *Yaephyu* Township, *Longlon* Township and *Thatyatchaung* Township only speak the dialects of the *Daweis*. Like the national races of *Kachin*, *Kayin*, *Mon* and *Shan*, the dialect of the *Daweis* is also used in Myanmar vocabularies and the *Daweis* dialects is one of the cultural heritage features derived from their ancestors. The dialects of *Daweis* can be said to be the original sources of Myanmar with preservation since pre- *Bagan*.<sup>13</sup>

It is proved that the dialect of *Daweis* is the oldest because it remained in writing but not in speaking of Myanmar words. A historical document which owned by the *Dawei* people is the dialects of *Daweis*. There are many significant aspects in the dialects of *Daweis* and it is also the life blood of the *Daweis*. Nowadays, the most esteemed preservation of the *Daweis* is their language. Another distinguishing feature is that the residents in *Dawei* region without discrimination in religions or races regarded themselves as *Dawei* people and they speak only *Daweis* dialects in the whole of *Dawei* region. However, the usage of words and the pronunciation of today's *Dawei* dialects are gradually being penetrated by the pronunciation of Myanmar and Myanmar speech. Nevertheless, the *Daweis* still speak their own dialects.

### **Traditional *Dawei* Dance and Song**

*Dawei* people have traditional folk music, song and dances since the ancient time. Among the traditional customs of *Dawei* people, *Dawei Dein* (classical song) and traditional *Dawei* dances are significant. *Dawei Dein* is regarded as the distinct song in the classical music. Many varieties of *Dawei* music and song are many kinds of *Dein chin*, love song, call for rain, verse song, rubber pounding song, Long drum (*Ozi*) and Chanting slogans, etc.<sup>14</sup> *Dein* dance, *Yan* dance, and *Ozi* dance with Drum ensemble, flourish in the rural festivals depending upon these songs throughout the area.<sup>15</sup> *Dawei* traditional dance has existed in the *Thanintharyi* Region since the founding date of *Dawei*. There are three kinds of *Dawei* dance; *Ayai* dance, *Yan* dance and *Ozi* dance in which dressing style, hair style, usage, song and musical instruments are used according to the ceremony. There are also many traditional *Dawei* dances and songs. Among them, a dance in which pots are put on the head is also famous as a traditional dance at the present day.<sup>16</sup> The *Dawei* Traditional cultural troupe was set up in 1988 to keep traditional culture. This helped to achieve the revival of the dances and the *Dawei* fine arts.<sup>17</sup>

Nowadays, *Dawei* people are keeping on the traditional dances and songs according to the traditional festivals. In fact, the traditional folk songs and dances are pleasant fine arts for the *Dawei* people. However, some of the traditional fine arts became fading gradually because of the influence of the modern music, song and dance. Today, traditional dances are created as suitable dance according to the tune and period. Moreover, Wearing *Dawei Longyi* (dress) is persuading fondly together with the traditional dances and songs in the present time. It can be found that they gradually try to preserve their traditional dances and song eagerly.

### **Pre- Lent Homage Paying (*War Win Chay-Kan- Taut-Thee*)**

In the Myanmar traditional customs, the young Buddhists pay always respect traditionally to the older and superior persons at the end of Buddhist Lent (*Thidingyut*). However, the *Daweis* are different from this practice. The *Daweis* pay homage to the older and superior people in the beginning of *Waso*.<sup>18</sup>

The fourteen waxing of the Moon *Waso* and the fourteen waxing of the second month of *Waso* (intercalate a year) is regarded as the homage paying date of *Dawei* people annually. It is called in the *Daweis* dialects as *Chay-Kan- Taut-Thee* which is also called as Pre-lent homage paying in *Dawei*. This practice is usually pay respect among the monks according to the age and the seniors. In this homage paying date, like single, group or family who are dressing fine clothes and go to paying homage happily.<sup>19</sup>

Pre- Lent homage paying practice is one of the significant and distinct customs of *Dawei* people unlike in the other places of Myanmar. The older and superior persons do not go anywhere except the emergency case and wait for the younger peoples' paying respect at pre – lent homage paying date. They always serve to the coming younger people with traditional *Dawei* snacks and cold drink or coffee. And then, the older people usually pay the pocket money to the children. Pre- Lent homage paying practice is one of the worthy days of *Dawei* region. It can be seen that young generation can preserve well this practice as their traditional custom.

