

Interpreting Religious Conversions among the Peoples of Myanmar

Assimilating the Christian Faith into the
Local Cultural Heritages and the Impact of
Christian Mission during the Colonial Era

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The United Graduate School of Theology
Yonsei University

Dedication

To all pioneering missionaries who had ever reached the golden shore of

Myanmar;

to my grandpa Rev. Za Khup and all those who were

the first magnificent converts to Christianity in the Chin Hills;

to all missionaries who had ever reached

Zoland the Chin Hills;

to all those who belong to Christian mission and cross-cultural studies;

this humble work is earnestly dedicated.

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Acknowledgements

I would like first to give thanks and all the glory to my God *Pathian* who had a great plan and preordination for his humble servant to have a wonderful study at Yonsei University.

I have many indebtedness and appreciations to many people for my study. Special indebtedness is gratefully acknowledged to several faculty members of the United Graduate School of Theology, Yonsei University, for their deep concern and special consideration for me by granting kind admission with a full scholarship and stipend throughout my study. Otherwise, as a student from the least developed country, it is impossible for me to study at Yonsei University.

My first appreciation goes to Professor Jueng, Suk-Hwan the academic dean and director of Samae Special Doctoral Program, and Professor Kim, Sang-Keun the associate dean at the time my application had been getting started for the process. By the kind thoughtfulness and guide of them, my eligibility of the admission for doctoral program in Mission Studies eventually emerged. At the same time, I would like to thank and express my sincere appreciation to all my professors from whom I have learned: Dr. Pang, Y. Samuel, Dr. Kim, Sang-Keun, Dr. Lee, Yang-Ho who

is now incumbently Academic Dean, and Dr. Lewis R. Rambo who is a visiting professor. I am also indebted to all the office staffs of the United Graduate School of Theology Department for their kind and excellent contribution to my study. Special heart-felt thanks should be given to Dr. Lewis for his of import comments together with his careful reading and kind editing on my writing out of his tight schedule. Not only the title and statement of the dissertation, but also the idea of interpreting religious conversion was conceived and born in the class of ‘Religious Conversion’ offered by Dr. Lewis. Thereby, it has been developed in Mission Studies.

Here again, my particular and grateful thanks, therefore, must be going to my five supervisors: Dissertation Supervisor Dr. Kim, Sang-Keun and the Committee Members Dr. Pang, Y. Samuel, Dr. Chung, Jae-Hyun, Dr. Lee, Yang-Ho, and Dr. Lewis R. Rambo for the deep interest they have shown in my dissertation and for reassuring words they have expressed with regard to the ideas propounded in it.

I am also deeply indebted to the incumbent academic dean Dr. Lee, Yang-Ho and vice academic dean Dr. Chung, Jae-Hyun together with Dr. Kim, Sang-Keun who arranged and managed a special fund—financial support of scholarship—for me to attending the quadrennial international conference of IAMS [Int’l Association for Mission Studies] held in Toronto, Canada in August 2012, where I presented my paper.

Furthermore, my appreciation and great gratitude must be going to Reverend Jung, Yeonhan the senior pastor of Wondang Church and all the members for their kindness and a monthly support of living cost plus a house to live with. I also thank 박응순목사님 Rev. Park, Eung-Soon the senior pastor of Juan Jungang Church 주안중앙교회 for a monthly support of finance. I also thank 윤종범목사님 the senior pastor of 영문중앙교회 for his kind monthly support of finance and prayer. Without these support, I would not be able to survive in the land of Korea.

I would like to thank all of my colleagues in Korea for their encouragement and general support. I wish to express my special gratitude and gratefulness to my best friend 류민영 who brotherly helped me with a deep concern when I was in trouble. I also thank 윤요한목사 who serves now as a chaplain in the Air Force services. He is my speedy angel in Korea. Without their generous contribution and kind help, my study life in Korea would be chaotic. I also thank and appreciate my friend 이병원목사 who is a professor in Kyunghee Univ. Let me mention also 오일영목사 who is my Haggai Institute friend. Moreover, I also thank to all those who have ever helped me here in Korea though I do not mention their names on this page.

Now, I must express herewith my deep gratitude and special thanks to all of my colleagues in Myanmar especially Rev. Pak Lian, for his deep

concern about my study abroad and great help of prayer and financing for my journey; and Rev. Tuang Nang, Rev. Cin Do Kang, Rev. Kim Khan Cin and other colleagues who have joined together with me in the very purpose of mission.

Finally, I am under obligation to my wife, Neam Khan Cing, who has been committed, and faithfully praying for me. She has been a constant inspiration, and no other dedication could be thought of than to her who valiantly resigned her occupation as a laboratory technician to support fully her husband's ministry. Gratitude is also felt to my girl Esther Pau Sann Cing for her forceful encouragement while I have been struggling with my studies. All the accomplishments must be shared with her for she did her best in her University life in Ewha Womans University that she finally won a pretty success that made her qualified to join the master's program in KDI [Korea Development Institute].

Lastly, but not the least, my great appreciation and a big honor must be going to my widowed mother Pi Cing Za Pau who loves me and prays for me in a continual basis.

If my mission concept, which is involved in this dissertation, makes even a slight contribution, then I will be amply rewarded.

Soli Deo Gloria!

Abstract

The present study is an interpretation of religious conversions among the different ethnic peoples of Myanmar. Southeast Asia had been Hinduized by Indian culture. Nevertheless, the nations converted to Theravada Buddhism during the period of eleventh and twelfth century Christian era.

The hill tribes of Myanmar had been converted into Christianity in the nineteenth-century-and-early-twentieth-century British colonial era. The researcher attempts to interpret particularly the beliefs of Chin people, whom are also called *Zo* people, in their primal religion; and thereby tries to articulate how they converted to Christianity. The present study focuses on the transforming mission theory that expands in the cases of different ethnic peoples of Southeast Asia. Through the missionary translation, the indigenous peoples came to know and worship the Christian God in their own vernacular divine names of traditional deities. The present study claims that religious conversion could be interpreted as cultural assimilation. It reflects on the framework of the cross-cultural missionary translation in colonial Burma, and provides the future possibility of Christian mission in the region.

Contents

Dedication	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Abstract	ix
Table of Contents	x
I. Introduction	1
1. Thesis Statement	1
2. Literature Review of Previous Studies	3
3. The Scope and Methodology of the Study.....	9
II. A History of Cross-Cultural Religious Conversions in Southeast Asia: The Case of Indian Religious Traditions in Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia.....	13
1. First Cultural Assimilation Stage: The Hinduization of the Region	16
2. Second Cultural Assimilation Stage: The Buddhization of Myanmar	39
3. Third Cultural Assimilation Stage: The Rise of Modern Buddhism in the Region and the Impact of Western Christianity in the colonial period.....	53
i. The Revival of Theravada Buddhism in Modern Myanmar.....	53
ii. The Impact of Protestant Missionary Translation in Myanmar	61
iii. The Promotion of Political Buddhism in the Region...	67
III. Protestantism and Christianization in the British Colonial Chin Hills	72
1. Introduction	72

2. Ethnic History of the Chin Peoples	76
3. Exploring the Primal Religion in Animistic Chin Rituals	85
4. <i>Pathian</i> and Pau Cin Hau New Religion Movement	100
5. Missionaries' Options in their 'Vernacular Operation'	108
i. <i>Pathian</i> vs. <i>Zinmang</i> : First Two Candidates for the Name of the Christian God among Chin People ...	109
ii. The Deity of <i>Khuazing</i> and Chin Sacrificial System...	123
 IV. Conclusion: Reflecting the framework of the Cross-Cultural Missionary Translation in Colonial Burma	136
1. A Reflection on the Protestant Christian Mission among the Hill Tribes	136
2. A Reflection on the Protestant Christian Mission among the Burmans	153
3. Future Possibility of Christian Mission in the Region	159
 Bibliography	169
 Abstract in Korean	177

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Chapter One

Introduction

1. Thesis Statement

The religious conversions of various tribal native peoples in Myanmar and its neighboring Southeast Asian nations in their cultural heritages need to be systematically examined. Various indigenous peoples of the region have different primal religions and cultures even though they have been sharing the same geographic area. The purpose of this study is to describe and understand the characteristics of the primal religions of the region and in order to understand the nature of the religious conversion in response to the presence of Protestant missionaries. What are the dynamics of this process of religious change among the peoples of this region? What is herewith interesting is the process of various kinds of conversions had been happening among the different tribal peoples through religious assimilation¹.

The present study shall examine the religious conversions of different ethnic peoples of Myanmar in particular, and its neighboring areas.

¹ By using the term ‘assimilation’ in this dissertation, the present study intends to emphasize the process of assimilating new ideas, concepts, beliefs, and practices into an existing cognitive structure of traditional religion through missionary translation in the region.

First, the present study will trace the historical backgrounds of the cultural heritages in the region. Understanding the context will facilitate a more nuanced exploration of the impact of Christian mission in the nineteenth-century-British-colonial era. The central focus will be on the transformation of Protestant Christian faith through missionary translation. This dissertation will first explore the impact of the Protestantism on the tribal Chin ethnic peoples and then compare their conversion with the Burmans [Burmese]. Of special interest will be an explication of the primal deities—*Pathian* of the Chin and *Paya ဘုရား* [Buhra] of the Burman. What does *Pathian* of Chin people and *Paya ဘုရား* [Buhra] of Burmese mean within the context of their primal religions? What are the specific meanings of the names of their divinities? What are the origins of the divine names used by the Chins and the Burmans? Why did the American Protestant missionaries, in their missionary translation, employ the name of the regional deities such as *Pathian* of the Chins, *Paya ဘုရား* [Buhra] of the Burmans, *Karai-Kasang* of their neighbor Kachins, and *Y'wa* of Karens, etc. in order to identify the Christian God with the indigenous divine names in their vernacular languages? Did these divine names represent a Supreme Being in their primal beliefs of religious systems in different vernaculars at the time when the missionaries first employed them? What were the indigenous responses

to the identifications of the divine names? What were the reasons for the accommodations or confrontations by the missionaries as they made ‘vernacular operation’ in the missionary translation during the colonial period? What are the implications for Christian mission in the region today? To answer these questions the present study will examine the process of religious conversions in the region and the impact of Protestant Christian mission in the-nineteenth-century-British-colonial era.

2. Literature Review of Previous Studies on Missionary Translation

The present study is an expansion of the ‘missionary translation of the divine names’ following the previous studies of ‘cross-cultural missionary translation’ made by Christian mission historians and scholars such as Andrew F. Walls, Lamin Sanneh, and Kim, Sang-Keun. The present study shall try to articulate the accommodation and confrontation of the indigenous peoples to the ‘translating the message’ of the gospel of Christianity in the missionary translations that identified the Christian God with the primal deities of the region, particularly in Myanmar.

Andrew F. Walls, in *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, argues regarding the ‘missionary translation’ in Africa that, in his words, “[...] there was no need to invent a High God in any non-Christian religion.

They found the High God in African religion because he was there, not because their theology demanded his presence.”² Again, concerning the story of Southern Christianity, Walls asserts that “the Christian preachers found God already there, known by a vernacular name. Often associated with the sky, creator of earth and moral governor of humanity, having no alters or priesthood, and perhaps no regular worship, some named Being could be identified behind the whole constitution of the phenomenal and transcendental worlds.”³ The present study aims consequently to provide some different tribal cases of the vernacular translation of the divine names, particularly *Pathian* in the Chin tribe, together with *Karai-Kasang* in the Kachin tribe, *Y’wa* in the Karen tribe, and *Paya-Th’khin* ပုရားသခင် in the Burmese vernacular language for the Christian God. Thereby we shall argue that the ‘vernacular nature of Christian faith’ could be seen among the different ethnic tribes of Myanmar through the missionary translation during the nineteenth-and-early-twentieth century. As Andrew Walls asserts, “Christian faith must go on being translated, must continuously enter into vernacular culture and interact with it, or it withers and fades.”⁴

² Andrew F. Walls, *Missionary Movement: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, Eight Printing, January 2004), 63.

³ *Ibid*, 71.

⁴ Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, Third Printing, May 2005), 29.

Lamin Sanneh, in the *Translating the Message*, argues that “the principle of translatability” was fundamental in the spread of African Christianity. The present study shall focus on the translatability of the Christian gospel and its impact on the indigenous intelligibility. Sanneh asserts, “[T]ranslation gave Christianity indigenous momentum and credibility. The vernacular was a necessity for the life of religion, the soil that nurtured the plant until its eminence acquired ecclesiastical heights.”⁵ With regard to the vernacular issue, he suggests, “Missionary translation was instrumental in the emergence of indigenous resistance to colonialism.”⁶ The present study aims to systematically examine the vernacularization of the missionary translation during the British colonial era in Southeast Asia. Was it “instrumental in the emergence of indigenous resistance to colonialism”, as Sanneh argues, in the case of Myanmar and its neighbors in their national movement throughout the colonial era and the post-colonial period? Did it sow the seed of ethnic conflict among the multi-ethnic indigenous peoples in the name of Christianity? The present study will examine the impact of Protestantism that had been accompanied by the colonialism of the West in the-nineteenth-century-colonial British-Burma.

Professor Kim, Sang-Keun’s arguments concerning the missionary’s

⁵ Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll: New York, Orbis Books, Second ed. 2009), 79.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 161.

choice of the divine name and transliteration of the Christian God into the indigenous peoples shall be employed in the present study particularly in the missionary transliteration of the divine name of *Pathian* among the Chin tribe; and *Paya* ဘုရား [Buhra] among the Burman tribe respectively. The enterprise of vernacular translation of the Christian message, that he calls ‘vernacular operation’ of cross-cultural missionary translation in his Ph.D. dissertation entitled *Strange Names of God*, shall be used to describe and understand the work of the American Baptist Mission during the colonial time Myanmar. Kim argues that in the late Ming China, Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci employed the Confucian term *Shangti* because of its designation of the divine “nature”; and not because it identifies the divine “person” of God.⁷ Therefore, we herewith comprehend that *Shangti* became the Christian God in China through the missionary translation of the divine nature. Accordingly, in the case of Myanmar, *Pathian* was employed among the Chins; *Karai-Kasang* among the Kachins, and *Y’wa* among the Karens, etc., identified with the Christian God in the divine nature whereas *Paya* ဘုရား [Buhra] the Buddhist Burmese atheistic term so far has no designation of the divine nature of the Christian God. The employment of Buddhist

⁷ Sang-Keun Kim, *The Strange Names of God: The Missionary Translation of the Divine Name and the Chinese Responses to Matteo Ricci’s Shangti in Late Ming China, 1583-1644*(New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 2004), 63.

atheistic term *Paya* ဘုရား [Buhra] identifying with the Christian God in the nineteenth-century-colonial era missionary translation sowed the seed of controversy between the two “person” of divinities—Buddha and Christian God.⁸ In other words, it makes the indigenous people confused between the Enlightened One and the Almighty One—the creature and the creator. As a result, employing the Burmese Buddhist atheistic term *Paya* [ဘုရား Bhura] as the Christian God has been problematic in the postcolonial time Christian mission.⁹

The present study, therefore, will examine the missionary translation method of the divine name of God identifying Christian God with the indigenous Supreme Beings in Myanmar. Particularly, Judson’s transliteration of the name of the divine God as Buddhist *Paya* ဘုရား [Bhura] that has been problematic today shall also be discussed. To do so, the present study shall trace back the historical backgrounds of different cultural heritages of the region through some selected previous studies. The first mission scholar who conducted academic religious research among the Chins

⁸ Today, the Buddhist Burman intellectuals complain of the colonial time missionary identification of Christian God with *Paya* that refers to the Buddha in the Burman vernacular.

⁹ The present study shall carefully avoid using the English theistic term God while interpreting the deities of the region. For instance, *Pathian*, *Karai-Kasang*, *Y’wa* are not Gods but rather they are just the divine names of regional deities. Furthermore, particularly, in the case of *Paya*, the divine name of Buddha in Burmese vernacular term, employing the English term God is problematic.

was Chester U. Strait who spent several years in the Chin Hills as a missionary in the colonial period. He did research among the different sub-ethnic tribes of the Chins [even though he focused the *Lai-mi* group of Haka region], and contributed two theses entitled *The Chin's Conception of Death and Future Life* and *A History and Interpretation of Chin Sacrifice*, the former as the master's thesis and the latter as the doctor's dissertation respectively. Strait interprets in his master's thesis the beliefs of the Chins in their primal religion, and articulates the idea of eternal life in their animism that has been helpful to be intelligible the gospel message of Christian faith. He argues that for the Chins "death does not end all, but there is life after death."¹⁰ He points out that though "the Chin has no idea of a resurrection after death" in his words, "death is a combination of transformation and transposition and yet not completely either."¹¹ For Strait, there was an idea of eternal life in the Chin animistic belief that facilitates intelligibility of the missionary translation of the Christian faith. Furthermore, in his doctor's dissertation, Strait interprets the Chins' sacrificial worship of the spirits and the belief of the existence of a Supreme Being in their primal animistic rituals. He argues, "[T]he knowledge the Chin has of a Supreme Being is a

¹⁰ Chester U. Strait, *The Chins' Conception of Death and Future Life* (Unpublished master's thesis, Berkeley Baptist Divinity School, 1932), 62.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

point of contact for the Christian missionary.”¹² The present study, from the perspective of a native missiologist, will reinterpret the concepts and the beliefs of the Chins and their conversion into Christianity through the missionary translation. Among the Chins, a native scholar who deserves to be pointed out in the study of the primal religion and culture of the Chins is Sing Khaw Khai. In his book *Zo People and Their Culture*, Sing Khaw Khai notably interprets the sacrificial worship of the Chins and the names of the deities in their tradition. He tries to figure out the development of the names of the deities in the Chin culture. It is interesting that his argument of the divine name *Pathian* that “seems to have had originated with the concept to heaven” likely to be “deified as T’ien in Chinese” as he asserts.¹³ The present study intends to develop and expand these previous studies particularly in the case of the Chin tribe with other hill tribes of the region.

3. The Scope and Methodology of the Study

Since there has been lack of modern research on the history of primal religions of the hill tribes of the region, this dissertation will examine

¹² Chester U. Strait, *A History and Interpretation of Chin Sacrifice* (Unpublished Th. D. dissertation, Berkeley Baptist Divinity School, 1933), 143.

¹³ Sing Khaw Khai, *Zo People and Their Culture: A historical, cultural study and critical analysis of Zo and its ethnic tribes* (Churachanpur, India: Khampu Hatzaw, First edition, 1995), 112-117.

archival research and oral traditions as primary sources. Thus, the present study shall be involved in the DABOH studies *i.e.* Documentation, Archives, Bibliography and Oral History in mission studies. I will trace the history of the ethnic peoples so that one might easily comprehend the cultural backgrounds of the peoples in order to understand the nature of their conversion processes in the context of their primal religions.¹⁴ The present study will focus the nineteenth-and-early-twentieth-century-colonial era in the ‘British Burma’. That is from 1813, the year that Adoniram Judson, the first overseas American missionary, arrived in Yangon, up to 1965, the year that all the missionaries together with all the foreigners were expelled from Myanmar by the Revolutionary Council of the military regime. With regard to interpret religious conversions of the region, the present study shall refer specifically two books in terms of definition: 1) *Understanding Religious Conversion*, written by Lewis R. Rambo; and 2) *Handbook of Religious Conversion*, edited by H. Newton Malony & Samuel Southard. In addition, Andrew F. Walls’ definition on ‘conversion and Christianity’ will be applied.

