

**The Endurance of Traditional Beliefs in Buddhist Festivals:
A Case Study of the Hot Air Balloon Festival in Taunggyi, Southern Shan State,
Myanmar**

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Abstract

Taunggyi Hot Air Balloon Festival is a most well-known festival not only for people in Myanmar but also among foreigners. The festival was established with a religious meaning. While at the beginning of the festival, there was only one balloon participating, year by year the number of balloons increased, and today over 400 balloons take part. Nowadays, the festival is celebrated transnationally as a traditional handicraft balloon competition. The competitors increasingly devote their traditional belief to become the winner of the competition. The youth of both Buddhism and other religions are participating in the festival, resulting in a combination of traditional beliefs. The aim of this paper is to explore the core performances and the significant customs as traditional beliefs in the festival. The specific objectives are to explore the traditional beliefs of the participants; the role and function of traditional beliefs in the festival; and the influence of traditional and religious beliefs on the festival. Qualitative research and a descriptive study design are applied in the research, and key informant interviews and direct observation were used to explore the research questions.

Keywords: hot air balloon, religious belief, traditional belief, competitors

Introduction

Taunggyi Hot Air Balloon Festival is a very well-known festival not only for Myanmar's ethnic groups but also for foreigners. Taunggyi is the capital of Shan State, located in the south of the State. Taunggyi is the fifth largest city of Myanmar, and is home to a diversity of traditional ethnic groups such as Shan, Paoh, Kachin, Intha, Danu and so on. Although ethnic groups are diverse and religious beliefs are different, they all participate in the hot Air Balloon festival with their traditional beliefs and their traditional handicraft skills.

The festival is organized as the Buddhist ritual. According to Myanmar tradition, launching the balloon is a light offertory for the Buddha. Although the people cannot reach to the Buddha in heaven, the balloon can do so. According to the meaning of the festival, all the competitors paint the Buddha image on the body surface of the balloon. They enshrine the hot air balloon as representative of the Buddha. So they want to be successful in launching the balloon. To be successful they follow the rules and regulations as well as indigenous beliefs or taboos and mana of traditional belief. At the beginning of the festival, there was only one balloon, but year by year celebrating the festival, the number of balloons increased until now it is over 400. The festival is now transnationally celebrated as a traditional handicraft balloon competition. The competition can be categorized into two types - the day-time competition and the night time competition. The more the number of competition groups is increased, the more the competitors will struggle to become the winner. They must not only follow the rules and regulations but also practice taboo and manna, because the result of the competition depends on their work and their luck. Before launching the balloon, the competitors can touch the objects. After launching the balloon, the balloon is in the sky and they can't. The successful launch depends on their competence, the weather and their luck. For good luck, they are eager to practice their traditional local knowledge or indigenous belief. They want to perform the functions of traditional beliefs, and they eagerly accept the influences of traditional belief.

The aim of this research is to explore the core performances and the significance manners as traditional beliefs in their festival. The specific objectives are to explore the traditional belief of the participants, to find out the role and function of traditional belief in festival and to analysis the influences of traditional and religious beliefs in the festival.

Literature Review

Festivals can be traced back thousands of years, involving a series of colorful legends and traditions. Chinese New Year Festival, the lantern festival, was celebrated by the famous legends of Nian. Chinese believe that Nian was a predator that could infiltrate houses. Nian, an extremely cruel and ferocious beast who the ancients believed would devour people on New Year's Eve. To keep Nian away, red paper couplets are posted on doors, torches are lit and fire crackers are set off throughout the night. The New Year's celebration traditionally included a religious ceremony given in honor of Heaven and Earth, the gods of the household and the family ancestors (Chinese New Year's Festival).

Falzon and Cassar (2015) explain the Maltese festival as cultural heritage and identity of a particular population group. The issue of the fireworks that are an intrinsic part of these festivals and are so important that many festival groups have their own fireworks as a cultural product. The function of the festival is a part of the rivalry and competition among local groups. Fireworks are one of the most contentious issues of public contestation, their moderation is required, but their regulation remains in question.

The concept of French Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) "habitus" is particularly associated with festivals and how they are celebrated, related stories, codes of behavior, attitude and beliefs. Bourdieu focused on understanding the informal cultural formation of a generation's habitus, indeed its folklore: the traditional, unofficial, non-institutional part of the culture, celebrated by this particular group of people commemorating a particular festival. Bourdieu offers sociological vocabulary for the analysis of the festival, and its associated beliefs, practices and customs.

Tradition means a long-established custom or belief that has been passed on from one generation to another. The concept of tradition has two main themes as Taboo and mana. Taboos are the inhibitions from social custom or emotional aversion, which are forbidden. Mana is supernatural, impersonal power in an object or person, believed to confer success. General definition of a festival is a themed, public celebration that is held regularly at same place. It is a time when community histories, values, ideologies and identity are jointly shared (Falassi, 1987, p.2).

