

THE TRADITIONS AND CUSTOMS OF *TWIN-YOE TWIN-ZARS* IN YENANCHAUNG TOWNSHIP

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Abstract

This paper describes the Traditions and Customs of *Twin-Yoe -Twin-zars* in Yenanchaung Township. They became a distinct social class during the reign of king Badon in Konbaung Period. In Late Konbaung Period. The oil industry has been existed in Yenangyaung since the days of Bagan Period. Along with the emergence of the industry, there also came to appear a distinguished class of the people, by the names of “*Twin-Yoe*” and “*Twin-zar*”. Concerning with the appearance of these people, all records through the ages pointed and used since Bagan Period. The present paper presented all the affairs concerning with *Twin-Yoe Twin-zars* as much as possible, incorporating matters from the days of their emergence to the disappearance on 1 April 1965, where the nationalization of their industry occurred. In doing so, the paper is divided into, focusing their traditions and customs in Konbaung Period, colonial period and independence era. From this research project, it is expected that an identity of Yenanchaung has been partially revealed. It also to be concluded that further reliable documents will be searched for clear revelation to researchers.

Keywords: Traditions, Customs and Status

Introduction

Twin-yoe Twin-zar community has been existed since the olden days, but actually emerged only in the reign of King Anawrahta (1044-1077), in early Bagan Period. There were two social classes namely the ruling social class and the ruled social class. Of the many social status in Myanmar society, one social status is found confined to only a region, which was *Twin-Yoe Twin-zars* or the hereditary earth oil diggers and owners of Yenanchaung *Twin-Yoe Twin-zars* had done the digging of earth oil as the mean for their living, since the days of Bagan Period. Though the number of *Twin-Yoe Twin-zar* families increased, they did not mingle with other peoples, not in association with others, not dine with other people and not marry to others. The precedence of *Twin-Yoe* succession dictated that women in the male line of *Twin-yoe* descendant and men in the female line of *Twin-Yoe* descendant could not succeed the hereditary right of *Twin-Yoe Twin-zars*. This practice finally caused to appear the practice of trading the *Twin-Yoe Twin-zars* right.

Research Objectives

This research was written and presented with the following objectives:

- To examine the lineage of the *Twin-Yoe Twin-zars*
- To study the social status of the community in Yenanchaung
- To know about the Myanmar's traditional heritages as a cultural research

Research Questions

Who became a distinct social class in Konbaung Period?

What kinds of secular auspicious occasions were held?

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Data and Research Methods

In compiling this paper, the researcher used primary and secondary sources. The necessary data such as Historical Publications, Yenanchaung University library and Department of History. And then personal interviewees. The research will be conducted using a historical analysis approach, which involves the various steps such as Literature Review, Document Analysis, Content Analysis.

The Traditions and Customs of *Twin-Yoe Twin-zars*

Like the Kings of Myanmar monarchy, *Twin-Yoe Twin-zars* in their cultural tradition usually paid homage to the elders, teachers and parents three times a year at the new year in Tagu, at the start of Buddhist Lent in Wazo and at the end of Buddhist Lent in Thadingyut. In matrimonial affairs, *Twin-Yoe Twin-zars* were lightly bounded by the tradition of intermarriage among the community. In order not to mix with other people, *Twin-Yoe Twin-zars* married their son and daughter to near or far relatives, mostly step brother and sister. *Twin-Yoe Twin-zars* usually held three auspicious days of wedding, cradle hanging and novitiation/ear boring wonderfully and grandiosely. At such occasions, grandparents gave oil wells to their grandsons and granddaughter. *Twin-Yoe Twin-zars* had made a range of donations such as ordination hall and stairways and so on. These people usually held funeral services grandiosely. It can be deduced that *Twin-Yoe Twin-zars* and their community was a privileged class and community.