The thesis shall contribute mainly two parts: 1) a historical approach of the cross-cultural religious conversions of the region—Myanmar, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia; and 2) Christian mission and the impact of its

¹⁴ By cultural assimilation, the present study means a people’s absorption of other peoples’ culture. For example, we shall see the Burmans assimilated Indian culture in Hinduism first, and then were converted into Buddhism.

missionary translation among the Chins and other hill tribe animists, the non-Buddhists such as the Kachins, Karens, etc. Thus, the present study will have an historical approach to the cultural and anthropological backgrounds of the peoples of the region first. Thereby it will examine the responses of the indigenous peoples to the missionary translation of the Christian faith in the nineteenth-and-early-twentieth-century-colonial era.

Thus, Chapter One involves the Introduction, the thesis statement, literature review, and the scope of the thesis. Chapter Two will present history of the cross-cultural religious conversions in Southeast Asia. It explores the cultural assimilation of the region in the Hinduized culture; then Buddhization of the region, and thereby it examines the impact of Protestant Christianity and the rise of modern Theravada Buddhism during the colonial era and post-colonial time in Myanmar. It argues chiefly that the peoples of the region have been keeping their primal beliefs in animistic religious system so far today in their modern religious practice. Chapter Three, “Protestantism and Christianization in the British Chin Hills in the Colonial Era” contains the main argument of the present study. Chapter Three carefully examines the context of the primal religious system and cultural history of the Chin peoples in order to better understand the dynamics of conversion to Christianity in the early-twentieth-century-

colonial era. Chapter Four, “Reflecting the Framework of the Cross-Cultural Missionary Translation in Colonial Burma” will present some reflections on the-nineteenth-and-early-twentieth-centuries colonial period missionary translation in Myanmar; and the future possibilities of Christian mission in the region.

Chapter Two

A History of Cross-Cultural Religious Conversions in Southeast Asia

The Case of Indian Religious Traditions in Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia

In this chapter, I will argue that the peoples of the region have been so far keeping their animistic beliefs in the primal religious systems of the past even though they had already converted in a new religion. As Andrew F. Walls asserts, “Perhaps no conversion is complete without the conversion of the past.”¹⁵ The peoples of the region, as we shall see, though they technically and/or officially had converted from one religion to another, practically they still embrace the primal beliefs of their old religious systems: strictly speaking, they practice *Nat*-worship in their everyday life as devout Buddhists. Therefore, herewith a proper interpretation of the religious conversions of the region is needed. We shall interpret the religious conversions of the region as a cultural assimilation. Andrew Walls defines conversion in the following way: “Conversion is not the substitution of

¹⁵ Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, Eight printing, January 2004), 53.

something new for something old [...]; nor the addition of something new to something old [...].” Walls argues, “Conversion is the turning, the re-orientation, of every aspect of humanity culture-specific humanity—to God [Supreme Being]”¹⁶ To Walls, “conversion is not a single aoristic act, but a process” in his words.¹⁷ Also to Lewis Rambo, “conversion is a process, not a specific event.”¹⁸

Now I will investigate the cross-cultural converting stages in the region. We shall see how the peoples of the region assimilated beliefs and cultures of Indian religious systems and traditions. This chapter aims to investigate in the history of cross-cultural religious conversions and assimilations of the Indian religious traditions, notably Hinduism and later Buddhism, into the regional countries in Indo-China peninsula, such as Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia. The very name of the region, *Indochina*, itself reveals the unique cultural assimilations from India and China: the region has been a fertile land of religious and cultural interactions. With the origin from *Indochine* in French, the peninsula lies from the eastern borderline of India to the southern part of China with the various Mongoloid

¹⁶ Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, Eight printing, January 2004), 28.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Lewis, R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 7.

racess who have been dominant immigrants to the region. Among the countries of the Mainland Southeast Asia,¹⁹ the western and central parts, such as Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia, received the cultural and religious traditions of India, meanwhile eastern and southern nations, such as Vietnam, Malaysia, and Singapore, received a much larger Chinese cultural influence. This chapter studies religious assimilation²⁰ in the culture of the indigenous peoples particularly in Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia who have the Ramayana cultural tradition in common with a heavy Indian influenced civilization. Myanmar and other places had a unique process of Indianization, first under the influence of Hinduism (Ramayana tradition) followed by the Buddhist influence later. Both Hinduism and Buddhism originated from India; Myanmar and other places have been under religious and cultural influence from both religions subsequently. Nowadays, the area what called Suvarnabhumi has become the mainland of Theravada Buddhism. We shall examine religious conversions of the region through cultural assimilation.²¹

¹⁹ By Mainland Southeast Asia, we exclusively involve Myanmar, Thai, Laos and Cambodia in which Theravada Buddhism has been well established as state religion.

²⁰ The present study shall interpret religious conversion as cultural assimilation: therefore, sometimes we shall explain the religious conversions of the region as religious assimilation and/or cultural assimilation interchangeably.

²¹ Here the present study interprets religious conversion as religious assimilation. It means that the peoples of the region assimilated or absorbed new cultures and religions into their own primal religious system.

How could the Hinduized nations under the heavy influence from India be converted to the Theravada Buddhism later on? What was the cultural process and phenomena that the already converted could be re-converted by another religious framework? In Myanmar, why and how did the Burman tribe change the deities in their religious conversions? Did they change the person of the deities in their conversion? Or else did they use the same name of the High One in their religious system? What is the future possibility of Christianization in the process of religious assimilation in the future Indochina peninsula where re-conversion of the Theravada Buddhism already took place? To answer this kind of question, I will trace the religious history and the converting stages of cultural assimilation in the region.

1. First Cultural Assimilation Stage: The Hinduization of the Region

The nations in the Indochina peninsula may be divided into three historico-religious regional categories: Hinduized countries, Islamized countries, and Sinicized countries. As mentioned previously, the Hinduized countries such as Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia, eventually became Theravada Buddhist countries.

The people of the Hinduized countries have been primarily engaged with animism and shamanistic rituals that have been practiced for a long time. Furthermore, one could see that their traditional spiritism was mixed with the process of Hinduization in the region. Subsequently their second conversion to Buddhism was also related to these kinds of religious beliefs and practices. For instance, the Burmans, traditionally speaking, generally believe in *Nat* as the spirit and they still practice traditional *Nat*-worship in their daily life as devout Buddhists. Why do they still practice voluntarily and/or spontaneously the primitive ritual of the *Nat*-worship of their primal religion in this modern social life in the Burmanized Buddhism today? Kenneth Perry Landon perhaps seems to give us the shortest answer to this question: the Buddhism has been “used to dress up traditional ceremonies aimed to propitiate the *nats*.”²²

Do devout Buddhists have to propitiate *Nat* the spirits? No, obviously not at all! The teaching of Buddha opposes *Nat*-worship rituals. Then why do the Buddhists in the region so far practice traditional rituals of spiritism? Today one sees that they still actively practice *Nat*-worship ritual *i.e.* pleasing and appeasing local spirits for economic and social benefit. We

²² Kenneth Perry Landon, *Southeast Asia: Crossroad of Religions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), 25.

argue herewith that the people of the region have so far been keeping their primal beliefs of religious system in their new religions. Many a people who officially profess Theravada Buddhism in the region could be still seen embracing the *Nat*-worship. Then what is *Nat*? From where and when did the Burmans embrace *Nat* belief and the worship ritual in their religious system? What is the ritual of *Nat*-worship? Let us here have a brief study of *Nat* so that we shall comprehend the *Nat*-worship ritual among the people.²³ To do so, we shall trace back the genesis of the *Nats* pantheon in the early time history of the Burmans at the beginning of Bagan dynasty.

It was King Anawrahta, the first king of Bagan dynasty, that instituted the cult of the most famous and significant Thirty-Seven *Nats* together with Theravada Buddhism. When the king built the famous Shwezigon pagoda, ‘his chief monument’, as Harvey narrates, he allowed “the entire pantheon of the Thirty Seven Nat spirits” to circle around the relics of the Buddha. Why did the king allow the Burman pantheon to be worshipped together with the relics of the Buddha? Harvey continues his narration, “Asked why he allowed them, Anawrahta said, “Men will not come for the sake of the new faith. Let them come for their old gods [*Nats*]

²³ Not only the Burmans but also the other tribes of Myanmar who profess Buddhism such as Shan, Arakanese, Mon, etc., believe in *Nat* in their religious life.

and gradually they will be won over.”²⁴ *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia* makes a correct remark as it records, “Thus, the cults of the *nats* in Burma acquired official status and was sanctioned by the Buddhist orthodoxy.”²⁵ Anawrahta would get started erecting the Shwezigon pagoda as the state pagoda in 1059, and had not finished yet when he died in 1077, killed by a wild buffalo that is believed to be an incarnated *Nat* or avatar of a spirit.²⁶ Tradition says that the buffalo was not natural one; moreover was an enemy of Anawrahta in a previous life. It became the spirit of a tree waiting for vengeance to Anawrahta. When Anawrahta’s karma [Pali kamma] was exhausted, the spirit appeared as a wild buffalo and gored him to death. The sovereignty and the scepter of Anawrahta was believed to be given by *Thagya Min*.²⁷

Did the monarchs of ancient and modern time Myanmar intervene into the *Nat*-worship ritual as defenders of Buddhism? How have the

²⁴ G. E. Harvey, *History of Burma: From the Earliest Times to 10 March 1824 The Beginning of the English Conquest*, (London: Frank Cass & Co, Ltd, New impression 1967), 33. Harvey was well known as a senior colonial official in Indian Civil Service and a historian of Burma.

²⁵ Nicholas Tarling ed., *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia, Vol. 1: From Early Times to c. 1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, First published 1992), 285.

²⁶ Anawrahta was killed in the jungle by a wild buffalo that is believed to be an incarnated *Nat*. His body could not be found. Benedicte Brac de la Perriere makes a note: “Anawrahta was killed on the horns of a wild buffalo which was the incarnation of a spirit whom Anawrahta had castrated using Thigya’s [*Thagya Min*] scepter.” See, Benedicte Brac de la Perriere, “The Burmese *Nats*: Between Sovereignty and Autochthony” *Diogenes* (No. 174, Vol. 44/2, summer 1996), 59.

²⁷ *Thagya Min* is the Burmese version of Indra the king of Vedic gods in Hinduism: known as Sakra in Sanskrit and Sakka in Pali.

modern time state leaders been playing their role as defenders of Buddhism?
Now we shall catch a glimpse of genesis of the *Nat*.

Sir James George Scott (1851-1935),²⁸ a former Scottish journalist and colonial administrator, in the pseudonym name of Shway Yoe, regarding the word *Nat*, in his most famous book *The Burman: His life and Notions*, is not sure that “whether *Nat* is derived from the Sanskrit term *nath*, meaning ‘master, husband, lord,’ or not” referring General Phayre and Bishop Bigandet.²⁹ Nevertheless, Scott assumes that *Nat* came from *Dewa* in the Hindu mythology, and have been “transferred to the Buddhist world system.”³⁰ In regards of *Nat*-worship, Scott properly comments, “As a simple matter of fact, it is undeniable that the propitiating of the nats is a question of daily concern to the lower class Burman, while the worship at the pagoda is only thought of once a week.”³¹ To Scott, *Nat*-worship “has nothing to do with Buddhism [...] being heretical and antagonistic to the teachings of the Lord Buddha.”³²

²⁸ In the British colonial rule, Sir James George Scott served as a colonial administrator in Burma. As a journalist, he wrote many books: among them *The Burman: His Life and Notions* was famous. There is a ‘Scott Collection’ at Cambridge University Library.

²⁹ James George Scott (Shway Yoe), *The Burman: His Life and Notions* (New York: Norton & Company, Inc., First Published 1963), 231.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 232. For detail, see Shway Yoe, “Nats and Spirit Worship” in *The Burman: His Life and Notions* (New York: Norton & Company, Inc., First Published 1963), 231-242.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 231.

³² *Ibid.*, 232.

Then what does it mean by the ‘Thirty-Seven Nats’? From where did the Burmans adopt or inherit the pantheon? What is the genesis of the pantheon? Where did the pantheon originate from? What has the role of the cult—*i.e.* ‘the cult of the Thirty-Seven Lords’ been in the Burmese religious system? What is the significance of the pantheon? Sir Richard Carnac Temple (1850–1931),³³ a former British Commissioner, was the first foreign scholar of the pantheon. His famous book *The Thirty-seven Nats: A Phase of Spirit-worship Prevailing in Burma*, published in 1906, is a classic and primary source in regards of the studies of Nats. In his book, Temple investigates the official Nats of the cult of the Thirty-Seven Lords with illustrations in colorful pictures. The rare book is an important document as the earliest research and most primary source for study of Nat-worship among the Burmans in Myanmar. Temple, as he simply sees the Buddhist Burmans, asserts, “[T]he Burman, despite his now ancient official adoption, after a long fight, of the purest form of Buddhism, is at heart an Animist

³³ In 1883, Temple served the British Army as a Captain in the Third Anglo-Burmese War. In 1894, he was appointed as the Chief Commissioner for Andaman and Nicobar islands. In 1897, he was promoted as a Lt. Colonel. In 1904, he retired and wrote his book: *The Thirty-seven Nats* that was published in 1906. He collected and donated the statue of an official Nat, namely, *Lawkanat* to the National Museum of Myanmar in 1889.

[...].”³⁴ Furthermore, quoting Bishop Bigandet,³⁵ Temple comments as he sees:

[I]n his [Burman] every-day life, from the day of his birth to his marriage, and even when he lies on his death-bed, all the rites and forms that he observes are to be traced to Animistic and not to Buddhist sources. [...] he propitiates these Nats, who are the direct representatives of the old Animistic worship. Even the *pongyis* [monks] themselves are often directly influenced by the strong under-current of Animistic religion which underlies their faith in Buddhism.³⁶

Concerning *Nat*-worship in Burmese animism, D. G. E. Hall, formerly professor in the University of Rangoon, might not be wrong as he asserts, “Burmese animism is made up of the worship of a host of spirits called *nats*. Usually they were, and are, local nature gods, the spirits of earth and sky, rain and wind, whirlpool and whirlwind, of mountains, rivers and trees, of the jungle, and even of villages and houses.”³⁷ To Hall, “The religion of the Burmese, before they adopted Buddhism, was animism” in his words. He then points out, “The national religious festivals of today were all

³⁴ R. C. Temple, *The Thirty-seven Nats: A Phase of Spirit-worship Prevailing in Burma* (London: Kiscadale Publications, 1906), 1.

³⁵ Bishop Bigandet was a well-known Catholic missionary who was accommodated by the Burman king Mindon Min. He wrote a two-volumes of books titled “The Life or Legend of Gaudama: The Buddha of the Burmese” which was published in 1880. Temple thinks, “No one has ever known the Burmese better than Bishop Bigandet” in his words.

³⁶ R. C. Temple, *The Thirty-seven Nats: A Phase of Spirit-worship Prevailing in Burma* (London: Kiscadale Publications, 1906), 2.

³⁷ D. G. H. Hall, *Burma* (London: Hutchinson & Co. Ltd., Third edition, 1960), 13.

originally animist, and even when adopted into the Buddhist calendar lost none of their pre-Buddhist significance.”³⁸ He explains, “Thus the New Year water festival, *Thingyan*, celebrated the annual return of the Thagya Min, or King of the Spirit World, to the earth.”³⁹ Furthermore, Hall argues that the grafting of the Buddhist legends on to a pre-Buddhist practice by figuring out the *Thadingyut* festival of light that “commemorates the legend of Gautama ascending into spiritland to expound the Law to his mother, who had become Queen of the Nats [...]”⁴⁰

It was *Thagya Min* သိကြားမင်း [Thigya Min] literally meaning the king or lord who knows and hears in Burmese vernacular that had been appointed as the chief or king of the *Nats* by King Anawrahta when he first introduced Theravada Buddhism to his unified kingdom of Myanmar. What does *Thagya Min* mean in the vernacularly? Since the Burmese vernacular verb stem သိ [thih] means to know, and ကြား [gya] means to hear, the pronoun မင်း [min] means king/lord, it will be safe to understand the *Thagya Min* as an omniscient god or supernatural being. Nevertheless, the supernatural being was interestingly an imported one from Indian tradition.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

It is very interesting to study the relationship between the *Nats* and the monarchs of Myanmar in its politico-religious history. Then who and what was, and is, that significant and magnificent *Thagya Min*? Professor Michael Aung-Thwin, a Burmese scholar, explains the relationship between the Burmese king and *Thagya Min*: “[T]he Burmese king was also a manifestation of Sakka (or Thagya, from the Sanskrit Sakra) the Burmese-Buddhist equivalent of Indra, *devanamindo*, lord of Tavatimsa and its thirty-two other *devas*.”⁴¹

Benedicte Brac de la Perriere, a French anthropologist who scholarly studies about *Nat*-worship and is a specialist on Myanmar, explains the institution of the Thirty-Seven Lords narrating, “[I]t is said that the *nats* were placed under the authority of Thi'dja [*Thagya*], the Burmese version of Indra, the king of the Vedic gods. This god, whom the Buddhists call Sakra [Pali Sakka], is asserted to be the protector of Theravada in Burma.”⁴² “Thus,” she explains, “by the intermediary of Thi'dja, the king [Anawrahta] made clear the subordination of the former cults to the new state religion, Theravada Buddhism.” She provides the formulae of the pantheon:

⁴¹ Michael Aung-Thwin, *Pagan: The Origins of Modern Burma* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985), 49.

⁴² Benedicte Brac de la Perriere, “The Burmese Nats: Between Sovereignty and Autochthony” in *Diogenes*, (No. 174, Vol. 44/2, Summer 1996), 46.