Festivals thus directly or indirectly affect all community members and explicitly or implicitly refer to the fundamental values and world view that are shared by the community and are the basis of their cultural and social identity (Delgado, 2016). Weber (2015, pp. 90-91) states that the individual experience of a participant may have several dimensions, aesthetic, cognitive, affective and social. Each of these dimensions is intertwined with personal values, history, taste and expectations.

According to Davie (2011) "today's world is not only a secular place; it is full of various forms of religious life ..." Indeed, in modern society, religion in various forms is actively influencing all spheres

of public life and the process of socialization of the human being. Its role also increases significantly in the development of new initiatives in all areas of science and life.

From the point of view of Spiro (1967), in line with his "two religions" thesis, E. Paul Durrenberger described that for Shan villagers there are two separate spheres: a spirit component and a Buddhist one. The first provides ways to achieve particular concrete goals and the second, a means to increase one's individual innate power by incrementing his or her merit by making offerings. Although Shan villagers have two separate spheres, the rockets festival is not related to any spirit offerings, nor to any Buddhist merit making; they are clearly secular in any sense. They offer a way to express and test one's power; a secular field for the exercise of innate power.

Rationale of the Paper

Getz (2010, p.3) formulated three discourses on festival Studies: on the roles, meanings and impacts of festivals in society and culture, discourse on festival tourism, and discourse on festival management. There are many documents of Festival study as discourse on the roles, meanings and impacts of festivals in society and culture, but exploring the role and function of traditional beliefs of festival is rare. This is one of the reasons for doing this research.

The festival is established with meaning of religious belief as Buddhism. Year by year celebrating the festival, the festival gradually becomes the hot air Balloon competition festival. Since first established until now, the Hot air balloon festival is gradually popular among not only the ethnic but also the foreigners. The reason for its becoming the grand festival is also interesting factor in this research.

Balloon is made of paper and the flue which is used for launching balloon is made for fire. The successful launching is dependent on the systematic combination of two contrary things. Hot Air Balloon as tangible culture will be seen by visual sense. Intangible culture as the value, norm and meaning of not only making the balloon but also launching the balloon cannot be seen directly. Although lasting time for balloon in the sky is within twenty minutes to thirty minutes, not only making the balloon but also preparing the components takes more than three months to one year. During marking the balloon, how the competitors make their balloon, how they launch the balloon, how they follow and practice the traditional beliefs are encouragement for doing this research. "How can traditional beliefs endure in Buddhist festival?" is the main reason for doing this research. Moreover, the hot air balloon festival is a competition for traditional handicrafts. The members and the gun master of the winner balloon team possess prestige among the other competitors. They are proud of their successful launch. To be successful launching the balloon and to get their prestige, how they follow and practice the traditional beliefs have to be explored. Traditional means a long established custom or belief that has been passed on from one generation to another. According to the meaning

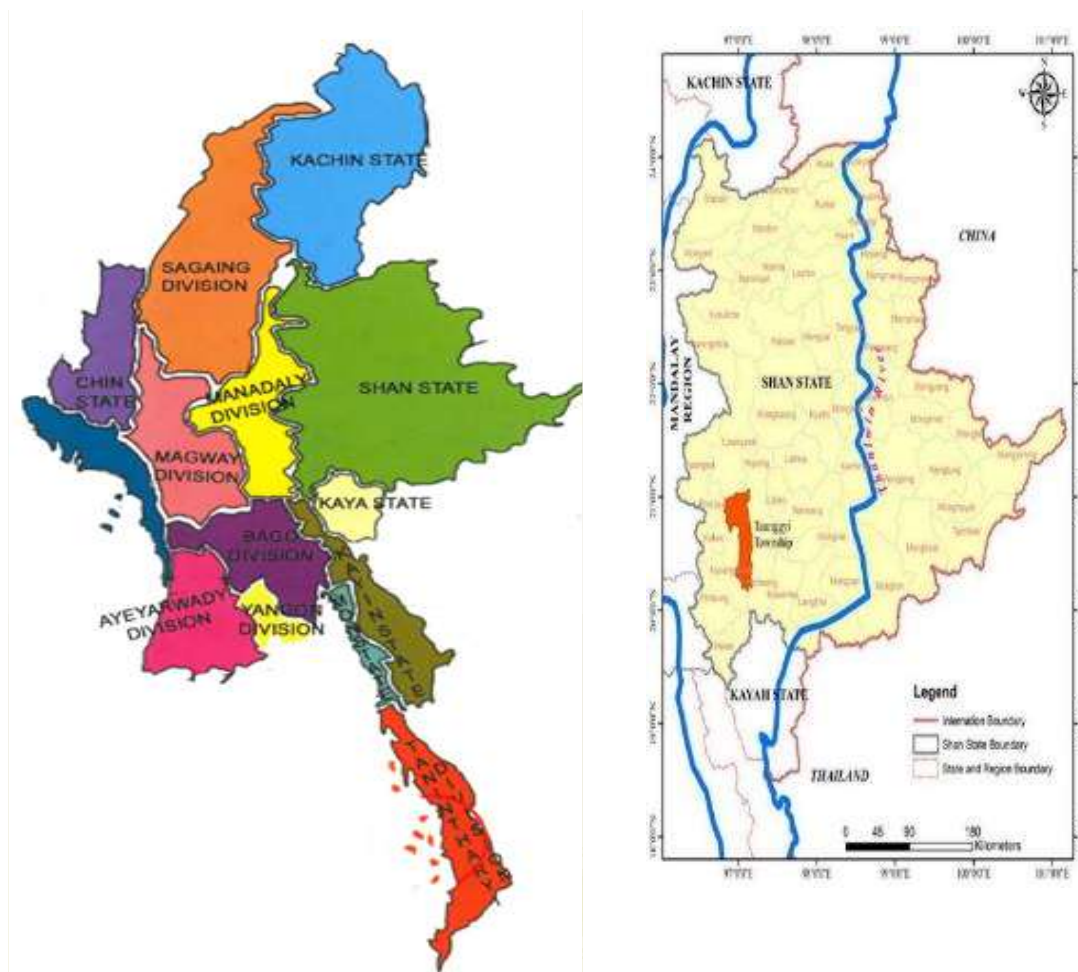
of traditional, how the competitors of hot air balloon festival they transmit their local or traditional beliefs are important to this research.