### **Traditional Religious Festivals of Dawei**

Most of the *Dawei* people mainly believe in Buddhism and traditional *nats*. The majority of *Dawei* people are Buddhists and also they are usually worship traditional *nats* from the arrival of Buddha at *Dawei* up to the present time.<sup>20</sup> There are fifteen wards in Dawei Township and 138 village tracts in *Dawei* District. Each ward and village of *Dawei* Township has *nat* shrine which is called *Ywartawtshin*.<sup>21</sup> Especially they focus on guardian *nats* of towns and villages. Among them, *Talimema Shrine* and *Kyatsarpyin Shrine* are the biggest shrines in today's *Dawei* people. The *Dawei* region is situated close to the Andaman Sea, so their main occupations are marine business and boat building. According to the traditional belief, they believe in the *U Shin Gyi Nat* and always offer to him every year at the beginning of Buddhist lent and at the end of Buddhist lent.<sup>22</sup>

The Buddhists of *Dawei* are always holding the religious festivals with grand scale. There are many religious festivals in *Dawei*. Among them, the Pouring water at the Sacred Banyan Tree Festival which is usually held in the Full Moon day of *Kason* (May), Float Down Alms Bowls Festival which refers to *Shin Upagutta* in the Full Moon day of *Thadingyut* (October) and the Procession of 28 Buddha Images Festival which is held in the *Tazaung Mon* (November) are very famous in *Dawei*. They usually hold other religious festivals such as *Ma Ma Phaya*, the Hindu *nat* and *Sawsikon*, the Chinese *nat* on grand scale and all the residents of *Dawei* region participate in these festivals.

### **Float Down Alms Bowls Festival ( DaweiTha Beik Hmyaw Pwe)**

The Full Moon Day of *Thadingyut* (October) is regarded as *Abidhama Akhadaw* Day, the holy day for Buddhists in which the Buddhists offer and donate foods, fruits, flowers and water, lights, candles, joss-sticks to the Lord Buddha in the whole country. Moreover, the pagodas and monasteries are teeming with Buddhist devotees, who are doing merits, at pagodas, stupas and community halls in respective wards. The Lighting Festival held in *Thadingyut* is one of the most famous religious festivals in Myanmar.

The people of Myanmar always hold the lighting festival in the whole country at the full moon day of *Thadingyut* with their respective rituals and traditions. Among them, people from *Dawei* celebrate Float Down Alms Bowls Festival (In Myanmar; *Dawei Tha Beik Hmyaw Pwe*) at the Full Moon day of *Thadingyut* and people of *Shwekyin* always hold The *Thadingyut* Setting Oil Lamps Festival of *Shwe Kyin* in *Bago* Region (In Myanmar; *Shwe Kyin Mie Hmyaw Pwe*) are similar and very renown in Myanmar. The traditional belief of these festivals is to offer lights to Lord Buddha and *Shin U Pa Gotta* by setting the colorful oil lanterns along the *Dawei* River and *Shwe Kyin* River.

Some wards of Dawei start to prepare for the Float Down Alms Bowls Festival in the eve of *Thadingyut*. At the Full Moon day of *Thadingyut*, every ward of *Dawei* people offer and dedicate to the *Shin Upagutta* with foods put in the alms bowls, offertories such as flowers and water, oil lamps and candles and joss-sticks which are together floated down into the *Dawei* River at the dawn. At that time, alms bowls and bright candle lights are full in the whole of *Dawei* River beautifully. This is called as the Offertories to *Shin Upagutta* (or) Float down alms bowls festival by the natives of *Dawei* (*Dawei Tha Beik Hmyaw Pwe*). They said to pay respect to the noble *Shin U Pa Gotta*, the guardian of the sea in Buddhism. *Tha Beik Hmyaw Pwe* festival is also celebrated as a grand scale with huge raft to the sea at *Maungmakan* village at *Longlon* Township in *Dawei*.<sup>23</sup>

Float Down Alms Bowls Festival of Dawei are well attended as an annual traditional festival year by year and also the *Daweis* could observe traditional rites. So, this festival is regarded not only *Dawei Tha Beik Hmyaw Pwe* but the traditional religious festival of *Dawei*. It can be found that these practice and traditions can hand over to the generation by generation as the present *Dawei* Culture.

### **The Procession of 28 Buddha images festival**

The *Tazaung Dine* Festival is traditionally held at the Full Moon day of *Tzaung Mon* (November) in nationwide and also known as the second Festival of Lights. Majority of Buddhists celebrate annually offering of robes to the monks, competitions of *Ma-tho-thingan* weaving. Moreover, there usually hold the Hot air balloons in this *Tazaung Dine* Festival. The *Tazaung Dine* Festivals which held by many places in Myanmar are quite different. Among them, the most significant festivals are the Hot air balloons festival of *Taunggyi*, the Hot air balloons festival of Pyin Oo Lwin, the *Tazaung Dine* Festival of Pyay and the *Tazaung Dine* Festival of Dawei.