The thirty-six *nats* plus Thi'dja [Thagya] make a pantheon of thirty-seven, a number which corresponds to the sum of 32 + 4 + 1: thirty-two being the number of divinities gathered at Tavatimsa, the city of the Hindu gods, to which Indra, their leader, is added, as well as the four guardian of the orient, called the *lokapala*.⁴³

Brac de la Perriere furthermore asserts that the number thirty-seven had been used by the Pyu and the Mon before the Burman as a 'cosmogonic category': and also asserts that the thirty-seven *Nats* listed at the Shwezigon pagoda could be taken as the original pantheon.⁴⁴

Melford E. Spiro, formerly professor of anthropology at the University of California, has been an expert on the Burman *Nat*-worship ritual. In his book *Burmese Supernaturalism* he provides a detailed analysis of the *Nat* spirits or ghosts of the Burman; and systematically studies the relationship between the two religions—*i.e.* Supernaturalism and Buddhism. To Spiro, a Burman has two religions: "animism and Buddhism." Spiro attempts "to interpret the relationship between these two systems" in his work. He asserts:

For most Burmese, animism is a concession to human frailty; Buddhism is a striving for human nobility. Animism represents man's natural fears and desires; Buddhism symbolizes his highest ideals and aspirations. Animism presents man as he is; Buddhism

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

indicates what he *ought* to be (and can become). One worships the Buddha because He is holy; one propitiates the nats because it is expedient (“out of fear we must”).⁴⁵

Regarding formulation of the pantheon, Spiro suggests, “Indeed, only thirty-three nats comprised the original royal list of nats, whose images King Anawtahta placed in the Shewzigon pagoda of Pagan in 1059. These included a group of thirty-two nats, plus the Hindu-derived Buddhist *deva*, Sakka [Thagya Min].”⁴⁶ Quoting Htin Aung, Spiro points out the issuing of new lists of the pantheon that Bodawpaya (1782-1819) compiled again at his court.⁴⁷

Since the present study is not particularly the study of *Nat* or spiritism of the Burmans, we shall focus only on the *Nat*-worship ritual and the role of the King of the Thirty-Seven *Nats*, namely, *Thagya Min*. The *Thagya Min*, or King of the *Nats* has his own yearly festival, *Thingyan* by the end of the Burmese lunar year. Normally the festival takes three or four days depending on the Burmese lunar calendar. On the first day, *Thagya Min* descends from [sic] the Tavatimsa heavens; and the first day of *Thagyan* is called *Agyah-naeh*, meaning descending day. The next day, the King stays

⁴⁵ Melford E. Spiro, *Burmese Supernaturalism* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, Expanded ed., Second Printing 2011), 273.

⁴⁶ Melford E. Spiro, *Burmese Supernaturalism* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, Expanded ed., Second Printing 2011), 52.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* Bodawpaya, the son of Alaungpaya, was a devote Buddhist king.

on earth among the human beings; and the second day is called *Agyat-naeh*, meaning eclipse day. Sometimes there are two eclipse days depends on the astronomical lunar calendar. The third and last day is called *Atet-naeh*, meaning *Thagya Min* the Sakka ascends again to Tavatimsa the Buddhist Cosmological heavens. Then the next day is the Burman New Year day. It has been officially gazetted as the New Year Day of Myanmar by the Burmo-centric government of independent Union of Myanmar. A Buddhist Burman is supposed to go to a pagoda to worship or venerate the Buddha on the New Year Day. Note that how close has been the relationship between the animistic ritual and the Hinduized Buddhist practice. A Hinduized Buddhist has to be washed away his sins with the cleansing water of the *Thingyan* festival of *Thagya Min*, and then get started again a new life without having sin at the beginning of every new year by venerating the Buddha at a pagoda on the New Year Day.

Thingyan is generally well-known as a Burmese national water festival that usually falls by the end of Burman lunar year mostly in the mid of summer time there in April. The *Thingyan* holiday has been a gazetted national holiday that lasts four to five days. The military juntas in the name of SPDC [State Peace and Development Council] later gazetted the *Thingyan* holiday lengthening so far one whole week as national holiday period.

Traditionally, the Burmans believe that *Thagya Min*, which implies king of the heavens, descends on the first day of *Thingyan*, and the second and third day [if eclipse] is the staying period of the said heavenly king on earth; then the king ascends again to the celestial heavens on the third or fourth day. The next day of the king's ascension is fixed as the New Year Day in the Burmese lunar calendar. It is interesting what *Thagya Min* performs on earth during his stay. Traditionally the people believe that *Thagya Min* usually brings two scrolls of inscriptions: the one made of gold leaf is the record of good deeds of those who are good whereas the other one made of dog skin is the record of evil doers. Thus, he looks for the good doers and the evil doers as well while he stays among the human beings. The pouring water ritual of one another means the cleansing of the sins that one had committed throughout the old whole year so that his sins might be washed away and accordingly his name might be recorded in the gold leaf inscription as a good doer in the record of *Thagya Min* in the New Year. Furthermore, *Thagya Min* also is traditionally believed as the caretaker of Buddhism. Regarding the *Thingyan* festival and the role of *Thagya Min*, Scott shortly narrates, "The Tha-gya min, the king of the nats, or déwas, comes down to earth at the beginning of the Burman year, and remains here for three days, and his subjects generally display great solicitude for the pious state and welfare of

mankind, but otherwise they are matters of no concern to dwellers in the lupyi [human world] unless as objects of envy.”⁴⁸

Here we observe that the first Myanmar monarch, the champion of Theravada Buddhism, instituted *Nat*-worship—*i.e.* the cult of the Thirty-Seven Lords pantheon in which *Thagya Min* had been there being appointed as the king of the *Nats*. Why did the first monarch institute the pantheon of thirty-seven? What was his attitude towards the *Nat* and *Nat-worship*? Benedicte reasonably explains, “The founder of the first Burmese dynasty, King Anawratha, initially sought to ban the cults that were in force at this time. Unsuccessful, he decided to gather the relevant cultic figures into a pantheon under the authority of Thagya [...].”⁴⁹

We shall see later that all the monarchs and even the modern Republic period political leaders of Myanmar worship *Nats*—the Thirty-Seven Lords. It is traditionally said that the Buddhist dhamma will be lasting 5,000 years, and in the mid, *i.e.* at 2,500th of the Buddha’s parinivāṇa the sasana might be handed over to the *Thagya Min*, the caretaker of the dhamma. Accordingly, we shall see later that during 1954-56, the very

⁴⁸ Sir James George Scott, (Shway Yoe), *The Burman: His Life and Notion*, 232.

⁴⁹ Benedicte Brac de la Perriere, “The Taungbyon Festival: Locality and Nation-Confronting in the Cult of the 37 Lords” trs. Annabelle Dolodon in Monique Skidmore ed. *Burma at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2005), 66.

period of 2,500th year of the Buddha' parinibbana, U Nu the devout Buddhist Prime Minister hosted the Great Sixth World Buddhist Council to edify the Tipitaka so that the modern Buddhism might be revived with its renewal.

Now we shall examine the historical beliefs system of the primal religions in the region. With regard to the beliefs of the people of the early time Myanmar, G. E. Harvey scholarly observes, "The faith existed side by side with Brahmanism. What the excavator finds in Burma is often Hindu rather than Buddhist. In some sculptures, Buddha appears as an incarnation of Vishnu."⁵⁰ This commentary proves the fact of Hinduization of the early people of Myanmar. Then did they worship Vishnu in the Hinduized cultural heritages? Who were they that first peopled the fertile region of ancient Myanmar? Myanmar has her earliest recorded history of the Pyu and the Mon as the foremost-civilized peoples: the former belong to the Tibeto-Burman speaking peoples; and the latter to the Mon-Khmer speaking groups respectively. H. G. Q. Wales, a British scholar, assumes that the Mons are the earliest of the inhabitants since between 2500 and 1500 before Christian

⁵⁰ G. E. Harvey, *History of Burma: from the Earliest Time to 10 March 1824 the Beginning of the English Conquest*. (London: Thomas Nelson Ltd., New Impression, 1967), 7.

era with the Older Megalithic culture who also “must have come under strong Indian influence.”⁵¹

The Mons founded Thaton city-state in lower Myanmar in the sixth century C.E., and it seems that they were Indianized by Indian merchants. Wales thinks that a Hinayana Buddhist city, inhabited mostly by Indianized Mons, seemed to be existed in the vicinity of Thaton.⁵² In regards of the Pyus, a Tibeto-Burman language group, Wales suggests that they acquired “an impoverished form of the Younger Megalithic civilization.”⁵³ G.H. Luce, former professor at Rangoon University, sees the Pyus as a non-Buddhist people before C.E. 638, the date of the foundation of their state-city သရေခေတ္တရာ Sri Ksetra. The Pyus were also fully Indianized with a high civilization, but they have so far been absolutely lost together with the decline of their city in C.E. 832 by the conquest of the Nanchao. One face of the famous quadrangle ‘Myazedi’ inscription of C.E. 1113, an old surviving stone inscription in the history of Myanmar, was written in Pyu language.⁵⁴ The Chinese chronicles of the Tang dynasty (C.E. 606-918) also documented

⁵¹ H. G. Quaritch Wales, *Early Burma-Old Siam: A Comparative Commentary* (London: Bernard Quaritch, Ltd., 1973), 1.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ H. G. Quaritch Wales, *Early Burma-Old Siam*, 4.

⁵⁴ The inscription was written in quadrilingual: Pyu, Mon, Burmese, and Pali on each face. Interestingly the script starts with *Pusha [Paya]-Th’khin* in regards of the Buddha and ends with *Ari-madeya Paya-Thakhin* with regard to the future Buddha. It seems that Judson might have discovered his *Paya-Th’khin* from this inscription. We shall talk about this later.

the civilization of the Pyu and their religion as Buddhism.⁵⁵ The Burman people migrated into the land of Myanmar round about C.E. 850.⁵⁶ The Burman also were totally Indianized after their migration in the lowland of fertile Irrawaddy River region. What kind of religion did the Burman practice at the time they migrated into the region? The history of religious practice of the Burman before Bagan dynasty is obscure.⁵⁷ Regarding the peoples' belief and religious system, Harvey comments as follows:

The legend of Duttapaung, the Pyu chief, is tinged with Sivaism, for he is described as having three eyes and what look like phallic emblems have been found at Pegu (an ancient city of the Mons).

[....] The bulk of the people outside went on in their old quiet way worshipping stocks and stones—the usual animism and spirit worship of simple races. Religious strife is scarcely mentioned; but that there were occasional struggle between Hinduism and Buddhism is indicated by traditions [...]"⁵⁸

The Pyus had three outstanding city-states in the central and northern part of modern Myanmar: Sri Ksetra (သရေခေတ္တရာ/သီရိခေတ္တရာ Old Prome), Halingyi (ဟန်လင်းကြီး Hanlingyi), and Vishnu (Beik-tha-noh ဗိသနီ in Burmese) named after the very name of the Supreme god of Hinduism. Duttabaung

⁵⁵ Reginald Le May, *The Culture of Southeast Asia: the Heritage of India* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., First published 1954), 45.

⁵⁶ H. G. Quaritch Wales, *Early Burma-Old Siam*, p. 5.

⁵⁷ Bagan dynasty, founded by Anawrahta together with the first unified nation of Myanmar, is the first Burman dynasty in the history of Myanmar.

⁵⁸ G. E. Harvey, *History of Burma*, p. 7.

was the first king of the Pyu at Sri Ksetra. Professor D. G. E. Hall suggests with regard to the religion of the Pyus: “Religious remains show both forms of Buddhism, Mahayanism and Hinayanism, together with Vishnu worship.”⁵⁹ When the Burmans migrated into the fertile valley of the Irrawaddy River, they would surely see there at least three different tribes of people: Pyu, Kanran, and Sak [Thet]. The Pyu tribe has been lost and the Kanran tribe is believed to be the Arakanese, and the Sak [Thet] is believed to be the Chin peoples.

Though we know little about the ancient history of Southeast Asia, it is sure that there were a most civilized people, namely Mon. The Mon People were the original propagators of Theravada Buddhism in the Hinduized States of the mainland Southeast Asia that both the Burman and the Siamese were first introduced with. The Burmans received the complete Pali canon of the Tipitaka ⁶⁰ by occupying Thaton the principal Mon city in the peninsula located at the delta of the River Sittang; and the Siamese, from the other Mon cities: Sri Thep, Phra Phatom, and Phong Tuk located in the valley of River Choa Phya.⁶¹ G. H. Luce asserts that the Mons as “the

⁵⁹ D. G. E. Hall, *Burma* (London: Hutchinson & Co. Ltd, Third edition, 1960), 8.

⁶⁰ Pali reads Tipitaka and Sanskrit reads Tripitaka meaning three baskets of the teaching of the Buddha.

⁶¹ Kenneth Perry Landon, *Southeast Asia: Crossroad of Religions*(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949),102-103.

pioneers in civilization, both in Old Burma and Old Siam”.⁶² Howbeit, the Mons including all the Buddhicized peoples of Southeast Asia are not directly Buddhists in their beliefs as Emmanuel Guillon argues. In fact, they have “a combination of beliefs” together with the practice of Theravada Buddhism so far. Guillon justly argues about the combined religious system of the peoples of Southeast Asia:

[...] with the Mons as with all the Buddhicized peoples of Southeast Asia, the religious system is [...] a complex synthesis. It consists of three commingled categories: the Buddhist Religion, inspired in part by the *Theravada*; the belief in various spirits or demons which populate the physical and social landscapes; and the world of omens, which attempts to secure an accommodation with the immediate or distant future. In addition, the Mons assert that they possess their own distinctive concept of relations between individuals [...]⁶³

Again, Reginald le May thinks the practice of Buddhism in Hinayana canon [Theravada] among the Pyus seemed to have been early as the sixth century of Christian era in early Myanmar, possibly imported from Southern India. As far as the religion of Myanmar is concerned, Dr. le May makes sense as he feels “reasonably certain that Buddhism, and possibly Brahmanism too, had taken a hold” long before since the fifth century in the

⁶² Emmanuel Guillon, *The Mons: A Civilization of Southeast Asia* (Bangkok: Amarin Printing and Publishing, English Translation by James V. Di Crocco, 1999), 52.

⁶³ Emmanuel Guillon, *The Mons: A Civilization of Southeast Asia*, p. 42.

Christian era.⁶⁴ In accord with G. Coedes, the “imprint of Buddhism” took place among the people of Southeast Asia together with “the decline of the Indian cultural influence” as many socio-political impacts came along between the nations in the region in the thirteenth century C.E.⁶⁵ Though the nationwide conversions in the Theravada Buddhism eventually took place in the region of Suvarnabhumi, one finds the fundamental beliefs of Hinduism in its Ramayana tradition in the practice of the new faith of Theravada Buddhism. In other words, one finds that Theravada Buddhism in Southeast Asia today as an Indian cultural heritage of religious complex. The present study argues here that the populations of the local people today still have a mixed Hinduized Buddhism having a faith in a Supreme Being or supernatural beings together with various folk beliefs of spiritism. For example, the Buddhists in Myanmar as nationwide basis, generally speaking, so far have a mere belief in the existence of the *Thagya Min*, the Burmese version of Indra the Vedic god, in spite of the teaching of the Buddha. One sees that this is true from the very beginning of the establishment of

⁶⁴ Reginald le May, *The Culture of South-east Asia: the Heritage of India* (London: Unwin Brothers Ltd., First Published, 1954), 46-47.

⁶⁵ For more detailed information, see G. Coedes, *The Making of Southeast Asia*, tr. H. M. Wright (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 199 ff., & G. Coedes, *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia*, ed. Walter F. Vella (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1968), 148 ff.

Buddhism in the Bagan dynasty. We would need Benedicte Brac de la Perriere herewith again to confirm our statement:

Even though King Anawratha is supposed to have subordinated the nat cult to Buddhism, this has not been enough to allay the suspicion of most orthodox Burmese Buddhists regarding it, even though the cult is observed in a general manner by most Burmese, in parallel with Buddhism, at least insofar as the basic rites are concerned. It is considered indispensable to be Buddhist in order to participate in the cult, and in fact the two practices are closely intertwined.⁶⁶

Even though Vishnu is exalted as the “Supreme god of monotheistic structure”⁶⁷ in the Vaishnavite tradition of Hinduism regarded as the caretaker of the world, ‘the guarantor of the dharma’, ‘the creator and destroyer of all existence’, etc., almost the monarchies of Southeast Asia has taken the role upon themselves wishing to be considered as avatar of Vishnu. For instance, Kyanzittha (C.E. 1084-1112), a famous king of Bagan dynasty in Myanmar, a devout Buddhist, is described as a reincarnation of Vishnu in

⁶⁶ Benedicte Brac de la Perriere, “The Taungbyon Festival: Locality and Nation-Confronting in the Cult of the 37 Lords” trs. Annabelle Dolodon in Monique Skidmore ed. *Burma at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’I Press, 2005), 67.

⁶⁷ Mircea Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas vol. 1: From the Stone Age to the Eleusinian Mysteries*, tr. William R. Trask (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1978), 213.

the Bagan inscriptions.⁶⁸ Emmanuel Guillon comments concerning the Buddhist belief in the Indian cultural heritage:

[...] the Buddhist belief in the transmigration of the deeds of one being to another after death enters into this concept of metamorphosis; the tales and legends blend these beliefs into a whole. Thus the concept of metamorphosis can be conceived of as the *central* concept of the systems which came from India, and easily so, since it already existed. Since this central concept exists in the Visnu cult as well as in Buddhism, this syncretism could thus come into being and become particularly useful to a king, who, in proclaiming himself [Kyanzittha ကျန်စစ်သား] a reincarnation of Visnu, sanctified his power.⁶⁹

An inscription of Bagan period reads something like this: “offerings were made to Indra and all the devas [...]”. The people would worship *Nar*, *i.e.* Vishnu.⁷⁰ Now let us see what happened in Cambodia, Laos and Thailand also.

In Cambodia, there was a belief in “the divine king” in the usual identification with Siva or Vishnu. For instance, Jayavarman VII, by the beginning of the thirteenth century, declared himself as Buddharaaja the divine king. “The Siamese”, says Landon, “were aware of this development

⁶⁸ King Kyanzittha claims himself as an Avatar of Vishnu, prophesied by the Buddha. For details, see, Gordon H. Luce, *Old Burma-Early Pagan* Vol. 1. Text (New York: J.J. Augustine Publisher, 1969), 41.

⁶⁹ Emmanuel Guillon, *The Mons: A Civilization of Southeast Asia*, p. 95.

⁷⁰ Gordon H. Luce, *Old Burma-Early Pagan* Vol. 1. Text (New York: J.J. Augustine Publisher, 1969), 69.

in Cambodia and saw possibilities in it for themselves, for they were Buddhists”. Landon explains the Siamese idea: “They established a cult in which the Hindu deities ministered to the Buddha who was supreme. According to the Siamese idea, the king was a bodhisattva [bodhisatta in Pali], a Buddha-to-be. Or he might be regarded as a *chakravartin* or a universal monarch.”⁷¹

In the perspective of a Buddhist, concerning a Cambodian monarch regarded as Siva or Vishnu seemed to be equivalent to a bodhisatta [Sanskrit bodhisattva]. Some *buddharajas* the divine kings regarded themselves as Maitreya the coming Buddha in their rule.⁷² Landon also points out the existence of ancestor worship in Siam the Thailand in the methods of both Hindu and Buddhist in which there are different rituals and ceremonies.⁷³ As a Buddhist nation, Thailand had earlier become a Hinduized culture. Landon clearly argues as follows:

Siam further qualified as a Hinduized nation in that it sanctioned and made use of both Hindu and Buddhist religious cults. Buddhism was regarded as the national religion, and the king was the layman sponsor or protector of the religion. The Hindu deities were utilized for the enlargement of the position of the divine king [...] when the Hindu gods were represented in a plowing or a swing ceremony.

⁷¹ Kenneth Perry Landon, *Southeast Asia: Crossroad of Religions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 108.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

Hinayana Buddhism was held by all the people to make provision for the life to come.⁷⁴

Until now, we have observed about the Hinduization of Southeast Asia and Hinduized Buddhism. We therefore herewith argue that the people of the region have been culturally assimilated in their religious conversion. Needless to say that the people have so far been practicing the beliefs and rituals of Hindus in their Theravada Buddhist faith. One sees obviously that the Hindu devas and Indra have been Burmanized as *Nats* and *Thagya Min* respectively. In other words, we claim here that the peoples' supernatural beliefs and practices syncretized into Buddhism.