Methodology

This study was conducted by using qualitative research approaches. Qualitative research is suitable to study the human experiences of practice, value and belief. In this research, the type of study design was descriptive study design. Values, beliefs and meanings of the festival and how people create the festival with their indigenous beliefs were explored by interviewing referees and competitors as Key informants. To explore the aim of this research, direct observation was applied as an important research tool in various activities during the festival.

This research was conducted by library research as references and document analysis from field study. Taking Photographs and recording with video were performed when making not only the Mee-Pone balloon but also fire work and launching the balloon.

Mee Phone Pyan festival is held in Taunggyi. So, the study area of this research was Taunggyi. In this research, the study population was classified into two groups - competitors and referees. In the festival, the competitors are divided into two kinds. They are day-time competitors who create animal designs and night-time competitors who create Seinnapan (decorated with small lanterns) and Mee Kyi (creativity of gun powder explosion). In addition to the competitors of 22 wards of Taunggyi, the other organizations, the business groups and the movement department also participate the balloon competition in the Taunggyi Mee Pone Pyan Festival. Every year, the number of teams is nearly one hundred night-time competitors and three hundred day-time competitors. Among them, within the previous three years, the competitors who were the winners were selected as key informant interviewees - 15 persons in all. The number of referees are (45) persons. Among them (10) referees who have over thirty years experience as judges were also selected as key informants. Thus, total number of informants were (25) person.



Map 1: Location of Shan State; Map 2: Location of Taunggyi

Findings

Historical Background of the Festival

Tazaungmone is the Burmese name of the eighth month. In Myanmar Swe Soun Kyan Vol (5), “Tazaung” (တန်ဆောင်) means light torch with oil lamp and “mon” (မုန့်) means to brighten. Thus Tazaungmon means to destroy or drive away the evil as well as to brighten the lights with oil lamps for offering to Buddha.

In the day of Lord Buddha, one night, on the full-moon day of Tazaungmone, King Ajasatta and his retinue came to pay obeisance to Lord Buddha. In order to lighten their way, they carried burning torches which is called in Myanmar word as “Tazaungdaing”. In ancient times, the candle is made of gooseberry wood. For this occasion, 4½ inches to 9 inches of gooseberry tree wood was shaped as a candle. Red and white thread were wind round the wood candle. Then soak it in oil. The ancient people used this candle to offer the light to the Buddha. This candle is called Tazaungdaing. (Nat Shin Dagon, A short Description of the twelve seasons, sarpay wutsim, No.5). Since then, the Tazaungdaing festival

was held by Buddhists to commemorate the offering of lights to the Lord Buddha. (Tazaungding Festival Taunggyi and Hot-Air Balloon Competition, 2010).

The people created many efforts to offer the candle as high as they could. The candle could not reach the sky. When people hear and imagine about the sky, they would feel something unreachable, untouchable, but full of scared illusions. It became a great dream for man to master it. When it could not satisfy him just by touching it only in his dream, relate to it in his myth, man tried to penetrate it by creating something as his representative on behalf of humanity. By inventing the fire balloon. The balloon can fly better than the candle to the sky. After invention of fire balloon, they used fire balloon instead of candle. The offering by launching the fire balloon satisfied the people as a symbol of paying homage to the Sulamuni Pagoda in Heaven.