Some held recitation of paritta suttas at the waxing day of a month and New Year paritta suttas recitation, where elders were invited and paid homage to them and entertained them with foods and snacks.¹ The ceremony of worldly matters the cradle blessing ceremony, ear-boring ceremony, marriage, and the burial ceremony are done extraordinarily. Before Colonial period, the alms-giving ceremony of wealthy people with or without musical instruments offered food to the attendance in the consecration hall and the ten righteous are also offered. Wealthy *Twin-Yoe Twin-zars* held the twelve secular auspicious occasions grandiosely, but some held it only modestly by inviting each seven houses from cardinal direction. Of these, wedding, cradle hanging, novitiation and funeral services were held pompously. The social control of *Twin-Yoe Twin-zar* community was that they usually intermarried among the member of their community, as they wished to maintain the community in tact. In this way, *Twin-Yoe Twin-zar* community in Yenanchaung became a secluded community. The secluded privileged class of *Twin-Yoe Twin-zar* and the influential Salin *thu-gaungs* were in one aspect the same, that is, their wedding tradition. Salin *thu-gaungs* intermarried themselves and if one married to other person outside of their circle, this person was not recognized as *thu-gaungs*.²

Wedding

In matrimonial affairs, *Twin-Yoe Twin-zars* were lightly bounded by the tradition of intermarriage among the community.³ Likewise, Salin *thu-gaungs* also intermarried themselves among their circle. In order not to mix with other people, *Twin-Yoe Twin-zars* married their son

¹ Twinyo U Naing, "Yenangyaung Myo Ye-nan Twin-yoe Twin-zar-mya Tha-mainghnint Da-le-htone-san Yin-kye-hmu" (The History of *Twin-Yoe Twin-zar*: their Tradition and Culture), Yenanchaung, Handscript, 1970, p.58 (Henceforth: Naing, 1970)

² Daw Ohn Kyi, "Salin Thugaung Tha-maing A-kyin" (The History of Salin Thu-gaung (brief), Miscellaneous Myanmar History, Mandalay, Typescript, 1982, p.77

³ MBK, An Outline of Burma's Oil History, Rangoon, Myawaddy Press, 1982, p.15

and daughter to near or far relatives, mostly step brother and sister. They accepted marriage by exchange.⁴ Wedding tradition of *Twin-Yoe Twin-zars* were found different from other people, especially in those of ceremonial style and accoutrements. As they regarded themselves “the secluded community”, they were prisoners of vain glory, such as keeping their tradition, doing intermarriage only and holding pompous wedding. But *Twin-Yoe Twin-zars*, were dignified by their wealth and high living standard in the social circle in Yenanchaung.⁵

The auspicious day of cradle hanging

Twin-Yoe Twin-zars usually held three auspicious days of wedding, cradle hanging and novitiation/ear boring wonderfully and grandiosely.⁶ When cradle hanging ceremony was held, they put their child in silver cradle, decorated with flowers. If the child was boy, toys of sword, gun and so on were placed at the side of the cradle and if girl, stone slab, *thanakha* and other toys were placed at the side of cradle, along with books and ballpen. While rocking the cradle, grandparents usually recited some Dhamma (teachings of the Buddha) verses. The child was given water with silver cup. These children were to use their own cup, till they came of age. At the ceremony of cradle hanging, monks were usually invited and offered alms foods and then visitors were treated with foods and snacks. Grandparents usually gave one or two gold coins to the child, some even gave oil well to the child. If it was oil well, the child became owner of oil well, effectively became *Twin-zars* since childhood. This practice of giving oil well to child was especially done, at the ceremony of cradle hanging. It was keeping one of the traditions of *Twin-Yoe Twin-zars*, but showing the power of wealth of the community.⁷

Novitiation and Ear-boring Ceremony

In holding novitiation and ear boring ceremony, there were entertaining words, consecration, and concluding entertaining words, which were exclusively performed by the persons of *Twin-Yoe Twin-zars*. Whenever feeding ceremony was held, rice feeders and rice food holders were wealthy, child bearing *Twin-Yoe Twin-zars*.⁸ Some had it made invitation with cloth, where it was interwoven with invitation letters and kept if for remembrance. In novitiation ceremony, novice to-be wore tiara, gold sash and gold girdle and near him were placed the eight requisites of a monk. Gold girdle had a buckle, on which was embossed the figure of novice-to-be's birth date representative animal. Ear boring girls wore gem studded ceremonial frock and under the “Sibon” (Myanmar ceremonial head-dress for girls) ceremonial head-dress wore gold diadem, on which was inscribed the name of the girl. These girls also wore gold girdle, on the buckle of which was embossed the representative figure of the girl's birth date. After the ceremony, the novice-to-be and ear boring girls were given what they wore of gold sash, gold girdles and gold diadem.⁹ At such occasions, grandparents gave oil wells to their grandsons and

⁴ Consecration hall (betel server with stand, best man, brides maid, bachelor's room, maiden's room)

⁵ Interview with (*Twin-Yoe*) Daw Khin Nwe Nwe, (B.E.H.S, Retired), 86 year old, Shwe Kyar Ngon Quarter, (3.8.2024)