2. Second Cultural Assimilation Stage: The Buddhicization of Myanmar

The Buddhicization of the region began after the foundation of Bagan City of the first unified kingdom of Myanmar. Bagan/Pagan ဝံ (C.E. 1044-1287), *Pugam* or *Pukam* in Chinese and Pyu word, Pali *Pugama*, was founded in C.E. 849 according to tradition.⁷⁵ Anawrahta (1044-1077), a. k. a.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p. 132.

⁷⁵ Bagan or Pagan, spelling Pu-gan ဝံ, after the pronunciation in Burmese is meaningless in Burmese vocabulary. Perhaps the *Zo-mi* ethnic group among Chin people might claim Bagan,

Anuruddha/Aniruddha, founded Bagan with dynasty. He became the first king of the first unified kingdom of Myanmar after he killed his elder brother who was ruling the nation at the time in a challenge of spear-to-spear single combat fight, and seized the throne in 1044.⁷⁶ What was then the religion in Bagan at the time? Were there any sects of Buddhism there in the region when Anawratha unified the kingdom? In fact, Buddhism had been introduced into ancient Myanmar in the fifth century C.E. in the form of Mahayana.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, in the eleventh century C.E. Theravada Buddhism became the dominating state religion.⁷⁸ The Anawrahta unified the ever first kingdom of Myanmar in C.E.1044, making Bagan its capital. It is interesting the way Professor Hall explains the naming of Myanmar [Mranma]:

At what period of time the national name, *Mranma*, i.e. the Burmans, first came into use, it is impossible to say. In Burmese the word first appears in an inscription of 1190. A Mon inscription of about 1102 refers to them as the *Mirma*. The name by which the Chinese knew them, *Mien*, presumably representing the first syllable of *Mranma*, is first mentioned in 1273.⁷⁹

with regard to its spelling in Chinese and Pyu, as their ancestral land by the meaning of the spelling Pu-gam, literally meaning grandfather's country or land in Zo dialect. It is reported that the Chin people had already migrated there before the Burmans migrated the region.

⁷⁶ Harvey, 19.

⁷⁷ Reginald Le May. *The Culture of Southeast Asia: The Heritage of India* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., First publication 1954), 47.

⁷⁸ Edward Conze, *Buddhism: Its Essence and Development* (Oxford: Bruno Cassirer, Third Edition 1957), 118.

⁷⁹ D. G. E. Hall, *Burma* (London: Hutchinson & Co. Ltd, Third edition, 1960), 13.

Just after King Anawrahta's invasion of Thaton the ancient city of Mon people in 1057, Theravadin doctrine has been profoundly introduced together with the Indian civilization to the Burmans. D. G. E. Hall writes:

The conquest of Thaton in 1057 was a decisive event in Burmese history. It brought the Burman into direct contact with the Indian civilizing influences in the south and opened the way for intercourse with Buddhist centres overseas, especially Ceylon. The possession of the Pali scriptures revolutionized his [Anawrahta] outlook: they supplied him [...] to liberate him from the worst of his animistic practices.⁸⁰

It is therefore safe to say that Buddhism in the Theravada form, which is called Hinayana by the Mahayanists, was implanted at Bagan for the first time as early as the eleventh century by the first Myanmar monarch Anawrahta. Why did Anawrahta invade the Thaton? Moreover, why did he eliminate the present practice of dominant religion and implant a new practice of religion, *i.e.* Theravada Buddhism as the state religion?

As the Anawrahta got started to reign there was a dominating traditional animistic religion known as *Ari Sasana* in the region of Bagan, such a form of Mahayana Buddhism, which is believed to have been derived

⁸⁰ D. G. E. Hall, *Burma* (London: Hutchinson & Co. Ltd, Third edition, 1960), 16.

from Bangladesh.⁸¹ The *Ari Sasana* or *Ari-ism* was a kind of *Nat*-worship mixed with Buddhism in Mahayana form. Helen James suggests that *Ari-ism* as *Nat*-worship since it was the indigenous spirit belief. Thus before Theravada was introduced to the Burmans, there had obviously been a religion mixed of *Nat*-worship and Buddhist beliefs conducted by the *Aris*.⁸² U Hla Myint, a professor of Patipatti Studies, explains: “It was a mixture of a decadent form of Buddhism with native animistic beliefs.”⁸³ It is reported that the *Aris*, a big group of monks, misled the people into heresies with a huge religious influence. U Hla Myint asserts:

First, they held that the sin or the evil deed of killing another person could be condoned by the recitation of a particular religious formula of prayer. Secondly, the sin or the evil deed of killing even one’s own parents could be condoned in the same way. Thirdly, [as a wedding ritual] any bride was to be first sent to the monastery for a night just before the wedding.⁸⁴

With regard to the position of the people therein and the heresy of the *Ari*, C. M. Enriquez, a former captain in the British Army, narrates, “Just

⁸¹Yoshiaki Ishizawa, “Considerations Regarding the Basic Framework of Burmese History and Buddhism” in Dr. Y. Ishizawa, ed., *Historical and Cultural Studies in Burma* (Tokyo, Japan: The Institute of Asian Cultures, Sophia Univ., 1988), 31.

⁸² Helen James, *Governance and Civil Society in Myanmar: Education, Health, and Environment*. (New York: Routledge, 2005), 79.

⁸³ U Hla Myint, “The State’s role in purifying and perpetuating Buddha Sasana” in *the Lanka Daily News* (Posted on Dec 22, 2004). See in the Buddhist Channel at <<http://www.buddhistchannel.tv/>> [Professor U Hla Myint is a faculty member of Patipatti Studies at the International Theravada Buddhist Missionary University, Yangon, Myanmar].

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* U Hla Myint, “The State’s role in purifying and perpetuating Buddha Sasana” in *the Lanka Daily News*.

then there was widespread discontent against the immoral practices of the Ari, who were the priests of the existing nat and animistic worship. The Ari claimed the right of violating all bribes, not excluding even royal princesses.”⁸⁵ Accordingly the *Aris*, patriarchal religious leaders, the monks, would sleep with the bribe first and then hand her over to the groom the next day. Therefore, the people were disconcerted with the religious system that allowed such unethical behavior that they desired to purify the doctrine and practices of religion. Harvey, quoting the *Hmannan Yazawin* [Glass Palace Chronicles] states the Ari cult movement:

They wrote books after their own heart and beguiled others into the snare. According to the law they preached, a man might take the life of another and evade the course of *karma* if he recited the formula of deprecation; nay, he might even kill his mother and his father and evade the course of *karma* if he recited the formula of deprecation. Such false and lawless doctrine they preached as true doctrine. Moreover kings and ministers, great and small, rich men and common people, whenever they celebrated the marriage of their children, had to send them to these teachers at nightfall, sending, as it was called, the flower of their virginity. Nor could they be married till they were set free early in the morning. If they were married without sending to the teachers the flower of their virginity, it is said that they were heavily punished by the king for

⁸⁵ C. M. Enriquez, *Pagan: Being the first connected account in English of the 11th Century Capital of Burma, with the History of a few of its most important Pagodas*, (Rangoon: Hanthawaddy Press, 1914), 13.

breaking the custom. This sending of the flower of virginity meant an act of worship. (*Hmannan* I. 227, 204, 241.)⁸⁶

King Anawrahta himself would surely have been scheming to purify religion. At that time, an eminent monk known as Shin Arahan, came from Thaton, city of the Mons, to Bagan, city of the Burman, with the aim of “purifying, propagating and perpetuating the Buddha Sasana” according to U Hla Myint.⁸⁷ By elaborating the doctrine of Theravada Buddhism to the king, Shin Arahan eventually converted Anawratha to be a Theravadin. Shin Arahan then would have encouraged the king to make Theravada Buddhism the state religion. The adoption of Theravada Buddhism was Anawratha’s most distinguished act in accordance with Shin Arahan.⁸⁸

Then why did Shin Arahan persistently attempt to Buddhicize the Bagan kingdom? What were the motivations that made Arahan to be the apostle of Theravada Buddhism to the first unified kingdom of Myanmar? The Buddhist religion among the Mon at the time in Suvarnabhumi was on

⁸⁶ G. E. Harvey, *History of Burma*, p. 18. The *Mmannan Yazawin* is known as Glass Palace Chronicles a translation and edition work of Prof. Luce and his brother in law Prof. Pe Maung Tin.

⁸⁷ U Hla Myint, “The State’s role in purifying and perpetuating Buddha Sasana” *the Lanka Daily News*.

⁸⁸ Yoshiaki Ishizawa, “Considerations Regarding the Basic Framework of Burmese History and Buddhism” in Dr. Y. Ishizawa, ed., *Historical and Cultural Studies in Burma* (Tokyo: Institute of Asian Cultures, Sophia University, 1988), 31.

the decline as adversaries of the religion disturbed the people. Khmer tribes from Cambodia and Northern Thailand were endeavoring to invade the Mon kingdoms established in the lower part of Myanmar. Shin Araham seemed to have feared of elimination of Buddhism and probably that was the main reason that he went up to the north where the Burman people were developing their social life and civilization. The king seemed to have felt that he had found a genuine religious alternative to the superficial teachings of the Ari monks. As a prompt response to the Theravada message, the king built a monastery for Shin Araham, and banned by force all kinds of worship rituals and religious systems of the Ari monks. After his conversion to Theravada Buddhism, King Anawrahta attempted to establish his Bagan kingdom with a strong religion influence. He, therefore, requested to get the *Tipitaka*—scripture of Theravada doctrine in Pali canon—from Thaton, Shin Araham place of origin. His request was refused. After several times of refusal for his strong request, the king lost his temper and marched to Thaton City with his army. Eventually he occupied Thaton and the *Tipitaka* as well.⁸⁹ Who could say then that Shin Araham did not motivate the king to do so? No doubt, perhaps it would surely have been Shin Araham that made the king invaded the Thaton in order to occupy the *Tipitaka*. Nevertheless,

⁸⁹ Edward Conze, *Buddhism: Its Essence and Development* (Oxford: Bruno Cassirer, Third Edition 1957), 65.

Enriquez presents another positive motivation of Anawratha that caused the invasion of Thaton, in his words, “Anawrahta was the Napoleon of Burma. He [...] had carried the Burmese frontier far down south into the Malay Peninsula, and far up north to the borders of China; and also towards India and Assam. [...] The Talaing [Mon] kingdom, with its capital at Thaton, was then famous throughout Asia. Anawratha determined to crush these rivals before it was too late.”⁹⁰

Thus, it is to say at whatever rate that the eleventh century of the Christian era saw the rise of Theravada Buddhism together with the establishment of the first unified kingdom of Myanmar. Could one say then that herewith the Anawratha, the first king of the unified Myanmar, brought back the pure Theravada Buddhism from Thathon? D. G. E. Hall wisely whispers, “But let it not be thought that Anawratha and Shin Araham brought back pure Hinayana [Theravada] Buddhism from Thathon as the chronicles asserts.”⁹¹ Hall, quoting Luce, argues that Buddhism instituted in Bagan by Anawratha “was mixed up with Hindu Brahmanic cults, Vaisnavism in particular. It was tinged with Mahayanism, and towards the end of the dynasty at least with Tantrism. It rested doubtless on a deep bed of Naga

⁹⁰ C. M. Enriquez, *Pagan: Being the first connected account in English of the 11th Century Capital of Burma, with the History of a few of its most important Pagodas*, (Rangoon: Hanthawaddy Press, 1914), 9-10.

⁹¹ D. G. E. Hall, *Burma* (London: Hutchinson & Co. Ltd, Third edition, 1960), 16.

[Dragon] and Nat worship.”⁹² Hall, quoting Harvey, asserts that Buddhism in Thaton also was largely Hinduized. Harvey narrates that Manuha, the captive king of Thathon, was at first well treated with consideration by Anawrahta at Bagan. Harvey continues his historical narration that Manuha built a shrine, namely Nanpaya, at Myinkaba, south of Bagan, containing his throne room with a nice stone handicraft work “with interesting bas-beliefs in which Hindu deities are so prominent as to leave no room for doubt that Thaton Buddhism was largely Hindu.”⁹³ C. M. Enriquez also asserts with regard to the Hinduized Buddhism in Bagan, “There are traces of Hinduism in Pagan, and this is hardly surprising when we realize how intimate the communication with India must have been.”⁹⁴ It is interesting that Enriquez, as an eyewitness, testifies:

The Nat Haluang Kyaung was at first believed to be dedicated to Nat worship, but an inscription has since been found which proves it to be a Hindu temple, built by a merchant of Southern India for the use of his fellow Vishnuvites. An image of Vishnu, riding his vehicle, the Garuda, is carved inside. There are niches outside, in which it is supposed that images of the ten Avatars, or incarnations

⁹² *Ibid.*, Hall quotes professor Luce: Luce, G. H. “Burma’s Debt to Pagan” in *Journal of the Burman Research Society*, Vol. XXII, p. 121.

⁹³ G. E. Harvey, *History of Burma*, 28.

⁹⁴ C. M. Enriquez, *Pagan: Being the first connected account in English of the 11th Century Capital of Burma, with the History of a few of its most important Pagodas*, (Rangoon: Hanthawaddy Press, 1914), 4-5.

of Vishnu, were placed. There are two images of Siva in the Shwezigon.⁹⁵

Hall, therefore, at any rate, might not be wrong as he comments on the Buddhism of Myanmar:

Hinayana [Theravada] Buddhism has subsequently made great strides toward eliminating these extraneous elements. But it still retains traces of Brahmanism, and in addition to the Nat worship which it has assimilated there remains today a distinctive animistic religion, which has no connection whatever with Buddhism and is frowned on by the monkhood.⁹⁶

Anawratha built the famous Shwezigon pagoda there at Bagan dedicating his Mon royal captive king and the family as slaves to the pagoda, “thus rendering them outcaste forever” in Harvey’s words.⁹⁷ Enriquez also narrates, “Anawrahta soon became afraid of his royal prisoner. He summoned Manuha to the Shwezison Pagoda, and during a ceremony, suddenly poured water his hands, thus dedicating him a slave to the

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* Enriquez footnotes, “The Garuda is a Demi-God, half man, half bird. It is the special vehicle of Vishnu.”

⁹⁶ D. G. E. Hall, *Burma*, 16-17.

⁹⁷ Harvey, 28.

pagoda.”⁹⁸ Thus, Anawrahta, the champion of Theravada Buddhism not only wickedly treated his royal prisoner and but robbed the social influence.

From that time onwards, undoubtedly, Theravada Buddhism had been getting started its Burmanization accompanied with the invention of Burmese literature. The set of Tipitaka occupied from Thaton would have been no question a Mon [a.k.a. Talaing] version. Reportedly, the Burmese consonant were borrowed from the Mon. Thus, it would be safe to say that the Burmanized Tipitaka had come to its appearance together with the invention of Burmese writing system in the eleventh-century-Bagan. Formerly the Burmans were preliterate and later seemed to use Sanskrit. At whatever rate, there was a great change there at Bagan in the eleventh century. Harvey points out “three immediate results”:

Firstly, Shin Arahana gained many helpers from the Thaton clergy, and got all the scriptures he wanted, housing them in the Tripitakataik library building which is still to be seen at Pagan. Secondly, Pali supersedes Sanskrit as the normal language of sacred books, and Hinayana teaching supersedes Northern Buddhism. Thirdly, the Burmese adopted the Talaing alphabet and for the first time wrote their language.”⁹⁹

⁹⁸ C. M. Enriquez, *Pagan: Being the first connected account in English of the 11th Century Capital of Burma, with the History of a few of its most important Pagodas*, (Rangoon: Hanthawaddy Press, 1914), 11.

⁹⁹ Harvey, 29. Harvey argues that the earliest inscription in Burmese is dated 1058, the next year of the Thaton conquest.

Harvey continues his narrative that Anawrahta furthermore invaded and annexed the Arakan, but failed to bring home the Buddha image of Mahamuni.¹⁰⁰ In fact, the Burmans were believed to migrate into the plain region of Myanmar much later than did the other tribes. Then they would initiate expanding their territory by invading their neighbors who were already inhabited in the fertile region of the Irrawaddy River. J. S. Furnivall describes the mastery of the Burmans in his book *Colonial Policy and Practice* as follows:

Formerly, their northern neighbors were the Pyus, but these were conquered and assimilated by the Burmese [Burman] who came down in to the plains about A.D. 600-800. By 1100 the Burmese [Burman] had conquered the whole of Burma. Two hundred years later the Shans, cousins of the Siamese, broke across the eastern border, and the subsequent course of Burmese [Burman] history is largely a tale of conflict between Burmese [Burman], Shans and Mons, punctuated by wars with Siam and Arakan. [...] the Burmese [Burman] gained the mastery, drove the Shan back to the eastern hills [...], and subjugated [...] the Mons. They also conquered the Arakanese.¹⁰¹

What is interesting herewith is, as a matter of fact, the monarchs of the Myanmar Empire were defenders of the faith of Theravada Buddhism. All the monarchs were, thus, to say not only defenders of the faith of

¹⁰⁰ Mahamuni, however, was later captured by a Burman king and carried the image to Mandalay.

¹⁰¹ J. S. Furnivall, *Colonial Policy and Practice: A Comparative Study of Burma and Netherlands India* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1956), 12.

Buddhism but the builders of the temples—the pagodas, too. Even in the post-colonial time—from the parliamentary democracy period up to the military juntas’ period today—the Burman political leaders are supposed to be defenders of the faith of Buddhism against Christianity and other world religions that have been interacted together in Myanmar. Thus, so to say as Donald Eugene Smith rightly asserts: “It was the monarch’s unique role as defender and promoter of Buddhist religion which in the final analysis confirmed his legitimacy.”¹⁰² Therefore, no wonder why Buddhism gets its revival almost all the time in the land of Myanmar without having any kinds of ‘Ambedkar movement’.¹⁰³ Buddhist revival occurs on a continual basis through Buddhism promotion of the Burman political leaders. Regarding the Mahar conversion to Buddhism in India, Lewis Rambo rightly asserts, “It is possible that the Buddhist revival, among other forces, is eroding the hegemony of Hinduism, not only over the minds of Indians but also over the political structure.”¹⁰⁴ Note that the ‘Ambedkar movement’ occurred in 1956 at the same time of the Sixth World Buddhist Council was hosted in Myanmar. In the case of Myanmar, Buddhism has already been totally

¹⁰² Donald Eugene Smith, *Religion and Politics in Burma* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 23.

¹⁰³ Lewis R. Rambo mentions the Mahar conversion to Buddhism through the ‘Ambedkar movement’ in India: see Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 149-150.

¹⁰⁴ Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 150.

Burmanized and the majority almost 90% of the population have been Buddhicized.