In Myanmar Concise Dictionary vol. (3) (n.d.), the meaning of mee pon is a balloon which is made of paper or cloth which can fly in space (air) when it is filled with hot air or smoke. 'Mee pon pyan', mee means fire, pon means bag or packet, pyan means flying. Thus, Mee Pone Pyan is flying or floating in the skies.

Pho Raza described that setting off fire crackers can drive away evil beings, and sending up the fire balloons can raise one's good fortune. The people believe that light dispels evil and darkness. Fire-works and torches as oil lamps are lit for dispelling evil and darkness. (Pho Raza, The twelve seasons Myanmar cultural variety. n.d.)

According to this meaning, people sent up the fire balloons and nearly every house lit fire crackers. They believed that the sound of fire crackers can drive away the evil spirit and sending up fire-balloons raises their luck or fortune and offers light to the Buddha. From ancient times, it is customary to make and fly fire-balloons in the monasteries in the Thadingut and Tazaungmon months. During the day dolls of animals with gifts attached are flown up with the intention of the gifts falling into the hands of the lucky person. Fire balloons are sent up usually in the night, sometimes with strings of small lanterns attached (Thadoe Thaung, n.d.). Mee-Pone-Pyan (fire balloons) festival is celebrated in the 8 month of Myanmar calendar, namely Tazaungmon. So, it also called Tazaungdaing Mee-Pone-Pyan Festival.

According to this traditional belief and practice, in 1941, the sayadaw (abbot) of Kone-Tha monastery in Taunggyi, read and calculated the horoscope and made calculations of the planets to carry out rituals to raise his fortune. The abbot supervised the sending up of a cloth fire balloon having a diameter of (50) feet. The balloon took nearly one month for sewing and it used (40) bales of (40) yard each of cloth. To make the wick they wound the ropes made from old monks' robes thoroughly soaked in raw earth oil around an iron rod. They had to build a tunnel (50) yards long, wide at the start where the fire will be made and narrowing to the place where the hot air will be filling up the balloon. They

put an open drum at this end to funnel the smoke into the balloon. To control the balloon, they tied it with ropes to (4) gooseberry trees in a square.

They used firewood to get the smoke. When the balloon was full of hot air and raring to go, they lit the wick. When the balloon reached the height of (400) feet, it burst into flames with a loud noise and fell to the ground. It was a sad failure. They tried to send up the balloon a second time. This time they made it with Shan traditional paper instead of cloth. In that time, they successfully launched the balloon. Thenceforth balloons are made with the traditional paper.

In 1946, a police officer U Shwe Ohn Maung organized all service personal prayers in Taunggyi. Worship by celebrating a hot air balloon festival was held north east of the Police station. They sent up a balloon having only (10) feet in diameter as a light worship to the Buddha. They called it a police station festival. In those days, the various townships would compete with each other just for fun and the elders of the town just praised the best performers. There was no such thing as giving marks or prizes. Later it became more competitive and arguments arose as to whose balloon was better. Thus it reached a stage when they needed a board of elders to decide the competition.

In 1952-53 the hot air balloon competition committee was officially formed. The sub-committees were also formed to draw up rules and regulations such as giving marks, and rules to keep and obey. Year by year, celebrating the festival, the festival was more and more famous. The festival first started by a police department and was then celebrated as township festival and today, since 1997, a state festival.

Kinds of Competitive Hot Air Balloon

There are two kinds of competition - night time and day time. Night time competition includes two kinds - Meekyi which is the explosion of gun powder hot air balloon and Seinnapan which is attached by multicolored lanterns for illuminating the decorations around the body of the balloon. Day time balloon is animal figures competition. The animal figure beauty competition is divided into three categories namely two legged, three legged and miscellaneous. They have to make them look as real as possible. The school children and young people show off their skills with varieties of animals. The aim of animal figures competition is to learn the art of making the wick and the strategies in sending up the balloon. They are observing the art through practical experiments. Every year shows progress in the innovations and creativity of the competitors. Each group's four or five balloons are sent up simultaneously. It requires co-operation and skill to send up multiple balloons successfully. If one balloon should catch fire and burn down, they lose all the effort, according to the rules.



Figure 1: Meekyi balloon (night time competition); Figure 2: Seinnapan Balloon (night time competition)



Figure 3: Animal Figure Balloon (day time competition)

The Series of Mee Pone Pyan Festival is not a single festival; it includes a series of complicated events. Traditional beliefs as mana are influenced throughout their work.

Making the Balloon	Wick	Fire torch	Gun power	Before launching
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Before starting their task, the master of the each team calculates their team's luck with the help of an astrologer. According to the calculation of the astrologer, all the members follow the indications such as which color is good luck for their team and all the members must wear this color. Among seven days, which day is convenient for them to start? And they must start that day.