The Procession of 28 Buddha images festival is hold the whole of the country at the Full Moon day of *Tazaung Mon*. The Procession of 28 Buddha images festival is also one of the greatest religious festivals of *Dawei*. Traditionally, the Procession of 28 Buddha images festival is assigned by the 28 wards of *Dawei* Townships. The round of procession of the images started at 7 p.m. of the 14<sup>th</sup> waxing day and Buddha images are carried back to the compound of the *Law-Ka-Marrazein* Pagoda at 4 a.m. dawn of the Full Moon day of *Tazaung Mon*. Donations such as foods and money are offered along the procession route by the native people. The Procession of 28 Buddha images festival is started to hold in 1909 on grand scale. Over 2,000 Buddhist lay devotees worn white-clad are accompanied in the procession of Buddha images. Without discrimination on the nationality or religion, the whole people of *Dawei* participate in this festival and hold annually with ritual.<sup>24</sup> Although The Procession of 28 Buddha images festival is held in the many places of Myanmar, the Procession of 28 Buddha images festival held in *Dawei* could represent *Dawei* region because of the significant features.

The *Tazaung Dine* festival of 2014 in *Dawei* region is very distinct festival. This Festival was held in *Dawei* on 6 November 2014 in which monks from Myanmar, Thailand and other 13 countries attended and celebrated magnificently. In this festival, five thousands of oil-lit lighted and five thousands hot air balloons launched as cooperation programme to intend the friendly relationship between Myanmar and Thailand and to flourish Buddhism. This festival became the first historic merit event and the most important milestone for the *Dawei* people.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, It can be regarded that this event is the great preservation of Dawei people on their religion.

### **Cultural Heritages of Dawei**

*Dawei* has been called *Duraka Tai* since 4000 year ago. Gradually, ancient cities had been founded in this region by the successive rulers.<sup>26</sup> Ancient *Dawei* cities were included in the list of towns sufficient to levy 100,000 troops during the *Bagan* era. This region served faithfully under the rule of Myanmar kings though it was located between Thailand in the east and Mon in the north throughout the ages.<sup>27</sup>

Although there were many evidences that early men had inhabited in the *Dawei* Region since the prehistoric time, all the researchers from local and abroad faced many difficulties to do research about the relics of the ancient cultural heritage of the *Daweis* because of heavy rainfalls.<sup>28</sup>

There were ten ancient cities in *Dawei* region. They were *Aungthawaddy*, *Hmingkari*, *Thagara*, *Sinseint* (1) (2), *Dauntkwe*, *Weidi*, *Mute hti*, *Kamyaw*, *Kyatsarpyin* and *Tharawaddy* ancient cities. Among them, seven ancient cities were located along the *Dawei* River. Cities walls, pagodas, palaces and ancient utensils are still yielded at the two ancient cities; *Thagara* and *Mute hti*.<sup>29</sup> According to the Aerial Photographs, evidences of historical buildings and utensils were yielded and then *Thagara* was regarded as the oldest cities among ancient sites of *Dawei* region. *Thagara* is recognized as Ancient Site Zone and Protected and Preserved Zone by the Announcement of 2012.<sup>30</sup>

The researchers from local and foreign countries do many researches regarding with the ancient cities of *Dawei* region. And then, most of *Dawei* people and researchers always collect and preserve the ancient *Dawei* cultural heritages and some of the *Daweis* try to found as the Museum. *Dawei Kyaw Min* first founded as a little Museum of *Dawei* traditional culture in 1962 to preserve the cultural heritages of *Dawei* people.<sup>31</sup> Later, it was moved to *Pharagyi* Museum at the compound yard of *Lokamarazein* Pagoda on 2013 and open twice a day in morning and evening.

Many *Sanghas* and *laities* of *Dawei* people are collecting the relics of ancient utensils as possible as they can, with national spirit. Among them, *U Thondara*, the abbot of East *Sakhangyi* Monastery at *Longlon* township, founded own museum which is named *Thagara* Museum. He had collected stone tools, many different size of colourful beads, Buddha images, many potteries and lead and tin coins from *Thargara* ancient site on and on in 2013. He said that he has a plan to create *Dawei* national Museum to preserve the valuable culture of *Dawei* people.<sup>32</sup>

It can be confirmed that *Dawei* people both monks and *laities* try to preserve their valuable ancient cultural heritage. At present, New Culture Museum of *Dawei* had already been constructed by the arrangement of the Ministry of Culture at Stand Street in *Dawei*. But it has not opened yet.

### **Others Preservation on Cultural Heritages of *Dawei***

There is much other preservation on the cultural heritages of *Dawei*. Among them, the *Pitakas*, the three repositories of Buddhist Scriptures are preserved at the repository of the Buddhist Scriptures ( *Pitakats Kyaung*) in *Lyaung Taw mu Phayagyi* (*Shwe Thar Lyaung Phayagyi*) at *Dawei*. The original donors of these *pitakas* were King *Mindon*, Queen, Princes and Ministers.<sup>33</sup> It can be regarded that local historians and researchers including *laities* and monks collect and preserve the cultural heritages of *Dawei* as much as they can till today.