In the Burmanized Buddhism, there are three precious gems, namely Tri-ratna: they are 1) *Paya* [*Buhra* ဘုရား]; 2) *Taya* [*Tara* တရား]; 3) *Sangha* [*Thanga* သံဃာ]. *Paya* means the Buddha himself, *Taya* means the teaching of the Buddha—dhamma, and *Sangha* means the monk—bhikkhu. The *Paya*, *Taya*, *Thanga* in the Tri-ratna is arranged in consequently hierarchical order. Therefore, *Paya* the Buddha is obviously the atheistic Most High in Burmanized Buddhism. From where did the Burmanized Buddhist terms originate, then? Enriquez argues, “The Burmese words *Phaya/Paya* (Buddha), *Sangha* (Assembly); *Neikban* (Nirvana); *Pu-t’o* (Pagoda); *Kyaung* (Monastery); *Shan* or *Shin* (A Novice); *Hlu* (to give Charity); and *Shiko* (to worship) are not Pali or even Sanskrit, but are derived respectively from the Chinese words *Fu-ya*; *Sengchia*; *Niek-p’an*; *Fu-t’o*; *Kung*; *Shang-jen*; *lu*; and *shih-k;ao*.”¹⁰⁵

When the Protestant missionaries made their missionary translation in the nineteenth century, they employed *Paya-Th’khin* ဘုရားသခင် using the Burmese vernacular name of the Buddha as the Christian God. It has been

¹⁰⁵ C. M. Enriquez, *Pagan: Being the first connected account in English of the 11th Century Capital of Burma, with the History of a few of its most important Pagodas*, (Rangoon: Hanthawaddy Press, 1914), 35-36.

problematic in inter-faith dialogue between Buddhist intellectuals and Christian preachers due to the employment of the same name for different deities. We shall see a reflection on the nineteenth century Protestant missionary translation in Chapter Four. We argue herewith that in the Buddhicized Myanmar, even though the people therein technically and/or officially venerate the Buddha in the Theravada tradition, they still practically embrace their primal religious rituals of supernatural beliefs today.

3. Third Cultural Assimilation Stage: The Rise of Modern Buddhism in the Region and the Impact of Protestant Christianity

i. The Revival of Theravada Buddhism in Modern Myanmar

Modern Theravada Buddhism has become well known together with its popular practice of Vipassana after the two Theravada Buddhist Councils meetings were hosted in Myanmar. The first Theravada Buddhist Council or the Fifth World Buddhist Council was hosted during 1868-71 in Myanmar, in the reign of King Mindon of Kongboun dynasty in the mid of colonial annexation. The chief objective of the council was to recite the Tipitaka—the

teaching of the Buddha—to institute the correct text.¹⁰⁶ It could be argued that this movement was a modern reformation of Buddhist faith in Theravada form of Buddhism. Unfortunately, the reformation and universalization of the Buddhist faith was obstructed by the Western colonial power. The British colonials directly oppressed the faith under their colonial rule from the beginning of their intervention in Burma. The British colonials, thus, “replaced the Buddhist *sangha* authority system with their own bureaucratic administration”.¹⁰⁷ By capturing and removing the king, the British “removed the Burman ruling elite from positions of power and influence”.¹⁰⁸ It was the first impression that stimulated the Burman nationalism against the British colonialism and Christianity. In the perspective of the Burman intellectuals, the British colonialist had been eliminating their identity and Buddhist faith. John F. Cady rightly asserts, “The elimination of the royal Court meant for Burmans the sacrifice of their identity as a people and the elimination of any governmental support of customary law and the Buddhist faith.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Sheo Kumar Singh, *History and Philosophy of Buddhism* (Patna, India: Associated Book Agency, First Published 1982), 306.

¹⁰⁷ David Brown, *The State and Ethnic Politics in South-East Asia*, (New York & London: Routledge, First Published 1994), 41.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ John F. Cady, *Thailand, Burma, Laos, & Cambodia*, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966), 102.

In 1948 just after Myanmar got her independence from the British, U Nu, devout Buddhist, became the first Prime Minister. His first attempt of socio-religio-political system for the newly established union was blending Buddhism and socialism as the political ideology of government. In 1950, he established the Buddha Sasana Council for the purpose of propagating Buddhism and supervising monks by appointing a minister of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Accordingly he created a state Buddhist council and then “ordered government departments to dismiss civil servants thirty minutes early if they wished to meditate” as Donald K. Swearer narrates.¹¹⁰ Swearer astutely observes, “In the manner of King Asoka and later Southeast Asian Buddhist monarchs he [U Nu] called a *sangha* council to purify the *dhamma* and produce a new redaction of the Pali canon.”¹¹¹

Consequently, post-colonial period independent Union of Burma hosted the Sixth World Buddhist Council or the Second Theravada Buddhist Council during 1954-56 sponsored by the central government in the leadership of U Nu the Prime Minister. Thus, Theravada Buddhism has revived back its official role as state religion with nationalist sentiment in the post-colonial era in Myanmar. Why had U Nu had schemed to hosting the World Buddhist Council meeting in this exact period? It was because, as we

¹¹⁰ Donald K. Swearer, *The Buddhist World of Southeast Asia*, (Albany, N.Y: State University of New York, 1995), 96-97.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, 97.

had talked above, the 2,500th anniversary of the Buddha's Parinibbana has come. Traditionally, it is said that the Buddha dhamma will last only 5,000 years; and in the mid-term, *i.e.* at the 2,500th anniversary of the Buddha's parinivirna the *sasana* might be handed over to the *Thagya Min*, the caretaker of the dhamma. That was the reason U Nu the devout Buddhist Prime Minister hosted the Great Sixth World Buddhist Council to edify the Tipitaka so that the Council might affirm and preserve the genuine *dhamma* and *vinaya* of the Buddha. From eight different countries, 2,500 Theravadan monks and elders participated the Council. They would end the conference with the rise of the full moon of *Kasoun* ကဆုန်လပြည့် in accord with the Burmese lunar calendar that fell on the evening of 24 May 1956. It was traditionally the 2,500th anniversary of the Buddha's death—Parinibbana.¹¹²

Donald Eugene Smith recalls the event, “The proposal to proclaim Buddhism the state religion was made at the close of the Sixth Council and became an important issue in the 1960 elections.”¹¹³ The Council would declare that the independent Buddhist nations “could make an important contribution to world peace by propagating the message of Buddha.” Donald Eugene Smith comments, “Nationalist sentiment was clearly present in the

¹¹² See also Nicholas Tarling, ed., *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia* vol. 2: *The nineteenth and twentieth centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 544.

¹¹³ Donald Eugene Smith, *Religion and Politics in Burma* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 117.

Buddhist conviction that Christianity had failed to bring peace to the world and that Buddhism was the only ideology capable of doing this.”¹¹⁴ U Nu, consequently, not only erected a large pagoda, namely *Gabar Aye* meaning World Peace but also built an assembly hall at state expense of six million dollars at the time. In 1961, he attempted to make Buddhism the state religion by introducing a constitutional amendment to the Parliament.¹¹⁵ *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia* rightly states, “U Nu’s socialism was also Buddhist [...]”¹¹⁶ The main reason was because not only he was a devout Buddhist but also for getting much more supporters the next election since almost 90% of the population professed Buddhism. These actions fueled ethnic conflicts fomented ethnic insurgencies and a never-ending-civil-war in the Union of Burma. For example, KIO [Kachin Independence Organization] was founded in 1961 led by three young Zau brothers—Zau Seng, Zau Tu and Zau Dan who were sons of a Baptist pastor.¹¹⁷ With regard to the state promotion of Buddhism, Rev. Robert G. Johnson, the last American missionaries who was compelled to leave Myanmar in 1965 by the Revolutionary Council, reports:

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, 123-124.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*. 117.

¹¹⁶ Nicholas Tarling, ed., *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia* vol. 2: *The nineteenth and twentieth centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 542.

¹¹⁷ Martin Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity* (London & New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd, 1991), 191.

[...] the resurgence of Buddhism in Burma and the plan of U Nu, the prime minister, to introduce Buddhism as the state religion made the Baptist leaders [...] suddenly aware that state schools might be used to propagate Buddhism, and that their children would lose their Christian nurture by attending government schools. (Fortunately the plan to make Buddhism the state religion of Burma was dropped when the General Ne Win government came to power in March, 1962.)¹¹⁸

Why did the first Prime Minister of the newly independent Union of Burma make Buddhism promotion against Christianity? We shall have to examine here the nationalism and anti-Christian movement in nationalist sentiment of Myanmar so that one might comprehend why the Buddhist Burman intellectuals usually confront Christianity. In short, the British colonials, using their bureaucratic administrative power, would seek to replace the Buddhist Burman *sangha*—the monk authoritative system.¹¹⁹ The British colonials, in David Brown's words, "removed the Burman ruling elite from positions of power and influence".¹²⁰ From the perspective of the Buddhist Burman intellectuals, their national identity and Buddhist faith had been eliminated by the British colonials. John F. Cady rightly asserts, "The elimination of the royal Court meant for Burmans the sacrifice of their identity as a people and the elimination of any governmental support of

¹¹⁸ Robert G. Johnson, *History of The American Baptist Chin Mission vol.2.* (Pennsylvania: Self-published 1988), 1,133.

¹¹⁹ David Brown, *The State and Ethnic Politics in South-East Asia* (New York & London: Routledge, First Published 1994), 41.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

customary law and the Buddhist faith.”¹²¹ Note that throughout the independence movement period the Burman national movement had been directly anti-Christianity together with anti-colonial sentiment.¹²² Therefore, no wonder that Buddhism promotion has been necessarily made in the post-colonial time Myanmar. Nevertheless, one surely might wonder if the devout Buddhist Prime Minister would worship *Nat* publicly. To the surprise of the world, U Nu not only publicly worshipped the *Nat* but also officially performed *Nat*-worship ceremony. Melford E. Spiro, together with the people of Myanmar, would surely eyewitness:

U Nu was concerned with the nats as a private citizen, as well as a government official. During the one year which I spent in Burma, he not only contributed two new statues of Min Mahagiri and his sister [it means *Nat* brother and sister] to their shrine on Mt. Popa, but he regularly retired to this mountain, the ancient center of the nat cultus, for long periods of retreat and meditation.¹²³

In addition, *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia* reports, “U Nu’s Buddhism was inseparable from the cult of the *nats*. He justified propitiation ceremonies through references to the scriptures; his Pyidaungsu

¹²¹ John F. Cady, *Thailand, Burma, Laos, & Cambodia* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966), 102.

¹²² For details, see Sang-Keun Kim, & Cope Suan Pau, “Peace Talk as Mission: Protestant Mission and Ethnic Insurgencies in Ethnocratic Buddhist Myanmar Today” in *Korean Journal of Christian Studies*, Vol. 84. (The Christian Literature Society of Korea, October 31, 2012), 285-302.

¹²³ Melford E. Spiro, *Burmese Supernaturalism* (N Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, Second Printing, 2011), 61.

Party gave annual offerings to the spirits and he spent lengthy periods at sites sacred to them, even when deciding economic matters.”¹²⁴

Consequently, Professor Simon pau Khan En, a native *Zo-mi* scholar, reasonably argues, “[I]t is clearly seen that Buddhism is applied by Nat Worship in Myanmar in exorcism, and Nat festivals. Technically speaking, there is no Nat worshipper among the Bahmas [Burmans] as they all claim Buddhism to be their religion, but practically they worship Nats side by side with Buddhism in order to solve the practical problems of life.”¹²⁵ Finally, we must be agreeing with Sir R. C. Temple as he asserts, “In order to understand the daily life and aspirations of the ordinary Burman, it is not sufficient to know that he is by professed religion a Buddhist and to understand what his Buddhism teaches. It is necessary to know also that he is a firm believer in Nats or Spirits, and to grasp how the superstitions connected with this faith affect him in his daily life and notions.”¹²⁶

The present study herewith therefore states that even the devout Buddhist Burmans usually still embrace their animistic beliefs of their primal religious system by practicing *Nat*-worship. We argue that this statement is

¹²⁴ Nicholas Tarling, ed., *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia vol. 2: The nineteenth and twentieth centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 543.

¹²⁵ Simon Pau Khan En, *Nat Worship: A Paradigm for Doing Contextual Theology in Myanmar* (Yangon: Myanmar Institute of Theology, 2012), 93.

¹²⁶ R. C. Temple, *The Thirty-Seven Nats: A Phase of Spirit Worship Prevailing in Burma* (London: W. Griggs, 1906), i.

true today not only in Myanmar, but in Southeast Asia particularly in Laos, Thai, and Cambodia. Consequently, we claim that the Christian mission would better do its missionary translation by means of supernatural beliefs of the indigenous. As we shall see, the missionary translation among the different hill peoples had been very appropriate and effective in ‘vernacular operation’ through their primal beliefs of religious systems.

ii. The Impact of Protestant Missionary Translation in Myanmar

It was Adoniram Judson who pioneered missionary translation among the Buddhist Burmans in early nineteenth century. Judson arrived in Yangon on July 13, 1813. Judson directly employed *ဘုရား Paya / ဘုရားသခင် Paya-Th’khin* the title of Buddha to identify with the Christian God. Why did Judson employ the atheistic term of Burmese Buddhism to designate the theistic Christian God?¹²⁷ We shall reflect in more detail on the missionary translation of Judson in the Burmese vernacular language later in Chapter Four. Judson would simply attempt to introduce a new religion to the Buddhist Burmans by identifying Christian God with the Buddha employing

¹²⁷ In this dissertation, I claim the Buddha as an atheist. Buddha, from the perspective of the Theravada Buddhists, is an atheist. He was/is regarded just as a great teacher, a guide, a model of moral practice, etc. in Theravada Buddhism.

the atheistic term ဘုရား *Paya*/ ဘုရားသခင် *Paya-Th'khin*. In fact, it seems that he intended to designate the Christian God or YHWH with *Paya* ဘုရား the title of Buddha as the Most High of the native Burman. It has been a problematic naming of the Christian God among the Buddhist Burmans. For example, a Burman convert have to be baptized in the strange and confused names of *Paya* the Father ခမည်းတော်ဘုရား, *Paya* the Son သားတော်ဘုရား and *Paya* the Holy Spirit သန့်ရှင်းသောဝိညာဉ်တော်ဘုရား into a new religion. Then what does it mean by ဘုရား *Paya* or ဘုရားသခင် *Paya-Th'khin*? From where did the Buddhist Burmans adopt this term for the title of the Buddha? We shall have to trace here the origin of the term ဘုရား *Paya*. As a matter of fact, no one seems to know from where the *Paya* originated. We have seen an argument in a previous page that the Burmese term *Paya* [Buhra] is derived from *Fu-ya* the Chinese term. If so, does *Fu-ya* imply the Buddha?

Some traditions say that *Paya* ဘုရား is the corrupted word of *Purusha* ပုရုရှား the Sanskrit term for ‘Cosmic Being’— *i.e.* Purusha ပုရုရှား - pursha ပုရ်ရှား - pura ပုရား - Puhra ဖုရား - Buhra ဘုရား—whereas some would say it is a corrupted word of Buddha—*i.e.* Buddha ဗုဒ္ဓ - Budha ဗုဒါ - Buhra - ဗုရာ-Puhra ဖုရား - Buhra ဘုရား [then Buhra ဘုရား is pronounced as *Paya* ဖရား]. At whatever the origins of the word may be, the indigenous understanding of *Paya* ဘုရား

has so far been the title of the Buddha in Myanmar. In fact, ဘုရား *Paya* has been regarded as traditional title for the Buddha in the semantic Burman language spelling such as ဖုရား [Phura], ဘုရား [Bhura]. They call the Buddha as ဗုဒ္ဓဘုရား Buddha *Paya*.¹²⁸

Now, we shall have a glimpse of an inscription written in the early time of the Bagan period in order to trace the genesis of *Paya* ဖုရား [Phura], ဘုရား [Bhura] or ဘုရားသခင် *Paya-Th'khin*. It was Rajarkumar, the son of King Kyansittha, who wrote the inscription. The famous Rajakumar inscription, rather well-known as Myazedi inscription, was written in 1113 C.E.¹²⁹ What is interesting in the inscription is the description of the name or title of the Buddha. In the very beginning, it describes Buddha as *Pusha Th'khin* ဖုရားသခင် / ဗုရားသွင် and in the end, it describes the future yet coming Buddha as *Ari-madeya Paya-Th'khin* အရိမေတ္တယျ ဘုရားသခင် in the vernacular Burmese term.¹³⁰ The inscription was written in quadrilingual: Pyu, Mon, Burmese, and Pali on each face. It seems that perhaps Judson might have discovered his *Paya-Th'khin* from this inscription.

¹²⁸ For the term *Paya*, the present study investigates its origin and the derivation via interviews and conversations with Buddhist scholars who are presently pursuing higher degrees in Buddhist Studies in Sri Lanka and India. Shan and Siamese term for *Paya* is pronounced as *Phra* [P'ra].

¹²⁹ Some version would date it 1112.

¹³⁰ Pe Maung Tin, "Myazedi Inscription" ဦးဖေမောင်တင် မြေစတီကျောက်စာ article in *Nawarat Ko-thwe* (Yangon: Sabei Oo Sarpay, 2nd Edition, 1974), 18-27.

It is interesting that consequently the king is called *Bayin* [Bhurin] ဘုရင်, and his queen, *Mi-Paya* [Mi-Phura] မိဖုရား. But the queen ruler is called *Bayin-Ma* ဘုရင်မ [Bhurin-Ma]. Now, in regards of the word ဘုရား [Bhura] *Paya*, we shall have a glimpse at the contribution of a famous Burman historian, namely, Dr. Than Tun, former professor of History Department in Mandalay University. Than Tun thinks first of all that the Burmese word “*purhā*” i.e. [Buhra] *Paya* ဘုရား “meaning the exalted one is probably derived from *vara*.”¹³¹ “Generally,” he explains, “it denotes Buddha himself as a pagoda where the bodily relics of Buddha are enshrined.”¹³² He further writes:

But a king is also addressed as *purhā* [ဘုရား *Paya*] and his queen called by that name with a *mi* [မိ] or *ami* [အမိ] prefix denoting female as *mipurhā* [မိဖုရား] or *amipurhā* [အမိဖုရား]. To show the difference between the spiritual and temporal lords, some scribes of old Burma took special care to say *mlat cwa so purhā* [မြတ်စွာသောဘုရား]—the most exalted *purhā*, when they wanted to signify Buddha and *purhā rhan*[ဘုရားရှင်]—the *purhā* who is living, to denote the then reigning king. The king is also mentioned *purhā lon* [ဘုရားလောင်း]—the Boddhisattva [Pali Boddhisatta].¹³³

¹³¹ Than Tun, “Religion in Burma, AD 1000 - 1300 *Journal of Burma Research Society* Vol. 42, part 2. December 1959), 50.

¹³² *Ibid.* 50-51.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

The Burman, at any rate, calls or knows Buddha as *Paya*—Bhura သုရား and king as *Bayin*—Bhuryin သုရင် today in their semantic language traditionally. In fact, the origin of the term *Paya* is obscure like *Pathian*. No doubt, *Paya* has been obviously used in the vernacular Burmese language as the title of the Buddha since the early Bagan period in the eleventh century. Whenever the term *Paya* is employed it implies the Buddha himself first, and the kings, and the monks also. The Buddha images and pagodas also are called simply *Paya* သုရား, for example, *Shwedagon Paya*, *Sule Paya*, *Mahamuni Paya*, etc., in Burmese vernacular. The king is entitled as *Bayin*—Bhuryin သုရင် similar to Bhura သုရား as most high in hierarchical position. Thus, the Buddha in Myanmar has been called as *Myatswa Paya*, မြတ်စွာသုရား meaning Glorious *Paya* the Buddha ဗုဒ္ဓ, and the king or the monarch, as Bayin Min Myat သုရင်မင်းမြတ် meaning Glorious King *Bayin*—သုရင် Bhuryin.