⁶ *Yenangyaung Myo-ne Phyt-sin Hmat-tan* (Records of Yenangyaung Township), Yenangyaung, Kawi Mahein Press, 1969, p.7

⁷ Interview with (*Twin-Yoe*) Dr. Myint Myint Than, (Thant Zin Oo Clinic) 80 Year Old, Shwe Kyar Ngon Quarter, (3.8.2024)

⁸ “Tha-shin-pyu Mingalar A-khan-a-nar A-si-a-sin” (Narites of novitiation Ceremony (1973)), Dr. Yin Yin Tun Collection, handwriting, p.15

⁹ *Twin-yoe U Yoe Pe's* novitiation and ear boring ceremony interviewed with Daw Khin Nwe Nwe, aged 77, on 20.5.2011

granddaughter, and grandparents and relatives gave lands and money to their grandchild, which was recorded on a *parabaik*. Before the novice-to-be and ear boring girls were taken to their mentor, they were to pay homage to the guardian Nat (God), known as Bobogyi.¹⁰ At the ceremony, Sayadaws were invited and offered alms foods, children were consecrated and boys were ordained into the Order. Invited guests were entertained with foods and snacks.¹¹ *Twin-yoe Twin-zars* had made a range of donations such as ordination hall and stairways and so on. In 1869, son of Wunshindaw Yenangyaung Myo-zar Bohmu Myinwun Mingyi, four towns governor (Yenangyaung, Wetmasut, Kyaukye and Pakhanng) *Twin-zar* U Maung Maung Lay and his wife donated a bell, worth 31,506 kyats, at the Auk-taw-ya Monastery, in honour of the ceremonies of making novice and ear boring for their son, Maung Maung Ba. As a record of donation, they inscribed an inscription on the outer surface of the *Atighosamakuta-ghamda-rajā* Bell in 1869. The inscription written in Pali and Myanmar languages kept fourteen lines of letters. The Bell took the leading role among the Bell inscriptions in Yenanchaung's area for tracing the Town's events.¹² Wealthy *Twin-yoe Twin-zars* usually held and observed their traditions with pomp and romp.

Donation (erections of pagodas, building of monasteries and inscription sheds)

In 1908, *Twin-zar* U Thakan and *Paramiphet* Daw Khin Thin and their son U Thant Zin and wife Daw Ma Ma Gyi donated stone inscriptions of 114 slabs of Vinaya (discipline or code of conduct for Buddhist monks), 124 slabs of Suttanta and 213 slabs of Abhidhamma (Buddhist doctrine embodied in the third basket of Tipitaka), totalling 451 stone inscriptions with the shed.¹³ This inscription shed can still be seen in Ponnagon Ward, in the north part of Yenangyaung. They also donated Pyinsamarazein Pagoda, the upper Nat shrine with figures of Indra, four guardians, dragon, garuda, ogre, and the lower Nat shrine with figures of Bobogyi, Shwepyingyi and Shwepyinlay, Kyeponna, seven queens and Ma Hnelay. *Twin-zar* U Thant Zin and wife Daw Ma Ma Gyi repaired their parent's donation of inscription shed. Since 1996, grandson of *Twin-zar* U Thant Zin and Daw Ma Ma Gyi, Maj. Tin Maung (Rtd.) and wife annually donated 300,000 kyats to the reparation trustee of inscription shed. In 1909, Mindon's Queen Kyemyin repaired a monastery in the Mahāvisutāyama Taik at Innagan, in the east section of Mandalay. This monastery is known as Kyemyin Monastery till present. Great grandsons and daughters of Queen Kyemyin go on maintain their great grandmother's donation nowadays.¹⁴

In 1914, a total of Twenty-four *Twin-Yoe Twin-zars* had established *Sasanahita Catupissaya (Yoma)* daily alms offering association, by dedicating an oil well for it. When the British gave oil wells to Twenty-four *Twin-Yoe Twin-zar*, they divided these wells among them and an oil well came out extra. When they discussed about the extra oil well, to use it for the establishment of the association, went against the plan. Thus shares of the four were bought by *Twin-zar* U Bo Htun and Daw Phwa for the share of *Twin-Yoe* U Yo Set, Salin Seinban monastery donor Daw Meinmagyi for the share of *Twin-Yoe* U Shwe Din, *Twin-zar* Saya Ywe