Most of the traditional customs of the *Daweis* which are different from the other national races of Myanmar also have. They are “the ceremony for the remittance enquiry” (*Amay Ngwe Aut Mingalar* in the dialects of *Daweis*) that is the ceremony of engagement, changing the white cloth to the Death and funerals rites of *Dawei* people, *Pwe-San* which is donation festival at the Myanmar New Year Day to donate foods for monasteries, *Dawei* Traditional Water Festival and Festival of Male Frog and Female Frog or Calling for Rain. Nowadays, some traditional customs became gradually faded away at present because of less preservation. However, the old generations are trying to preserve these significant traditional customs.

*Dawie Longyi* (cloth) is famous traditional dress of *Dawei* People and they still wear it at the present time. The eating style of the *Daweis* is quite different from the other places of Myanmar. The most popular food for *Dawei* people is *Dawei Mont-Let- Thoaat*. *Dawei Hmine* (flower) and *Dawei Kyain* (cane) are famous for the including name of *Dawei* and these are also symbolical features of the *Daweis* traditional culture.

## Conclusion

Myanmar is a country in which over hundred national races are living and it is also rich the ancient cultural heritages. *Dawei* Region has many interesting historical events, many traditional customs, different dialects as well as emergence of the outstanding persons from this region. *Dawei* is geographically separated from Upper and Central Myanmar, but the surrounding places of *Dawei* are the regions which are flourishing in Buddhism. According to the geographically approximate *Dawei* people believe and practice both in the teaching of Lord Buddha and the adoring to the traditional *nats*, it also effects on the preservation of their culture. Moreover, the existing traditional customs are automatically protected because of these favorable conditions.

A great number of *cetis* and famous pagodas can be seen and every monastery is magnificent in *Dawei*. Therefore, it is possible to prove that the *Dawei* people deeply focus on Buddhism. Nowadays, all religions and multiple races live peacefully together and all religious festivals are allowed to be held with tolerance and grand scale within *Dawei* region. Just as the *Dawei* people are devout Buddhists so they also participate in the worship of traditional *nats*. Moreover, they pay respect to other religions and traditional *nats*. In the preservation of *Dawei* people's traditional customs, it can be seen that some customs are still practiced and preserved traditionally but some are nearly faded away. In the age of globalization, every nation has duties and responsibilities to maintain and preserve their own cultural heritage.



Figure (1) : Map of *Tanintharyi* Region



Figure (2) : *Dawei* was founded at the crow shouting



Figure (3) : The famous *Dawei* dance in which pots are put on the head



Figure (4) : Float Down Alms Bowls Festival ( *Dawei Tha Beik Hmyaw Pwe* )





Figure (5) : The Procession of 28 Buddha images festival of Dawei



Figure (6) : Tazaung Dine Festival of Dawei in 2014



Figure (7) : Thagara is recognized as Ancient Site Zone and Protected and Preserved Zone



Figure (8): *Pharagyi* Museum at the compound yard of *Lokamarazein* Pagoda



Figure (9) : *U Thondara*, The abbot of East *Sakhangyi* Monastery at *Longlon* township, founded own museum which is named *Thagara* Museum

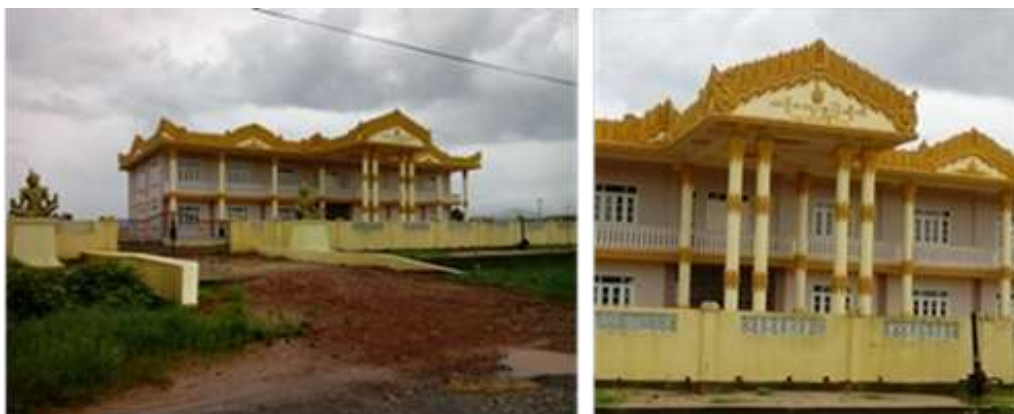


Figure (10): New Culture Museum of Dawei at Stand Street



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