Mana for Bamboo

The main support of the balloon is bamboo. Bamboo is the basic raw material for making a hot air balloon and its accessory. Bamboo for balloon are made throughout the year. The bamboo cutter who is a member of the balloon team and the bamboo merchant said that they follow their traditional belief in cutting the bamboo. According to Myanmar people's traditional belief "No insect feeds on

bamboo in Tazaungmone”, so they cut down some species of bamboo such as kya khat wah (*Bambusa arundinacea*) and Thaik wah (*Bambusa tulga*) for hot air balloon in month of Tazaungmone.

Mana for Making the Body of Balloon

When making progress towards the competition, the competitors should perform the local or traditional behavior. These behaviors are not principles of the Buddha. These behaviors are descended from local knowledge as well as traditional custom. Traditional customs are transmitted from generation to generation.

From observing in the field, it can be observed that the balloon has three portions such as top, body and bottom. The competitors said that it is an important day when the top part of the balloon and the whole section of the balloon are joined to the main body middle portion of the balloon. At that day, they have to make an offering to the nat and the guardian nat of Taunggyi town and Shan State. It is a tradition for all competitors. The offering includes a green coconut complete with its growth, banana combs, betel leaf and nut, sprigs of *Eugenia*, incense sticks, candles and a red and white cloth head band. Two offerings must be offered. One is for the place of where they make the balloon and the other is for the shrine of Komyoshin of Taunggyi as the local guardian spirit. It can be seen that the religious belief and traditional belief are involved when making the balloon.

Design of the balloon body is also influenced by traditional beliefs. The balloon is made as an offering to the Buddha. Nearly all the balloons are decorated by the scene of Buddha (Buddhist statta's) renunciation as well as the image of Buddha. Although the festival is based on the Buddhist belief, some non-Buddhist youths also take part in this cultural activity due to their interest in its fantastic handicraft. They also decorate the images of Buddha on their balloon. All the competitors have a strong traditional belief that they don't have the image of dragon on the surface of the balloon. They believe that the smoke of the dragon would destroy the balloon. According to the legend of Paoh ethnic group, they are descended from the mother as the dragon and the father as sorceress. Thus, the organization of Paoh ethnic's literature and culture also participated in the Hot Air Balloon competition. They created the dragon design on the surface of their balloon. At that time, their balloon was burnt. So, except Paoh ethnic, other competitors avoid to create the dragon image on the surface of balloon's body. They design their balloon body influenced by their traditional belief.

Mana for Making “Wick”

One of the winner balloon team mentioned that the important component of the Hot Air Balloon is the wick. The meaning of the wick is given in Myanmar Concise Dictionary Vol (3) as cotton yarn that can soak up fuel to light lamps etc. But in this festival, wick used are soldered iron rods weighing (18 to 20) vises. To make an iron cross to control the wick, two iron rods of (7) feet long, (3) inches

thickness are needed. The post rod (26) feet of (3) inches thick rods are needed. When these iron roads have been soldered, they must wind patiently length wise cut up pieces of cotton blanket. Then they pour on it hot boiled fuel mixture of (4) vises of crude oil (4) vises of wax camphor and indwe (resin in thitya tree) for the twisted blankets to soak in. Then it is put out in the sun for at least (10) days.

One of the informants said that when making a wick, they also have to make an offering on that day. When they start making the wick, a knowledgeable person must prepare the offertory. It consists of a flawless green coconut, two combs of bananas, betel nut and betel leaf, incense sticks, candles euglena sprouts, and white and red cloth for coconut head band.

Traditional Belief of Flame Torch

The hot air balloon competitors use the flame torch to supply smoke and to stoke the fire. It is made of bamboo. The green *wabo* bamboo of (3) inches (4) inches diameter and (5) feet (6) feet length is used to make it. One end is cut into sections and pine wood sticks of equal length are inserted in the bamboo sections making the top like a funnel. They are tied with iron wire string to make it firm. It is used in night balloons and each need (5) or (6) fire torches. It uses about (10) vises of turpentine. This fire torch is used when a balloon in spite of the balloon having the wick attached catches fire or have not enough strength, then the flame torch is used to fill the balloon with more smoke for the balloon to fill up and become bloated and stand up. The flame torch is soaked in kerosene and lit to provide smoke for the balloon to lift off. By observing in the field, the competitors use a torch which is tied with a piece of robe. All the competitors believe that by tying a piece of robe the torch will more effectively help to launch the balloon by protecting it from evil.