¹⁰ The legendary founder of earth oil, who after death, became a Nat, looking after *Twin-Yoe Twin-zar* relative

¹¹ *Twin-yoe* U Yoe pe's record on the novitiation and ear boring ceremony, 1973, 4

¹² Kyaw Swe Oo, An investigation of Yenanchaung in the context of Stone and Bell inscriptions, Yenanchaung Degree College, Research Project, 2017, p.4

¹³ U Win Kyi (Yenangyaung), "Yenangyaung Myo Hma Pi-ta-kat-taw-son Kyauk-sayon Dham-ma Sa-di-mya Thamaing (Yenangyaung)" (History of Pitaka Inscriptions in Yenangyaung), *Yenatha Annual Magazine*, Yangon, Colour Zone Press, 2006, p. 10

¹⁴ Field Survey on 2. 8.2024

and wife for the share of *Twin-Yoe* U Thagado and Daw Ma Ma Gyi, wife of *Twinzar-yo* U Thant Zin for the share of Fatama Bi Bi and donated to the association.¹⁵ The oil well donated to the association was Grant Number 3955. British Burma Petroleum Co. paid advanced money of 5000 kyats, to do the oil well, in joint venture with the association. BBPC dug it with machine and the oil well number of it was No.44. Sasanahita Catupissaya association was added the word “Yoma”, to indicate, it was established based on the advanced money of 5000 kyats. First chairman of the association was U Yoe Pe and secretaries were also *Twin-Yoe Twin-zars*. Elder members led by U Yoe Pe, supervised association and three persons were alternately assigned annually to do the operation of the association. They made the association’s fund increased, by means of operating money lending. On 23 January 1924, *Twin-zar* Pyinmana Prince and wife Htayanka Hteikkhaungtin Prince donated 2000 kyats to the Catupissaya association, in dedication of mother Queen Kyemyin.¹⁶

In 1921, *Catupissaya* association formed a sub-association of *Sasanahita Dhammānuggha* Exam Association. On 22 September 1928, *Twin-zar* Ma Phwa Nyein donated her oil well with the Grant-No.355, to this association, which located at Twin-gon Aungban Ward.¹⁷ When the Revolutionary Council nationalized all oil wells, these associations lost their oil wells. Thus these associations began to dwindle, far their wherewithal sources were being cut off. In 1971, under the lead of *Twin-zar* U Kyi Sein, traders and businessmen reinvigorated the association, with U Khine as chairman. Since then, Catupissaya association can go on their daily alms offering to sangha. The association goes on run till present day. *Twin-zar-yo* Daw Thet Su, son U Ba U (ex. upper house deputy and lawyer) and Daw Ahma built a brick monastery called Yadanabonmyint in Shweminwun Taik, Yenanchaung. As it was bit by a bomb during World War II, grandsons and daughters repaired it. All these indicate that *Twin-yoe Twin-zars* had been found maintained donations of their forefathers.¹⁸

Whenever these people made any donation, they invariably prefixed their appellation of *Twin-yoe*, *Twin-zar* and *Salin Thu-gaungs*, before their names. Their donations had exalted them, by assuming such appellations of pagoda donor, Sima (Buddhist Ordination Hall) donor, monastery donor and so on, which were possible only by the power of earth oil. With regard to religion, *Twin-yoe Twin-zars* might be attributable as devout devotees to the Sāsana. They were also found to be believers in Nat worship. Whenever an oil well was to be dug out, they worshipped Bobogyi Nat and seven queens and prayed for the good exploitation of earth oil. Thus, *Twin-yoe Twin-zars* can be said of devout Buddhists as well as Nat worshipers.¹⁹

Funeral Ceremony

Twin-yoe Twin-zars usually performed the inauspicious affair of funeral ceremony, according to their traditions and customs.²⁰ When someone in the household died, the style of preparation of funeral was different, dependent upon who died, such as household head or sons or daughters or son-in-law or daughter-in-law or servants. If it was house owner or household

¹⁵ *Yenangyaung Myo Tha-tha-na-hi-ta Satupassaya Yoma A-thin U-pa-de* (Rules of Yenangyaung Sasanahita Catupissaya Yoma Association), Mandalay, Tampadipa Division, Pitaka Press, 1978, p.6

¹⁶ 23 January 1924, donated to the Catupissaya Association

¹⁷ 22 September 1928, donated to Sasanahita Dhammānuggha Exam Association

¹⁸ Field Survey (3.7.2024)