Then why did Judson employ *Paya* သုရား to identify with the Christian God in his ‘vernacular operation’? Was it due to being the Most High of the Buddhist Burmans? Alternatively, did Judson invent a combined term *Paya-Th’khin* သုရားဘုရင် regarding as the theistic Cosmic Lord? In fact, strictly speaking *Paya* သုရား has no similar characteristics with the Christian God both in “nature” and in “person”. *Paya* သုရား is not a name of any

theistic deities in semantic Burmese vernacular language. It simply implies the Buddha and his images. Therefore, the present study would argue that the employment of *Paya* ဘုရား the title of Buddha to identify with the Christian God in the early-nineteenth-century-Myanmar is inappropriate. In addition, the invented name *Paya-Th'khin* ဘုရားသခင် meaning *Paya* the Lord does neither imply to be a creator or a god. Rather it has no specific meaning in Burmese vernacular language except its implication of the Buddha as master and lord. Accordingly, one sees that Christian faith has not properly expanded among the Buddhist Burmans in the name of *Paya Th'khin* ဘုရားသခင် in Myanmar today. The missionary churches established among the Burmans in the colonial time have to survive today with handful worshippers who have almost disappeared.

We now have learned that *Paya* ဘုရား does not imply any divinity or divine attributes in the concept of Buddhism. Then what name will be appropriate for the Christian God in Burmese vernacular today? We shall discuss about it in a more details later in Chapter Four. It is to say that Protestant missionaries, however, successfully converted the hill tribes of colonial Burma particularly Karen, Kachin, Chin, and other minority hill peoples. The missionary translation in the vernacular languages of the hill peoples is very interesting as we shall see soon in Chapter Three. Now let us

examine the state promotion of Buddhism in the post-colonial period in the region.

iii. State Promotion of Political Buddhism in the Region of Modernized Suvarnabhumi

In 1962, General Ne Win came to power and ruled the Union by his de facto Revolutionary Council. General Ne Win later became U Ne Win, meaning a civilian leader, and let the “Buddha Sasana Council” end; and established a socialist state ruled by the authority of the BSPP [Burma Socialist Program Party]. In the words of Donald K. Swearer, “The Burmese government’s symbolic and practical promotion of Buddhism is reminiscent of classical as well as modern forms of Buddhist civil religion, in which religion and the state are inexorably linked”. A government-controlled journal, *The Light of the Dhamma*, considers the relationship between Buddhism, the people, and the state “to three strands of a single rope” as an article in 1981 reads “Indeed, they are like three strings twisted properly into one strong durable rope”.¹³⁴

¹³⁴ Donald K. Swearer, *The Buddhist World of Southeast Asia* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), 97-100. [The journal *The Light of the Dhamma* is a journal of the Ministry of Home and Religious Affairs]

Unlike her neighboring sister countries, Thailand had never been under the colonial rule. King Rama V, aka King Chulalongkorn (1865-1902), the modern champion of Theravada Buddhism, made the promotion of Buddhism as a national plan of education. He uplifted the monastic education under the supervision of the national government. His successor, King Vajiravudh (reign 1910-1925), increased the integration of religion and the state. In Swearer's words, "Vajiravudh blended the concept of 'nation,' 'religion,' and 'king,' into a governing ideology for modern Thailand". Since 1962 onward, Buddhism as the "civil religion" has its *sangha* the legal supporter under the control of a central government.¹³⁵

In the case of modern Cambodia, in 1993, Prince Norodom Sihanouk and his son Prince Norodom Ranariddh promoted Theravada Buddhism as a civil religion in the socio-political life of Cambodian together with the establishment of a newly legitimate government. We would agree with Swearer that "the current revival of institutional Buddhism in Cambodia parallels the revival of the Cambodian state".¹³⁶ Thus, Theravada Buddhism has been playing its major role again as the "civil religion" in modernized Cambodia today.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 102.

¹³⁶ *Ibid*, 104.

In socialist Laos, the same with her neighboring sister countries, the major civil religion is Theravada Buddhism; but unlike her neighbors, Laos has only between fifty to sixty per cent of the people who are ethnic Lao or lowlander Buddhist Laotians among a population of 6.4 million. The remainders belong to at least 48 different ethnic minority groups who are mostly animists. In Thailand and Cambodia, the majority of the people, who are either ethnic Thai or ethnic Khmer, practice Buddhism. In Myanmar, the majority ethnic Burman professed Theravada Buddhism since the eleventh century C.E.¹³⁷ In Cambodia, Theravada Buddhism has been the state religion since the thirteenth century C.E. The “divine king” in the Hinduized Cambodian monarch, was “usually identified with Siva or Vishnu”.¹³⁸ Concerning Laos “civil religion”, Swearer comments and predicts the future revival of Buddhism:

Although the socialist regime in Laos never sought to destroy the Buddhist *sangha* per se, the government did place severe restrictions on the monastic order, including the freedom to enter the monkhood and the content of the monastic curriculum. Furthermore, in a material sense the *sangha* suffered from an economy greatly weakened by the Vietnam War and the economic policies of a socialist government. With the gradual political and economic transformation of Laos, Buddhism is also seeing signs of revival. As the speed of the economic recovery of Laos continues in the 1990s

¹³⁷ Oh Myung-Seok and Kim Hyung-Jun ed., *Religion, Ethnicity and Modernity in Southeast Asia* (Seoul: Seoul National University Press, 1998), 174.

¹³⁸ Kenneth Perry Landon, *Southeast Asia: Crossroad of Religions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), 109.

fueled especially by Thailand, one hopes that the accompanying prosperity of the *sangha* will also lead to a revival in monastic education and spiritual practice. Laotian and Cambodian monks in the United States and in Europe will play a crucial role in the revival of Buddhism in their respective countries.¹³⁹

Thus, Theravada Buddhism, with its official revival, has deep roots in the fertile soil of Indo-China peninsula—the mainland Southeast Asian nations—as the major state religion today. At any rate, Buddhism in the Theravada tradition socio-religio-politically dominates the Hinduized Southeast Asia today together with the practice of traditional *Nat*-worship ritual. We would argue that the majority Buddhists in Burman, Siamese, Laotian, and Cambodian profess official Theravada Buddhism with traditional practice of *Nat*-worship today. In other words, from the missiological perspective, the religion of modern Suvanarbhumi is animistic Theravada Buddhism. Finally, Horace Geoffrey Q. Wales avers, “The survival of beliefs in local spirits is doubtless universal at village level, and among the more superstitious of the town-dwellers, throughout the Indianized states of Southeast Asia.”¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ Donald K. Swearer, *The Buddhist World of Southeast Asia* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), 104.

¹⁴⁰ H. G. Q. Wales, *Early Burma-Old Siam: A Comparative Commentary* (London: Bernard Quaritch, Ltd., 1973), 8.

Today, the supernatural beliefs and practices that we call *Nat*-worship obviously could be seen among the peoples of Southeast Asia who claim themselves as the practitioners of Theravada Buddhism. Therefore, herewith we claim that Christian mission ought to have its missionary translation by approaching the beliefs of primal religious systems of the region rather than Theravada Buddhism. There had been two options for the Protestant missionaries in approaching the indigenous ‘heathens’: 1) approaching the indigenous to their primal beliefs of religious systems; 2) approaching the indigenous to their Theravada Buddhist faith. The missionaries exercised only the latter: approaching the Buddhists in regards of their Theravada doctrine. They totally ignored the primal beliefs of religious systems of the indigenous nominal/official Buddhists. The present study, at whatever rate, therefore, asserts that the early nineteenth-century Protestant missionary translation of the Christian faith to the Burmese vernacular had been ineffective in terms of spreading Christian faith. Now, in contrast, we shall examine the effectiveness of missionary translation through ‘vernacular operation’ approaching the primal beliefs of religious system among the Chin people, a.k.a. Zo people in the next chapter as a standard.

Chapter Three

Protestantism and Christianization in the British Colonial Chin Hills

1. Introduction

In this chapter, I will investigate the primal beliefs of animistic religious system of the Chin people, and thereby provide the context in which missionaries engaged in the vernacular translation of the Christian faith. This analysis will enable scholars to have a more in-depth and nuanced interpretation of how and why people convert to Christianity. Andrew Walls asserts:

In primal societies in quite diverse parts of the world, the Christian preachers found God already there, known by a vernacular name. Often associated with the sky, creator of earth and moral governor of humanity, having no altars or priesthood, and perhaps no regular worship, some named Being could be identified behind the whole constitution of the phenomenal and transcendental worlds.¹⁴¹

When the American Protestant missionaries first reached the British Chin Hills¹⁴² by the end of the nineteenth century, there had already been

¹⁴¹ Andrew F. Walls, *The missionary Movement In Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, Eight printing, January 2004), 71.

¹⁴² Chin Hills became well known in 1896 when the British decreed the 'Chin Hills Regulations'. For details of the regulations, see Khup Za Go, *Zo Chronicle: A Documentary*

Pathian the Supreme Being in the indigenous Chin vernacular.¹⁴³ Through the ‘translating the message’ of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Chin people came to know the Christian God in the name of *Pathian* their native animistic Supreme Being. Why did the American Protestant missionaries employ *Pathian* the theistic name of spiritism to be identified with the Christian God in the British Chin Hills? What does it mean by *Pathian* in animistic belief of the Chin/Zo people? Who was *Pathian* to the Chins or Zo-mi? Who are the Zo-mi? Where did they come from? What are the origins of this name for the diety? What was the role and significance of *Pathian* in the Chin primal religious system? No one has the exact idea about *Pathian* in the Chin primal religion. In fact, *Pathian* seems to have no specific meaning. No one is able to figure out today the origin and the genesis of *Pathian*. Today the Chin peoples worship *Pathian* in Christianity. The origin of the term remains uncertain and obscure.

Unfortunately, since we have little knowledge of animistic *Pathian* in the Chin/Zo people, only archival research and oral tradition will help us

Study of History and Culture of the Kuki-Chin-Lushei Tribe (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, First Published 2008), 61-71.

¹⁴³ Zo people, who call themselves *Zo-mi*, *mi* meaning man or people, have been known as Chin people. The present study shall use the term *Zo* people, *Zo-mi*, and Chin /Chin people interchangeably. For more detailed study of the Chin people, see Vum Ko Hau, “History of the Zo Mi (Chin) Race” in *Profile of a Burma Frontier Man* (Bandung, Indonesia: Self-published 1963), 297-312.; and Vum Son, *Zo History: With an Introduction to Zo Culture, Economy, Religion and Their Status as an Ethnic Minority in India, Burma, and Bangladesh* (Aizawl, Mizoram: Self-published, 1986).

to articulate the Zo worship and thereby to interpret their conversion to Christianity.¹⁴⁴ We shall trace back the origin of the Chin / Zo people and their cultural background so that we shall be able to interpret their conversion to Christianity out of their animistic religion. What was the nature of their belief in animism? How could the ‘translating the message’ of the gospel of Christianity been intelligible to the primal Chin/Zo people? The Western Christian missionaries’ point of view on the conversions of the people is interesting. Anglican Bishop Arthur M. Knight learned that the hill tribes of Myanmar are easier to convert. In the preface of the book *Christian Missions in Burma*, he asserts, “The Animist tribes are always ready to accept higher religious teachings, Buddhists, Mohammedan, or Christian. The question is, which will reach them first”.¹⁴⁵ Does he mean that the ethnic, animistic tribes of Myanmar are keen to adopt the world religions including Christianity? He quotes the comment of a Deputy Commissioner of the British colonialist in terms of the Chin people: “You are too late to catch the Chins who are now by thousands living in the plains among the

¹⁴⁴ We are especially thankful and indebted to Robert G. Johnson who distinctively accomplished a complete Christian mission history of the Zo people; and to Chester U. Strait whose research in both Master of Theology and Doctor of Theology in the studies of the Chin animistic religion. We also would like to thank and credit some *Zo-mi* native scholars particularly to Vum Ko Hau, Vum Son, and Sing Khaw Khai whose scholarly contributions provide us with valuable studies concerning the origin and culture of the Zo people.

¹⁴⁵ W.C.B. Purser, *Christian Missions in Burma* (Westminster: Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, Second edition, 1911), x.

Burman”. Furthermore, the Commissioner’s suggestion to the missionaries was: “[Y]ou must go to those who remain in the hills away from the Buddhists”. “He was right [...]” the Anglican bishop agreed with the British colonial official.¹⁴⁶

What does the Anglican bishop mean by “He was right [...]?” Does he mean that he “must go to those who remain in the hills away from the Buddhists” so that he might Christianize the colonized hill tribes? How did he regard the conversion of hill people at the time in colonial Burma? How shall we describe and understand the conversion of the Chins and the other hill tribes to Christianity in the British colonial era? Was it Christianization into a form of Westernized Christianity? Alternatively, was it happening in the process of religious assimilations? Lewis Rambo asserts, “Such a problem is a classic issue in missions. Western missionaries seek to find the “pure” convert, while the converts themselves assimilate the faith in the categories relevant to them [...]”¹⁴⁷ Could one say then that the conversions of the hill tribes in colonial Burma as a “pure” conversion that the Western missionaries would seek? Or else shall we say it was “the converts themselves assimilate the faith”? In order to understand the conversion of the

¹⁴⁶ W.C.B. Purser, *Christian Missions in Burma* (Westminster: Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, Second edition, 1911), x.

¹⁴⁷ Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 5.

hill tribes of Myanmar, we shall study “the four components: cultural, social, personal, and religious systems” of the hill peoples as Lewis Rambo believes “to be the most crucial to an understanding of conversion”.¹⁴⁸

I will now provide a brief exploration of the Chin people. By understanding their origins, the nature of their primal religious beliefs and practices we will be able comprehend their forms of religious cognition and their meaning and modes of religious change from animism to Christianity.

2. Ethnic History of the Chin Peoples

Who are the Chins? Chins are Tibeto-Bumese speaking people who originated from the Tibetan plateau. They are reportedly believed to have migrated into the plain region of Irrawaddy river in Myanmar before the Burman dominant tribe migrated. Generally speaking, the Chins in the Chin Hills of Myanmar are classified geo-politically into three groups: the northern, the central, and the southern people. The Chin tribal sub ethnic peoples are called, *Zo-mi*, *Lai-mi*, and *Khu-mi* respectively, meaning *Zo* people, *Lai* people, and *Khu* people. *Mizo* aka *Lushai* in the Mizoram State, India, also is the same tribe of *Zo* people who shares *Ciim Nuai* chronicles

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

and genealogy.¹⁴⁹ Besides the hill-dwellers, there have also been other tribal Chins in the plains, namely *Asho*, and *Yaw*, meaning *Sho* people, *Yaw* people respectively. Vum Ko Hau, a native scholar,¹⁵⁰ believes that all the tribes and sub-ethnic clans of the Chins are descendants of one progenitor—*Zo*; since the various tribal names sound closely similar in the monotone of one syllable “*Zo*, *Yo*, *Yaw*, *Cho*, *Sho*, etc.” He sees all the sub-ethnic tribes of the Chins as “one and the same *Zo* (*Yaw*, *Jo*) race [...]” under the umbrella of *Zo* anthropologically.¹⁵¹ He confidently asserts, “From time immemorial we call ourselves *Zo* (*Jo*, *Yaw*). This fact had been admirably recorded by Father V. Sangermano since the year 1783 when he made his headquarters at Ava [...] A few early writers also recorded the fact that we *Zo* (*Jo*, *Yaw*) people inhabiting areas between Assam and the Irrawaddy River [...]”¹⁵²

Therefore, *Zo-mi* or *Zo* people simply mean the descendants of *Zo* the progenitor. Thus, in any case, generally speaking, a *Zo* person or a *Zo-mi*

¹⁴⁹ *Ciim Nuai* is reported as the first migration location for the *Zo-mi* the ‘northerners’ from Kale-Kabaw valley. The time line is estimated round about C.E. 1500 that the *Zo* people moved away from Kale-Kabaw valley to the hilly regions of the Chin Hills. A group of them who call themselves *Zo-mi* first settled at the valley named ‘*Ciim Nuai*’, meaning the underneath the *Ciim* trees, in the northern region of present Chin State in Myanmar.

¹⁵⁰ Vum Ko Hau is a scholar of Chin/ *Zo* people: he received his PhD in Anthropology Studies from Charles University, Prague whilst he served as the Ambassador of the Union of Myanmar to Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Austria. He was well known as a frontier leader in unifying the Union of Burma together with Aung San.

¹⁵¹ Vum Ko Hau, “History of the *Zo Mi* (Chin) Race” in *Profile of A Burma Frontier Man*, (Bandung, Indonesia: Self-published 1963), 297-312

¹⁵² Vum Ko Hau, “The First Printed Burmese Book,” in *Profile of A Burma Frontier Man*, (Bandung, Indonesia: Self-published 1963), 238.

implies any person who belongs to any sub-clan of the Zo people such as Zo, Yo, Yaw, Cho, Sho, etc. The present study, in regards of the term and meaning of Zo and Zo-mi, shall have an argument against the erroneous interpretation of F. K. Lehman an American anthropologist. To the surprise of the present study, Lehman, as an anthropologist, makes his interpretation of the term ‘Zo’ in terms of the geographic belt instead of the anthropological name. It is obvious that he has been confused the geographical term ‘zo’ that implies the mountainside with the colder climate, with the tribal name ‘Zo’ that implies a people who have so far been well known as Chin. Lehman studies the geographical belt of the region and learns about two opposite terms of geography in the Chin dialects—‘zo’ versus ‘sim’ meaning highland vs. lowland in geography, colder vs. warmer in temperature, respectively. Lehman learns the term ‘zo’ as highland, and he thus erroneously interprets ‘zo-mi’ as highlanders. Nevertheless, he does not make any interpretation about the lowlanders as ‘sim-mi’.¹⁵³ As an anthropologist, why does Lehman make geographical interpretation of the term ‘zo’ instead of ‘Zo’ anthropological name? He attempts to interpret that “Chin are *zo mi* because they lack the civilization of the Burman, whose culture they envy [...]” in his

¹⁵³ F. K. Lehman, *Structure of the Chin Society: A Tribal People of Burma Adapted to a Non-Western Civilization* (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1963), 53-56.

agricultural interpretation of the Chin people.¹⁵⁴ If Lehman did his anthropological research among the ‘northerners’, who call themselves *Zo-mi*, then he would not have committed this kind of error. Now he stubbornly defends his views from the perspective of the *Lai-mi* in Haka region on the term *zo* as he strongly and incorrectly asserts, “From a study of the use of the term *zo lo* [meaning high firm] we arrive at a fuller understanding of what the Chin means when they call themselves *zo*.”¹⁵⁵ Furthermore, the American modern anthropologist identifies the Haka region which is the central part of the Chin Hills as ‘the Northern Chin’ while he interprets, “*lai* means the “center”” at the same time. Since he had learned that *Lai-mi* means central people, then why does he define the Haka area, where the *Lai-mi* tribes inhabit, as ‘the Northern Chin’ absolutely ignoring the real Northern Chin areas? With regard to the interpretation of Lehman, Sing Khaw Khai remarks, “This erroneous interpretation needs to be set right on the original traditional line of concept.”¹⁵⁶ In fact, it is obvious that Lehman simply failed to visit the real Northern Chin areas where the *Zo-mi* tribes,

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 55.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 53-54. [I several times sent email to Lehman discussing his interpretation on the term *Zo*, but he continued to defend it based on the concept of the *Lai* people of Haka area. He shows no interest about the ‘northerners’ since he defines the Haka area as the ‘Northern Chin’. I herewith humbly do not intend to attack him, but rather would like to invite him to come to the real Northern Chin Hills so that he might see the *Zo* people and their culture.]