Figure 4: Wick



Figure 5: Fire torch is tying by robe

Taboo and Mana in Making the Gun Powder

In the past, the leader of a balloon team also known as yansayar had to perform a ritual of observing the five precepts before starting the task of gun powder preparation. The fire work master has to

observe five precepts all Buddhists follow such as abstaining from taking the other's lives or killing, abstaining from stealing, from sexual misconduct, from telling lies and from taking intoxicant liqueur. He has to take the pledge of observing these five precepts at the presence of a Buddha image or at the temple. They offer a bowl of alms including two combs of bananas, a spring of two betel nuts, three betel quid's and three packages of green tea leaves and some rice on the first day of their preparation. The team members have to be always vigilant to keep an eye on the bowl of offertories throughout the process of making gun powder for the hot air balloon. This is because they believe that the bowl represents signals to remind them of mistakes in their conduct or in their process. Whenever the bananas in the bowl begin to ripen, they have to be replaced by fresh green ones in a new bowl of offertories. It is a common practice that all members participating in the preparation of gunpowder worship the Buddha at the place where the bowl of offertories is put every day before they start their work. Only after they have worshipped or paid homage to the mentors in front of the bowl of offertories are they allowed to make gun powder. So worshipping the mentors with a bowl of offertories is a must for every one participating in this task. According to the five precepts, they are not allowed to drink any kind of alcohol during the process of pounding the gunpowder. If they want to indulge themselves; they can take alcoholic drinks after the successful launching of the hot air balloon.

These days, they still follow other rules and regulation although the custom of daily worshipping to the mentor is gradually dying out. In spite of having a bowl of offertories for the Buddha on the first day they no longer pay homage to the mentor daily. Every hot air balloon maker takes a special care of the combs of bananas in the bowl. If the bananas happen to be bitten by a mouse or if they dropped on to the floor, if young children hold them, in playful manner, they assume that they have made some minor or major mistakes. Thus they stop doing their task for a while and they resume it again after begging the Buddha to forgive their wrong doings and giving a new bowl of offertories.

During the process, they also have to avoid eating red meat such as beef, pork, mutton as well as big fish to ensure safety in their work. There are some dos and don'ts for gunpowder makers. The gun powder they are making is meant for offering to the Buddha, they have to take a special care so as not to offend it by any improper behavior. They are supposed neither to stride over chemicals and other materials at the workplace nor to use abusive language among themselves. They are obliged to use only pleasant and polite words and they must have decent behavior in every aspect of work they are doing. Moreover, no lady is allowed to enter their work place as it is regarded as a holy place preparing an offertory for the Buddha.



Figure 6: A bowl of offertories

Regarding the storage and setting of the work place, it is essential that the room must be always clean and tidy. Everyone in the work team is responsible for cleaning the room. All of them are required to use the materials with great care because there are various kinds of chemicals easy to catch fire and even to explode violently. For this potential danger, two colors are not to be created at the same time. They should create a certain kind of color at a time. In addition, the finished products damp fireworks of different kind need to be stored carefully. The best containers to store them are well ventilated card board boxes so that they can dry up.

Despite they are a kind of amateur scientists operating their task based on their limited knowledge and previous experience, each step of their process is required to be systematic and their readiness to follow rules and regulates is also important. The success of their work largely depends on scientific method and partly depends on their discipline. In fact, both the systematic method and good behavior are two key factors to safety and success. Once they miss to follow a seemingly trivial thing prescribed as a rule or if they happen to make a minor mistake carelessly, this can lead to burning up or even to violent explosion. To prevent such potential danger, they should never fail to take refuge in the Buddha always realizing the noble attributes of Buddha during the work. At the same time they should also appreciate their instructor for his expertise and valuable guidelines.

No matter however smart and skillful firework makers they may be, a successful operation of a hot air balloon can be ensured through a careful operation and systematic management for the whole period of accomplishing this special task. Just before the fireworks are fixed at the frame, some special shampoo not only prepared with soap acacia and tayaw bark but also treated with the incarnation of Buddha's parittas is sprinkled all over the structure. It is common knowledge that no lady is allowed to approach this frame as soon as the fireworks and decorative items are fixed on it. Even after the frame is completely fixed up with all accessories, women are still deprived of lingering around it because the firework frame is a holy offertory to the Buddha. It is common practice that the fire work

frames are covered by the saffron robes of monk's attire because to be offered to be Buddha by launching it in to the sky.

Mana in Making Seinnapan Hot Air Fire Balloon

The competitors of Meekyi balloon follow their traditional belief like the competitors of Seinnapan balloon must follow their traditional belief. One of the winner Seinnapan balloon team discussed that the members have to consult the master who knows how to read the horoscope and the stars to choose an auspicious day to begin making the balloon. On that day they have to offer an offertory at the household shrine and pray to the guardian spirits in the eight directions of the earth to help guard their balloon to rise successfully. The offertory must consist of one flawless green cocoanut complete with its spicate growth, three combs of bananas, three triangular pennants, pickled tealeaf, betel quid, candles, incense sticks, Eugenia sprays. At the four corners of the table on which the offertory is placed, they have to put betel leaf with rice on it. Then they have to light a candle and incense stick once in the morning and once again in the evening.