¹⁹ Kyaw Soe, “*Twin-yoe Twin-zar Tha-maing*” (History of *Twin-yoe Twin-zar*), M.A Thesis, History Department, University of Yangon, 1987, p.2 (Henceforth: Kyaw Soe, 1987)

²⁰ Kyaw Soe, 1987, p.40

head, the funeral was prepared at about the middle of the house, and other persons such as sons, daughters, son-in-law, daughter-in-law, brother, sister, uncle, auntie and so on of relatives, the funeral was prepared in the roofed extension of the house. If it was house servant, who had been in the house since the days of forefathers, the funeral was placed on the house. If the servant arrived the house, only in time of household head, the funeral was placed on the ground at the side of the house, where temporary shed was built. However, if any visitor, relatives or stranger, had died, the funeral was placed outside the house, well away from the line of caves. The corpse of *Twin-yoe Twin-zars* shall not keep more than three days. If it desires to keep more, the corpse shall bury only on the seventh day. If one dies on new moon day, he/she shall bury on the same day and hold food offering to the monk in dedication of the deceased. Also if it was a new mother, died within seven day of delivery and the one died of violent death, shall bury within the day of death. Besides, death by small pox, leprosy and virulent disease and children less than 10 years of age, shall bury within the day. No funeral ceremony shall be held for these persons.²¹

At the funeral of *Twin-yoe Twin-zar*, musicians have to play the dirge, to the accompaniment of the “*Byaingtaung*”²² drums, which are restricted to the funeral only. The bier pavilion where the coffin was placed, was shouldered by friends and relatives, some of them drew the rope, extended from the bier. At the day of the bury of the corpse, monks were to be invited according to the age of the deceased. At the place of bury, four banana trees were to be planted. After the corpse had been lowered in the ground, relatives and friends filled the pit with earth and stone, mind full of the law of impermanence. Within the seven days, alms foods offering to the monk in dedication of the deceased shall be done daily. If it built the tomb, the name and the appellation of the deceased were recorded on the tomb. Being a privileged community, *Twin-yoe Twin-zars* have unusual funeral rites, different from those of ordinary people.²³

Finding and discussion

In presenting the customs and traditions of the current oil well worship ceremonies, it is not solely for the purpose of preserving and adhering to ancient practices. Rather, it is intended to inform and educate about a part of Myanmar's traditional heritage as a cultural research endeavor. Although it cannot be assumed that the traditional practices and customs of the oil well-digging lineage strictly adhere to their ancestral traditions, it is genuinely believed that their cultural heritage should be properly revealed and presented.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Anawrahta had appointed the head of *Twin-Yoe Twin-zars* as *Twinthu-gyi*, decorating him with the title of *Naymyothamantayaza*, responsible to administer *Twin-Yoe Twin-zars*, to settle and judge all affairs and cases, occurred among the community. *Twin-thu-gyi* had the power to grant anyone to dig the earth oil. *Twin-Yoe Twin-zar* community was a secluded one, to the extent that they did not dine, not marry and not communicate with other peoples. In both line of descendants, only the primogeniture could succeed the line, the eldest son to the male line and the eldest daughter to the female line. When there was no heir, for fear of disappearance of the line, the hereditary right was sold to others, who mostly happened to be members of *Twin-*

²¹ Naing, 1970, p.68

²² Wrapping drums and above with white cloths

²³ Interview with Daw Sint Sint, (Sein Min Press), 78 Year old, Sone taik Quarter (3.8.2024)

Yoe Twin-zars community. There also were some succession disputes. Of the twelve auspicious occasions, cradle hanging, novitiation and wedding ceremonies were grandiosely and pompously held. At such occasions, elders gave a range of gifts from gold coins to oil well. *Twin-Yoe Twin-zars* also donated ordination hall, rest house, and bell, plus the donation of pagodas, monasteries, stairways, archway, and so on. *Twin-Yoe Twin-zars* had it established a religious association, known as Catupissaya (*Yoma*) daily alms food offering association. All these donations and dedications show the fact that *Twin-Yoe Twin-zars* were pious Buddhists. In social area, *Twin-Yoe Twin-zars* were found themselves ostracizing from other peoples, by not relating to, not dining with and not marrying to other peoples. Their observance of those social occasions of novitiation, wedding and funeral were different from other peoples. Since then, centuries long traditional livelihood of *Twin-Yoe Twin-zars* was gone forever, but still known the industry and the people in association together forever.

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