¹⁵⁶ Sing Khaw Khai, *Zo People and Their Culture A historical, cultural study and critical analysis of Zo and its ethnic tribes* (Churachanpur, India: Khampu Hatzaw, First edition, 1995), 91.

which Carey defines as the ‘northerners’, inhabit. If he did his visit to the real Northern Chin, then he would not be able to ignore the real ‘northerners’ and their outstanding *Ciim Nuai* chronicles and their genealogical anthropology.

In fact, the ‘northerners’ rather identify themselves as *Zo* people as an umbrella term for their ethnicity.¹⁵⁷ The *Zo* (*Chin*) peoples, therefore, may be segmented by smaller tribal groups, such as *Zo-mi*, *Mi-zo*, *Cho-mi*, *Sho-mi*, *Khxou-mi*, *Chaw-mi*, *Yaw-mi*, and *Masho-mi*, *Khu-mi*, etc., since *mi* means man or people, to name a few significant ethnic groups in the same region. One finds all sub-ethnic *Zo* people love to be called as they identify themselves. Accordingly, as Vumson asserts, “*Zo* people find it very difficult to accept a name other than the one they call themselves.”¹⁵⁸ The *Chins* or *Zos* have lived in the hilly regions along the Indo-Burma borderline independently since several centuries before the arrival of the British at the end of nineteenth century. Even though they have been located between the territorial vicinity of the Burmese and the Indian borderline, they had never been under the domain of foreign powers. After the British occupation,

¹⁵⁷ *Zo-mi* means people of *Zo* and they believe that they are the descendants of *Zo*, their primal ancestor. In India, the people of the same tribe call themselves as *Mizo* the same meaning with a reverse order of the term for a socio-political purpose.

¹⁵⁸ Vumson, *Zo History: With an Introduction to Zo Culture, Economy, Religion and Their Status as an Ethnic Minority in India, Burma, and Bangladesh* (Aizawl, Mizoram: Self-published, 1986), 2.

however, the colonial administrators divided their territory for the administrative purposes into Chin Hills, Manipur, Tripura, Arakan, Chittagong Hill Tracts and North Cachar Hills.¹⁵⁹ In fact, the *Chins* were not *de facto* hill people before they reached the Chin Hills by the foreign administrator's division of the land. They had occupied the plains territory in the valley of River *Chindwin* from which the *Chin* people have been called. The people of the *Chindwin Valley* have been called *Chin* in the Burman language—Burmese.¹⁶⁰ They are believed and evidently reported to have had occupied the low and fertile land of the *Chindwin Valley* some hundreds years before the Burman tribe migrated from the present Yunnan Province of China into the region of Myanmar about 1,200-1,500 years ago. The name *Chin* seems to be given by the Burmans to imply that the people of low and fertile land were carrying baskets since the meaning of *Chindwin* would be “the valley of the baskets” according to Vumson.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ Khup Za Go, *Zo Chronicles: A Documentary Study of History and Culture of the Kuki-Chin-Lushai Tribe* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2008), 164-65.

¹⁶⁰ The Burman is the dominant ethnic group, up to 68 % of the entire population, of Myanmar. Burmese, the Burman language, is the lingua franca of Myanmar and the official language.

¹⁶¹ Vum Son mentions his opinion regarding the name of Chin: “the Burmans called the Zo people Chin from their very early contacts in the eleventh or twelfth century AD. When the Burmans moved down the Irrawaddy River and came to the Chindwin, they discovered a basket carrying people occupying the river valley. Hence they called the river “Chindwin,” meaning “the valley of the baskets” as “chin” means basket in Burmese. The general Burmese population accepts “chin” to be a word for basket, and they explain that the Zo people were so called because of their habit of carrying baskets.” Vum Son, *Zo History*, 3-4.

The ‘northerners’ genealogically believe that they are offspring of a progenitor, namely *Zo* who was the founder of the *Zo* people. Even though *Zo* people have many different dialects and clans, in Christianity they find themselves today in the same belief in the common Supreme Being, namely *Pathian*. Who then was *Pathian*? What is the meaning of the word *Pathian*? Before Christianity came into their territories, generally speaking, the *Zo/Chin* people would worship independently in their own form of animism. In their animist belief, they had a belief in *Pathian* the kind and gracious Supreme Being. Did they then worship *Pathian*? What was the relationship between the *Zo* people and *Pathian*? Vumson asserts, “*Zo* believe in a supreme God or *pathian*. God [*Pathian*] is good. He gives health, richness, children and other human wishes. God [*Pathian*] is never cruel and never hurts people. Therefore *Zo* people never sacrifice or offer anything to appease God [*Pathian*].”¹⁶² Nevertheless, they would rather practically worship *Zinmang / Zinleng* or *Khuazing* as the supreme one in their social and religious systems. The interesting thing is that they never had any sacrificial worship ceremonies to *Pathian* in their social and religious life. However, as for the *Chins/Zo* people¹⁶³ *Pathian* was not a regional supreme one, but rather a universal being in their cosmology. While they believe in

¹⁶² Vumson, *Zo History*, 16.

¹⁶³ The present study shall employ the term ‘Chin’ and ‘*Zo* people’ interchangeably.

Pathian on the one hand, but they trust traditional priests or shamans to worship or appease the local spirits on the other hand, in order that *dawi* the evil spirits might not be harmful to them. It will be more correct to say that Chins made bargains with the regional *dawi* — the spirits to get advantages. Vumson rightly interprets, “Zo people fear spirits or devils who are under the rule of the king of spirits. The spirits (*dawi*, *huai*, *khuazing*) [...] brings sickness and misery [*sic*] unless treated with due respect. Rituals have to be performed and sacrifices made so as to appease the spirits.”¹⁶⁴

Given this complex picture, can one say that the animistic Chins were monotheist? How did they understand and deal with their deities? Sing Khaw Khai makes an argument for the similarity of the names of the deities: *Pathian/Pasian* in the *Zo-mi* and *Paya* in Burmese in the Tibeto-Burmese language.¹⁶⁵ According to him, the deity terms in *Zo-mi* ‘*Pathian/Pasian* and *Lungzai*’ perhaps might have been derived from the Chinese terms ‘*Pahsien*’ that represents eight immortal beings, and ‘*Lung*’ that refers to the dragon rain spirit.¹⁶⁶ Does it mean then that the Chins had adopted their traditional deities from the ancient Chinese? Alternatively, are the Chins

¹⁶⁴ Vumson, *Zo History*, 16.

¹⁶⁵ Sing Khaw Khai, *Zo People and Their Culture: A historical, cultural study and critical analysis of Zo and its ethnic tribes* (Churachanpur, India: Khampu Hatzaw, First edition, 1995), 68.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

themselves the lineage of the Chinese or the Jewish Chinese? What is interesting in the beliefs of the hill tribes of Myanmar is their biblical legends in their theistic religions of animism. When the missionaries reduced the vernacular language systems into the written forms in Romanization, to their surprise they discovered that some biblical legends had been there among these hill tribes of Myanmar. Are the hill tribes be descendants of the lost tribes of the Jews? The hill tribes were still preliterate as the missionaries first reached them in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century colonial time. Since they had no written records of their history only oral traditions have been available.

What is interesting is the commonality in animistic beliefs and practices though they differ in many areas. Regarding the commonality of the hill tribes, Purser rightly asserts his missiological perspective in his book *Christian Missions in Burma*: “The habits, the language, and the physical appearance of these various tribes are widely dissimilar. But whilst they differ in almost every other particular, they are united by their religion: they are all possessed with a common reverence and fear of the spirits; they are all Animists.”¹⁶⁷ We shall see that due to being animists “with a common reverence and fear of the spirits” in their social and religious life, the hill

¹⁶⁷ W. C. B. Purser, *Christian Missions in Burma* (Westminster: Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, 1911), 22.

tribes were easier to convert in Christianity in the colonial Burma. The present study will argue that the primal beliefs and animistic religious cognitions of the hills tribes in the spirits had been one of the most helpful basic conditions for the missionary translation of the Christian faith in colonial Burma in early twentieth century.

3. Exploring the Primal Religion in Animistic Chin Rituals

Now we shall discuss the Chin primal religion as an example of animistic worship of the hill people of Myanmar. Did the Chins have any concepts of the existence of a Supreme Being in their traditional worship of animistic cognition? What was the first impression of the discoveries of the Western intellectuals on the beliefs and cultural rituals in the social and religious systems of the Chin tradition? Let us have a glimpse on the perspectives of the British colonial administrators first. Soon after their annexation of the Chin Hills and restoration of pacification, one of their first politico-administrational activities was studying the culture and custom of the indigenous people: making a gazette, namely “The Chin Hills” gazetteer.¹⁶⁸ It was Sir Bertram S. Carey who made the firsthand impression

¹⁶⁸ Bertram S. Carey & H. N. Tuck, *The Chin Hills*, Carey, Bertram S. & Tuck, H. N. *The Chin Hills: A History of the People, our dealings with them, their Customs and Manners, and a Gazetteer of their Country* vol. 1 & 2 (Rangoon, Burma: Government Printing, 1896).

of Chin analysis as the Political Officer of the Chin Hills. Actually, the British soldiers were the first Christians that ever reached the isolated Chin Hills. Soon after they had captured and dethroned the last monarch of the Burmans, at his Mandalay palace in 1885, they eventually reached the Chin Hills, located at the northwestern part of Myanmar, in 1889. They found there three small socio-political countries in the Northern Chin Hills, namely, ‘Siyin [Sizang] country’, ‘Sokte [Sukte] country’; and ‘Kanhaw [Kamhau] country’.¹⁶⁹ Field Marshal Sir George S. White himself accompanied the British troops and captured the ‘Siyin country’ of Northern Chin Hills.¹⁷⁰ Sir George White remarks, “Most difficult enemy to see or hit I ever fought” as his first impression on the Siyin warriors in his report by telegram to the Chief Commissioner of Burma.¹⁷¹ Vum Ko Hau of Siyin comments, “It is interesting to note that one of the greatest British soldiers, at least the most decorated soldier of whom I have ever heard of, General Sir George White, personally accompanied and led the first invasion of the Chin Hills up to the occupation of the Siyin Valley and erected the first fort named after him—

¹⁶⁹ Siyin [Sizang], Sokte [Sukte], and Kanhaw [Kamhau] are the ‘northerners’ of the ‘Chin Hills’ who claim and/or call themselves ‘*Zo-mi*’ meaning Zo people who believe that they have the same progenitor Zo.

¹⁷⁰ A British officer was awarded a V.C. medal.

¹⁷¹ Bertram S. Carey & H. N. Tuck, *The Chin Hills*, vol. 1 (Calcutta, India: Firma KLM Private Ltd, Reprinted 1976), 28.

Fort White.”¹⁷² They would bury the dead bodies of the British soldiers using Christian rituals.¹⁷³ Could one then regard that God sent Gen. White and his British troops as forerunners of the Christian gospel to the Chin people? Thereby could one see the British colonials as the openers of the door of the gospel of Jesus Christ? Note that only after the British colonials had restored pacification in the Chin Hills, the American Baptist missionaries first ever reached it in 1899. It is obvious that without any safe protection they did not dare to reach the ‘savage’, ‘wild’ and ‘uncivilized’ people, as they remarked at the point of their first impression. Why did the British colonial administrators accommodate the American missionaries to the Chin Hills? Unlike in India, whereas the British colonials, in the name of the East India Company, prohibited their stay in their empire; in Myanmar even to the whole country—‘Whole Burma’ nationwide, the British colonial authorities accommodated the American missionaries.

Sir Bertram S. Carey, the colonial administration officer, entitled as the ‘Political Officer, Chin Hills’, however is to be credited for his investigation of the animistic world views and practices of the isolated Chin peoples. He was the ever first explorer of the Chin Hills together with Tuck

¹⁷² Vum Ko Hau, *Profile of A Burma Frontier Man* (Bandung, Indonesia: Self-published 1963), 6.

¹⁷³ The cemetery place which is located at Thuklai the Fort White has been called ‘*Mikang Than*’ in the Siyin dialect meaning the tomb of the white people.

the Assistant Political Officer in the study. As soon as he came to the Chin Hills, he first would make close approach to the chiefs of the Siyin tribe, a sub-ethnic group of Chin peoples. He then would attempt to interpret the culture, rituals, beliefs, customs, social and religious cognitions, anthropology and so on of the Chins by writing two volumes of *The Chin Hills Gazette*. Carey nonetheless makes an erroneous interpretation at the first impression of his exploration with regard to the beliefs of the Siyins when he asserts, “The Siyins say that there is no Supreme God and no other world save this, which is full of evil spirits who inhabits the fields, infest the houses, and haunt the jungles.” But he studies rightly as he interprets that “These spirits must be propitiated or bribed [*sic*] to refrain from doing the particular harm of which each is capable, for one can destroy crops, another can make women barren, and a third cause a lizard to enter the stomach and devour the bowels”.¹⁷⁴ If truly, the Siyin Chins have no idea about any Supreme Being, as Carey interprets, then how could they become the ever first converts to Christianity in the British Chin Hills? The present study argues that the religious cognition of the existence of a Supreme Being had been there among all sub-ethnic groups of the Chins prior to the arrival of Westerners in their territories. It is obvious that the British colonial

¹⁷⁴ Bertram S. Carey, & Tuck, H. N. *The Chin Hills: A History of the People, our dealings with them, their Customs and Manners, and a Gazetteer of their Country* vol. 1(Rangoon, Burma: Government Printing, 1896).196.

administrators were not aware of the belief of a Supreme Being among the Siyins and the ‘northerners’ the *Ciim Nuai* group. In fact, the Siyin clans and the ‘northerners’ also surely would have the concept of the existence of a Supreme Being, namely *Pathian* as we shall see later. We shall see that “the Christian preachers found God already there, known by a vernacular name” as Andrew Walls asserts.¹⁷⁵ Carey, the Political Officer, dividedly makes his geo-politico-cultural exploration in the Chin Hills into two categories: ‘northerners’ and ‘southerners’. In regards to the belief in a Supreme Being among the Chin people Carey asserts:

The Chin is often described as a devil-worshipper. This is incorrect for he worships neither god nor devil. The northerners believe that there is no Supreme Being and, although the southern Chins admit that there is a Supreme God or “Kozin,” [*Khuazing*] to whom they sacrifice, they do not worship him and never look to him for any grace or mercy, except that of withholding the plagues and misfortunes which he is capable of invoking on any in this world who offend him.¹⁷⁶

If Carey had carefully researched the belief in a Supreme Being among the ‘northerners’, he would not make such assertions. Rather his interpretation would be going something like this: the ‘northerners’ also believe that there is a Supreme Being in the name of *Pathian* though they do

¹⁷⁵ Andrew F. Walls, *Missionary Movement*, 71.

¹⁷⁶ Carey & Tuck, *The Chin Hills*, vol. 1, p.195. For a more detailed study, see Carey & Tuck, vol. 1, pp. 195-200.

not worship him. By the ‘northerners’, Carey means the three socio-political countries: the Siyin, the Sokte, and the Kanhow in the northern ‘Chin Hills’.¹⁷⁷ With regard to the belief of omens, Carey asserts, “[T]he belief in spirits which control destiny and a future existence, the Chin believes firmly in omens and witchcraft.”¹⁷⁸ Furthermore, he divides the studies of the ‘northerners’ and the ‘southerners’ as he says the “beliefs of the Siyin and those of the Hakas will be given separately, as they differ materially.”¹⁷⁹ He argues that “there are no gods and only devils or that there is a god as well as minor spirits” in the Chin animistic cognition. Concerning the belief of a Supreme Being among the ‘southerners’, Carey writes, “The Hakas and the southerners believe that there is a God (Kozin) [*Khuazing*]¹⁸⁰, who lives in the heavens. He is not capable of showering blessings on them, but as he is able to trouble them in every conceivable manner they propitiate him with sacrifices”.¹⁸¹ It is, however, very interesting that the colonial Political Officer analyzes the religious concepts in the primal animistic cognitions of the Chins. It is very helpful for the present study to trace back the animistic

¹⁷⁷ The socio-political system of the ‘Chin Hills’ at the time had been the chieftainship system ruled by the clan chiefs. For example, The Siyin clan chiefs ruled the ‘Siyin valley’; the Sokte chiefs, Sukte valley; and the Kanhow chiefs, Tedim and Kamhau region.

¹⁷⁸ Carey & Tuck, *The Chin Hills*, 195.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ *Khuazing* is the name of the deity worshipped among the people of Haka area the *Lai-mi* groups—the ‘southerners’.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.* by southerners, Carey refers the Hakas who call themselves *Lai-mi* meaning the central people, and other tribes in the central and southern ‘Chin Hills’.

cognitions of the Chins and thereby to better understand their conversions to another level of faith eventually up to Christianity. [A new religion that had appeared just soon after the British invaded the Chin Hills to the surprise of the American missionaries was Pau Cin Hau cult movement known as *Laipian*, as we shall discuss later.] Among the ‘southerners’, besides *Khuazing* the Supreme One that Carey comes to know are many other regional spirits of which, in his words, “None are capable of bestowing blessings, but all are prone to do damage and inflict loss and suffering; therefore they must be propitiated with sacrifices.”¹⁸² Generally speaking, their initial conversion to Christianity from their traditional animistic beliefs took place after the arrival of American missionaries in the late nineteenth century, as Martin Smith asserts, followed by the British colonial expansion to the region in the early twentieth century¹⁸³

In fact, only after the British totally pacified the Chin Hills, the American Baptist missionaries were able to reach it. There Rev. Carson¹⁸⁴ selected Haka village to make the mission strategic headquarters of the Chin Hills. Why Haka? It is obvious that, the Carsons, the first missionary couple to the Chin Hills, reached Haka because there had been a British

¹⁸² *Ibid*, 196.

¹⁸³ Martin Smith, *Ethnic Groups in Burma: Development, Democracy and Human Rights* (London: Anti-Slavery International, 1994), 36.