Traditional Beliefs Before Launching Hot Air Balloon

By interviewing with one of the balloon team leader, it can be observed that the balloon team members' efforts are largely given to preparation for the competition every time during the days of the festival. The team's members wipe out such solid fuel substances from the wick before wrapping it in a piece of saffron robe (thinkan). Then they tie it with another piece of robe. In the afternoon, they take the wick to the shrine of *Koe Myo Shin Nat* (Guardian Spirit of nine towns of Shan region). They worship the nat with a bowl of offertories and pray to the nat to protect their hot air balloon and to help accomplish a successful launch showing the wick. They take it back to the place where they are making preparations after performing the ritual at the nat shrine.



Figure 7: Wick is wrapped by robe and hanged sprigs of Eugenia leaves

Before leaving the place of competition, the member of hot air balloon team must spray all the accessories of hot air balloons including such musical instruments as drums and gongs with perfumed water. They spray perfumed water on to the packet of the main body of the balloon, the gun powder frame and the wick. They wrap the flame torch first in a sheet of plastic and then cover the sheet with a piece of robe. This can prevent dampening of the torch in case it snows along their way to the competition ground. They also hang sprigs of Eugenia leaves on to the flame torch and gun powder frame. The body of balloon is also packed with the robe. The purpose of using the robe is that all these things will be offered to the Lord Buddha. The competitors' indigenous belief can be seen in that they use the robe for all the accessories and components of the balloon.



Figure 8: Gun powder frame is hanged sprigs of Eugenia leaves



Figure 9: The body of gun powder frame is packed by robe; Figure 10: The body of balloon is packed by robe

One of the famous balloon teams is the Hatha team, the religion of team member are Muslims. They said that according to the local knowledge or tradition belief, they must attach dried chili and charcoal. In the southern shan state, the ethnic people belief that chili and charcoal can prevent evil. Food is carried to some place, at that time, small dried chili and small piece of charcoal are packed with the food. Local people belief that by attaching dried chili and charcoal, the evil can't eat the food or follow the food. They practice this traditional belief every year of their balloon. Thus, the competitors always attach the dried chili and charcoal in the package of balloon body to prevent the evil.

The board of judges also perform the traditional custom according to their religious belief. At the morning of the beginning of the festival, they invite five members of Sayadaws (monk) to the arena, the field where the hot air balloon competition is going to be held. They start the opening ceremony by observing the precepts administered and hearing the preaching delivered by these Sayadaws. In addition, they offer the candle light at the Buddha shrine every night from beginning to the end of the festival. By offering the candles to Buddha, they belief that Buddha will prevent evil and will support the safe and successful launching balloon.

After the offering a Shaman performs the ritual as worshipping Guardian Spirit of nine towns or the Guardian of the region (*koe Myo Shin Nat*) with a bowl of offertories. They attach the cabalistic square on the wall of the judges' building as a mana for all festival days. The purpose of this cabalistic square is to hold the successful festival, to prevent evil, to be safe for the competitors as well as the audiences. It can say that not only the competitors but also judges have religious and traditional belief.

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Figure 11: Jury of the judges offer to; Figure 12: A bowl of offertories for
 the Sayadaws at the arena Koe Myo Shin Nat



Figure 13: Manna for celebrating festival Fig. (14): Light candles at the shrine to offer Buddha



Figure 15: Cabalistic square for successful festival

Discussion

Like Chinese New Year Festival, hot air balloon festival is also celebrated with fire crackers, the local people in Taunggyi also believe that fire crackers can drive away evil beings. Although the meaning and celebrating item is also similar in two festivals, hot air balloon festival of Taunggyi is not only to prevent the evil but also towards to firework competition.

As the statement of Falzon and Cassar, it is seen that fireworks are a cultural product and the function of the festival is competition of local groups in Taunggyi hot air balloon festival. Both of Maltese festival and Taunggyi hot air balloon festival are based on religious meaning. Maltese festival is still on religious meaning, Taunggyi hot air balloon festival is toward the fire work competition. Thus, the competitors are more concerned to become the winner for their team. So, they add the traditional beliefs, the mana and taboo for their team winner, upon the religious meaning. The tradition customs which are not practice by people are slowly and slowly disappearing. For the competitors of hot air balloon, the more they want to win, the more they believe the traditional customs. So, the traditional beliefs are displayed as strong endurance in Taunggyi hot air balloon Buddhist Festivals.

“Habitus”, the concept of Pierre Bourdieu, is found in competitors of hot air balloon team. All the competitors have principle of thought, perception, appreciation and action associated with the festival and how they celebrate, related stories, codes of behavior, attitude and beliefs. Every hot air balloon is designed by the vision or aim of the team. Each builder team of hot air balloon usually makes a particular design to highlight its vision and aims. Some had clearly displayed their aim which can support one of the main national causes of non-disintegration of the national solidarity. Some design also conveys a symbolic image of offering ceremony. According to the statement of Falassia, each balloon team of competitor has their own aim and their aim is shared as a design on the surface of balloon body to the audiences. So, it can say that festival is a time when community histories, values, ideologies and identity are jointly shared.

As Delgado (2016) described that an average hot air balloon team is usually made up of young people from various national races since these youths share a common interest in this traditional practice as well as cultural activity regardless of their diversity in social status, races and even in religion. Although Weber (2015, pp. 90-91) states that the individual experience of a participant may have several dimensions, aesthetic, cognitive, affective and social, all the competitors must coordinate between these dimensions of the team members. They can make the discussion in order to come to agreement. Thus, they hold up the unity within the competitors, sharing the creativity thinking, solving together

the problems and practical works, building the relationship between each other, illuminating the responsibility of individual duty and the team's goal.

Analyzing the findings, it can be learnt that the balloon is made of traditional paper. To launch the balloon, fire smoke is needed. When the match of paper and fire, it is easy to burn. As well as making the gun powder, it is very easy to explode and it is very dangerous. But the hot air balloon competitors of Taunggyi can manage the combination of opposite two things and perform safely for successful launching the balloon. Another difficulty is that they cannot touch the balloon which is in the sky. They can manage the position of balloon only when they are making it. They have limitation as at the 150 feet above the ground level, the gun powder must explode and start to drop to the ground. To overcome all these difficulties, the competitors will follow the taboo and mana of their traditional knowledge. Knowledge becomes practice or habit and finally it becomes belief.

According to the findings, the competitors must practice and follow their traditional belief as taboo and mana not only when making the body of balloon but also in making other accessories such as wick and gunpowder. Making the gun powder is very dangerous because gun powder is easy to burn or explode. To be safe and to finish as a successful task, during making the gun powder, the competitors must deeply follow and perform their traditional beliefs. Before launching the balloon, not only competitors but also judges have the task to especially worship the guardian spirits (nat).

Analyzing the findings, the traditional belief is more important than religious belief during the making and launching balloon. Because all the tasks have performances which are related with the traditional beliefs. To be winner, traditional belief is more essential. Although religious belief is based on the meaning of festival, traditional beliefs are performed all the time while they making and launching the balloon. Thus, the festival of hot air balloon will be seen both as religious belief and traditional belief. Traditional belief is always influences in their daily festival themes. According to the statement of G. Davie (2011), "Today's world is full of various forms of religious life, relevant to the competitors, they believe not only Buddhism but also traditional. So, it can be seen that traditional beliefs stand with strong forces of endurance in Buddhist festival."

E. Paul Durenberger (1983) discussed that along the sides of the rivers of Thailand's northwestern province of Maehong Son, Shan peasants celebrated rocket festival with only a secular sense. They offer a way to express and test one's power; a secular field for the exercise of innate power. Taunggyi hot air balloon festival is held in the capital of Shan State and not only Shan ethnic group but also all multicultural ethnic groups participate in the festival with the traditional belief and religious belief.

The basic sense of the word "tradition" is displayed in hot air balloon festival. The number of balloons increased due to the enthusiasm of the youth. They had branched out from the main group to enter the competition on their own. This new generation of competitors are full of modern technology and

innovations. It is seen that the older generation is handing down their traditional heritage and for the younger generation to present it. The competitions were to raise the awareness of younger generation in traditional practice and national identity so that they can uphold and safeguard them for perpetuity, to train the youths to be able to perform traditional practices representing both social and cultural symbols, to hand down the traditional ways of constructing hot air balloons, to make the younger generation value and appreciate the cultural heritage.

Conclusion

Mee Pone Pyan Pwe (hot air balloon festival) is famous among all national races of Myanmar for its spectacular display and skilful traditional craftsmanship. It represents the adorable gesture of paying homage to Buddha with the fireworks of different designs. Paying homage to Buddha by lighting elaborate designs of hot air balloons and launching them into the sky is praiseworthy act and a kind of meritorious deed. To successfully launch the balloon, the competitions are devoted to the traditional belief. They eagerly accept the influences of traditional belief in their competition. Not only making the balloon body and making the other accessories but also launching the balloon, the competitors follow and practice the series of performances of traditional belief. Even the board of judges practice the traditional belief during the whole celebrating time. Although the festival is focused on religious belief, all the everyday functions are accomplished by traditional belief. Thus, traditional belief has more influence than religious belief. The people in Taunggyi keep more and more interest in their grand Mie Pone Pyan festival and they take pride for possessing it as their traditional heritage.

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