¹⁸⁴ Rev. Arthur Carson and Mrs. Laura Carson were the pioneering Protestant missionary couple to the Chin Hills.

military outpost. Otherwise, they would not have reached there.¹⁸⁵ There were four ‘forts’ in the Chin Hills established by the British: 1) Fort White [Thuklai]; 2) Fort Tiddim [Tedim]; 3) Fort Falam; and Fort Haka. “Carson chose Haka, the southernmost of the four, and thereby established the Christian mission at the very center of the Chin Hills” as Johnson narrates. With regard to the entrance of the Carsons to the British Chin Hills, Johnson describes, “The Carsons were Americans who lived during the glory days of the British Empire. They were able to enter the Chin Hills in 1899 because the British had overthrown the Burmese king, had taken over the administration of Upper Burma, and had brought pacification to the Chin Hills in the 1800s.”¹⁸⁶

In fact, the Carsons had firstly worked at Thayetmyo, in Magwe Division, among the Asho Chin¹⁸⁷ that had been Burmanized a long time ago. The Asho or *Sho* people inhabit in the plain Burman territories of the fertile regions along the Irrawaddy River. There the Carsons found many converts among the Burmanized Chins—*i.e.* *Sho* people. A question should be raised herewith in regards of the name of God in the missionary

¹⁸⁵ Laura Hardin Carson, *Pioneer Trails, Trials and Triumph* (New York: Baptist Board of Education, 1858), vi.

¹⁸⁶ Robert G. Johnson, *History of The American Baptist Chin Mission vol.1* (Pennsylvania: Self-published 1988), 50.

¹⁸⁷ The present study would like to call the *Asho* people as ‘*Sho-mi*’ under the anthropological umbrella of ‘*Zo-mi*’ since ‘*Asho*’ simply implies people of *Sho* or *Sho* people.

translation: which name of deity did Carson employ for the Christian God among the Asho Chin at Thayetmyo during his missionary translation work? It has so far been obscure which name Carson employed as the Christian God in his ‘vernacular operation’ of the Asho Chin language. Then why did Carson choose Thayetmyo as the first Chin mission center? It is obvious that Carson and the mission board did choose the town just because it had already been a British District quarter at the time. As a matter of fact, Thayetmyo itself had never been a Chin settlement; but it has rather been a Burmese-speaking-Burman-orthodox-Buddhist town. The real Chin settlement could be seen only so far in the neighboring areas of the town. One could find that every village or settlement of the Burmanized Ashos has been settled down near a Burman town or city along the western coast of the River Irrawaddy. It means that the minority tribe survives along with the dominant tribe in the plain region of the Irrawaddy.

Now we shall examine the ‘vernacular operation’ of Carson in the semantic language of the Thayetmyo area. Though the Carsons “planned to study the Chin language intensively” there at Thayetmyo, “they were forced to study of Burmese language instead of Chin” in Johnson’s words.¹⁸⁸ Why did they learn Burmese language instead of Chin since they had been

¹⁸⁸ Johnson, vol. 1, p. 7.

appointed as missionaries among the Chins? It obviously was because as mentioned above, the Asho or *Sho* people have already been so much Burmanized and settled down in the neighboring areas of Thayetmyo. They have long been fluent bilinguals speaking *Sho* dialect and Burmese. They have their own script that is very similar to Burmese. They even have their personal names officially only in Burmese. With regard to the Carsons' knowledge of Burmese language, Johnson narrates, "in later years they were grateful for their good knowledge of the dominant language of Burma."¹⁸⁹ Therefore, it is safe to say that the Carsons did not employ *Pathian* or other any name of the deities in Chin dialects there at Thayetmyo area among the *Sho* people. If Carson did study the Asho dialect and explore into their culture and primal religious system, then he would surely discover that they had a belief in the existence of a Supreme Being, namely *Hli*. According to Taw Sein Ko, a Burman scholar in the early colonial era, *Hli* is a goddess.¹⁹⁰ Today, at whatever rate, the Asho people worship God in Christianity in the name of *A Pa Hli Bway*, meaning Father God.¹⁹¹ It rather seems that the

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ Taw Sein Ko, *Burmese Sketches* (Rangoon: British Burma Press, 1913), 8.

¹⁹¹ Via correspondence with Salai Htun Hlaing, an Asho elder, ex. Head of State and Division level Education Department, he asserts that there had been the belief in the existence of a Supreme Being in Asho primal religious cognition. According to him, the deity name '*Hli*' is used as the Christian God, and thus '*A Pa Hli Bway*', meaning Father God, is applied today not only in the Holy Bible but also is everyday use in Asho dialect as well. The present study asserts that since Carson learned and used only the Burmese

Carsons would surely employ the Buddhist atheistic term *Paya* or *Paya-Th'khin* as the Christian God since they learned only Burmese.¹⁹² Why did they appreciate the different sub-ethnic tribes of Chins in terms of preaching the gospel rather than the Burmans? Arthur Carson would say after a year in Myanmar, “We find them [the Chin] naturally a superior people to the Burmans. They are not quarrelsome, may easily be taught to be independent and manly, and have a sense of gratitude for favors received. They have good minds and hearts capable of great love. Yet they are just as capable of enmities as of friendships [...] They are [...] but superior to the Burmans [...]”¹⁹³ That seemed to be the main reason why the Carsons were keen on the Chin tribes to evangelize. It is obvious that they would surely preach and teach to the Asho the Burmanized Chin in Burmese medium. After a decade of missionary experience, there at Thayetmyo (1888-1899), in the lowland region of the central Myanmar, the mission board decided to send them to the hill-dweller-Chins. Note herewith that it was only just after the British totally occupied and pacified the Chin Hills.

language there, it is obvious that neither he did employ ‘*Hli*’ nor ‘*A Pa Hli Bway*’ among the Asho at the time.

¹⁹² Though the *Sho* people are almost absolutely Burmanized, they still maintain their culture, language, customs, etc.; and their semantic language is totally different from Burmese.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

The Carsons' first impression of the Chins at Haka was, in Laura's words, "Their only religion is the sacrificing of animals to evil spirits; it is also their only system of medicine."¹⁹⁴ Then which name did they employ for the name of Christian God there? Did they have any ideas to introduce a holy spirit or the Holy Spirit of Christian faith to those whose "only religion is the sacrificing of animals to evil spirits"? As a matter of fact, it is not known for sure if the Carsons employed *Pathian* as Christian God to the Haka *Lai* people or *Lai-mi* at the time. Rather it is obvious that the Carsons did not employ the name *Pathian* among the *Lai* people and the 'southerners'. Therefore, it is safe to say that *Pathian* was the name of deity used and owned only by the 'northerners' who would love to be called *Zo-mi* meaning *Zo* people who have been derived from the *Ciim Nuai* group. In other words, *Pathian* originated among the 'northerners'.

Robert G. Johnson,¹⁹⁵ the last American Baptist missionary to the Chin Hills, reports that Mr. Carson directly employed YHWH when he introduced the Christian God in a hymn. He remarks after almost ninety years of Carson's missionary translation framework at Haka, "It is

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 161.

¹⁹⁵ Robert G. Johnson became the last Christian missionary to the Chin Hills because he and all the foreigners had to depart the Republic of the Union of Burma in 1966. Since 1962 onwards, when the dictator Gen. Ne Win took military power, up to the present time military backed Thein Sein civilian government era, Christian missionary visas have been strictly prohibited in the Union of Myanmar.

interesting that Carson, so very early, introduced the Hebrew name of God (YHWH, usually spelled now as Yahweh) instead of using *Pathian* which is now accepted as the Christian word for God.”¹⁹⁶ Why did Carson not employ *Pathian* as the Christian God? The present study would like to argue that at the time the *Lai-mi* the ‘southerners’ did not have *Pathian* as the vernacular name of a deity among them. They would rather worship a Supreme Being in their vernacular name of *Khuazing*. What are the different characteristics between *Pathian* and *Khuazing* then?¹⁹⁷ Could one identify the two different names of regional deities of the Chins—particularly between *Zo-mi* the ‘northerners’ and *Lai-mi* the ‘southerners’ sub-ethnic groups?

Why and how the ‘northerners’—*Zo-mi* converted to Christianity first and got started worshipping *Pathian* in a new religion? How and when did the American missionaries begin using the name *Pathian* to be identified with the Christian God? The ABM Union [American Baptist Mission Union] dispatched Arthur and H. Laura Carson to the hilly region of the Chins. The Mission Union believed that more missionary opportunities would be given to the animistic Chins in highland, rather than the Buddhist-Burmese people

¹⁹⁶ Robert G. Johnson, *History of The American Baptist Chin Mission vol.1*, (Pennsylvania: Self-published 1988), 69.

¹⁹⁷ Note that the *Zo-mi* tribes the ‘northerners’ including the Lushei tribe would say “*Khuazing Pathian!*” when they say a prayer for help from the Supreme Being especially at wartime in the battlefields.

in lower land. Thus, in short, the Carsons eventually reached the British Chin Hills in 1899 as the pioneering missionary couple. As mentioned above they marched to Haka where they found there “not a single Christian and not one person among the Chins who could read or write!” as Johnson narrates.¹⁹⁸

Soon after working round about eight years among the *Lai-mi* people the ‘southerners’ in Haka area, Rev. Carson, suffered from appendicitis, died in 1908.¹⁹⁹ Although Carson untimely passed away his surviving widow, Mrs. Laura Carson, continued missionary work among the Chins until 1920. Upon the loss of Carson, the Mission dispatched Herbert and Elizabeth Cope to the Chin Hills in 1908 and the new missionary couple performed tremendous works for the evangelization of the Chins. Notably, Herbert Cope translated the New Testament in Kamhau dialect [the common language in Tedim district] and it was published in 1932.²⁰⁰ The divine name of the Christian God Herbert Cope used was *Pathian*—spelling *Pasian* after the accent of Kamhau dialect. Why and how did the conversion from primal

¹⁹⁸ Robert G. Johnson, *History of the American Baptist Chin Mission*, vol.1, 41. For detailed story of the Chin mission, see Robert G. Johnson, *History of the American Baptist Chin Mission*, 2 vols.

¹⁹⁹ For detailed story of illness and death of Carson, see Robert G. Johnson, *History of the American Baptist Chin Mission*, vol. 1, pp. 163-177.

²⁰⁰ Johnson, *History of the American Baptist Chin Mission*, vol.1, p. 372.

For the translation work of Rev. Herbert Cope, see Johnson, *History of the American Baptist Chin Mission*, vol.1, pp. 353-373. It is reported that Cope initiated his translation work of the New Testament in the Siyin direct first. Due to some reasons, he changed his mind and rather used the Kamhau dialect that has been more common.

religion to Christianity occur among the *Zo-mi* ‘northerners’ first rather than the ‘southerners’ the Haka *Lai-mi* in which the American missionaries had directly worked harder to Christianize the people? Needless to say that it is obvious the ‘northerners’ already had the belief in a Supreme Being, namely *Pathian*. To their surprise, the American Baptist missionaries who had been centering Haka with busy missionary enterprises found the real conversion into Christianity took place among the ‘northerners’ to whom they showed less interest for the mission work. Dr. East, the great medical doctor who was ordained and so keen on evangelization, would surely regret for the missionaries’ ignorance of the ‘northerners’ *Zo-mi* group. Concerning the regret of Dr. East, Johnson describes, “East felt personally that it had been a mistake to center the work first at Haka. It seemed that more converts came from and the most interest was shown by the Siyins and the Kamhaus, and he wanted to capitalize on this interest before the golden opportunity passed.”²⁰¹ Dr. East was the one who worked as the in charge of ‘medical work’ whereas the Rev. Carson was the in charge of the ‘general work’.²⁰² Dr. East became the first missionary to baptize the first converts among the Chins. Why did the first conversion to Christianity take place among the ‘northerners’? We shall now see how a regional new religion movement had a huge influence

²⁰¹ Johnson, vol.1, 181.

²⁰² For detailed story of Dr. East, see Johnson, vol.1, pp. 79-141.

and impact to the people causing a tremendous religious conversion among the ‘northerners’.

4. *Pathian* and Pau Cin Hau New Religion Movement

It was Pau Cin Hau new religion movement²⁰³ that had converted many people among the ‘northerners’ to a new paradigm shift of religion whereas the American missionaries were busy in the region of Haka attempting to civilize first the ‘uncivilized’ *Lai-mi* the ‘southerners’. He proclaimed *Pathian*²⁰⁴ as the Supreme Being to be worshipped by the Chin peoples—*Zo-mi*. *Pathian*, according to Pau Cin Hau, is the Almighty God who created the universe including the heavens and the earth. Pau Cin Hau then organized the converted community, called *Laipian Pawlpi* meaning literature inventor’s community like Christian church communities. The *Laipian pawlpi*²⁰⁵ had their own regular Sunday worship service and their prayer and worship style was very similar to the Christian rituals. They even

²⁰³ For the study of Pau Cin Hau cult movement, See Sangkeun Kim & Cope Suan Pau, “For the Divine Name of the Christian God among the Chin Peoples: *Pathian* and the Pau Cin Hau Movement in Myanmar” in *Korean Journal of Christian Studies* Vol. 63. (The Christian Literature Society of Korea, April 30, 2009), 229-242.

²⁰⁴ Pau Cin Hau would pronounce the name of the deity as *Pasian* rather than *Pathian* after the pronunciation of the *Teizang* dialect. In *Teizang* dialect of the *Zo-mi* the ‘northerners’, ‘th’ sounds ‘s’ in accent; thus *Pathian* rather sounds *Pasian*. Thus among the ‘northerners’, the name of the deity is pronounced and spelled *Pathian* as well as *Pasian*. The present study would prefer to employ *Pathian* the original one.

²⁰⁵ Here *lai* implies script/literature and *pian/piang* has its meaning of creation or invention. Thus, *laipian* literally means the invention of literature. Accordingly, Pau Cin Hau was called *Laipianpa* meaning the inventor of literature.

composed *Laipian* hymnal in the folk tunes of the *Zo-mi* Chin tradition. Due to the similarity of the Christian worship, some doubted that Pau Cin Hau adapted Christianity from the Lushai Hills. At any rate, Sing Khaw Khai comments about the *Laipian* worship and their relationship with *Pathian* as he puts:

The cult believers contend that there is only one God who gives religions to each of people to suit with specific feature of their respective traditions and cultures. In that case, they believe, God in His deity as *Pasian* gave a religion to the Zo people through His prophet Pau Cin Hau [...] They refer the authenticity and authority of their faith and belief to *Pasian* as revealed through Pau Cin Hau in history. What the Laipian *Pasian* contrasts with the Christian *Pasian* is that the Laipian *Pasian* had not revealed itself as the symbol of love for the Zos [...] So many of its believers forsook the cult and turned to Christianity.”²⁰⁶

The Pau Cin Hau movement originated about the same period that the Western missionaries came to the Chin Hills around 1900. Before that time, the primitive *Zo-mi* Chins the ‘northerners’ had their traditional animistic worship of *Zinmang* the supreme one and the fear of *Dawi*, the spirits. They had a great fear of *Zinmang* and *Dawi* since they believed that these spirits could harm them anytime. As the Pau Cin Hau movement had a rapid spread among the ‘northerners’ especially in Tedim and Falam regions, the Chin peoples had a semantic opportunity to reconfigure the concepts of

²⁰⁶ Sing Khaw Khai, *Zo People and Their Culture*, 119-20.

deity by comparing the traditional *Pathian* of the Pau Cin Hau new religion movement and the newly introduced *Pathian* of missionary Christianity. More significantly, the traditional concept of *Zinmang* which is intimately connected with the real existence of *Dawi* has been challenged by Pau Cin Hau's religious teachings. Pau Cin Hau claimed that the *Zo-mi* Chin should worship *Pathian* rather than *Dawi*, in connection with *Zinmang*, since the latter was a mere spirit worshipping that is rather appeasing. We need more discussion to understand the differences between Pau Cin Hau's *Pathian* and the Christian *Pathian* culturally and semantically. One thing is clear, however, that the Christian *Pathian* without its semantic connotations of Pau Cin Hau's *Pathian* could not be accepted as the Universal Supreme Being of a new religion. Protestant missionaries first came to the Chin Hills in 1899 just a few years after the British occupation of the whole Chin Hills as their colony. Pau Cin Hau's introduction of a new concept in *Pathian* began at the same time to impact on the religious semantics of the Chins. Pau Cin Hau was not a Christian at all but his native religion had a huge impact of the missionary movement in the Chin Hills. Who was Pau Cin Hau? How did he receive his revelation and develop his *Pathian* new religious movement? What was the impact of his new religious movement on the 'northerners'? How did the American missionaries regard Pau Cin Hau and his movement?

To answer these questions we shall have here a brief study of Pau Cin Hau and his new religious movement.

Pau Cin Hau (1859-1948) was the founder of *Laipian* movement, meaning script invention or ‘the birth of writing’, a native religious movement in Tedim and Falam areas.²⁰⁷ Born in Tedim, he was brought up as a normal boy in the traditional patterns of life —“tending cattle in the field and roaming the woods” as missionary Johnson narrates the childhood life story of Pau Cin Hau. Since there were no schools, it seems that Johnson pities on him narrating, “[S]o he grew up illiterate”. Johnson continues his narration as he learns:

Pau Cin Hau was sick for about fifteen years, from 1888 through 1902, and the usual sacrifices to the evil spirits (dawi or rai) were ineffective. During this long period he began to have visions or dreams which he interpreted as God (Pasian or Pathian) speaking to him. He claimed to have had a miraculous healing, and these revelations from God prompted him to speak of his new religion to others. Followers attached themselves to him, and before long this prophet movement was under way.²⁰⁸

Johnson, furthermore, writes, “the Pau Cin Hau movement was

²⁰⁷ For a brief story of Pau Cin Hau and his religion that later has been called *Laipian*, see Vum Son, *Zo History*, 147-153.

²⁰⁸ Robert G. Johnson, “The Pau Cin Hau Cult: Impact on the Churches” in *History of the American Baptist Chin Mission*, vol. 1(Pennsylvania: Self Published by Robert G. Johnson, 1988), 393. For more detailed story about Pau Cin Hau, see Robert G. Johnson, vol. 1. pp. 393-401.

never a serious contender against the Christian religion. It never threatened to absorb the Christian churches.” He comments, “[F]irst, some persons consider that this movement in some ways paved the road for the coming of Christianity by its emphasis on one God and its abolition of sacrifices to the evil spirits, and secondly, because it is an example of a prophet-movement among the Chins.²⁰⁹ Pau Cin Hau would confidently testify that *Pathian* revealed to him several times and gave him some instructions to obey. This is his testimony:

During my fifteen years illness, I once had a vision of Pathian (God) coming from heaven and commended me ‘Pau Cin Hau, learn Lai, i.e., reading and writing, and He held a book in His hand. God then took some pebbles, and He put them together and separated them again in turn, in a certain fashion. God then asked me, ‘Can you do like this?’ and I answered, ‘I can’. Then I did as He done, and I was able to do so. When I could do so as He had done, He gave me a book.²¹⁰

Upon the mysterious revelation of *Pathian*, Pau Cin Hau would attempt to abolish the animistic sacrifices among the *Chins* and would ask people to convert to his new religion of *Pathian*. As a result, the people of Tedim and Falam districts became the followers of the *Pathian* religion. Sing Khaw Khai describes the early development of the *Pathian* religion:

²⁰⁹ Robert G. Johnson, 393.

²¹⁰ Vum Son, *Zo History*, p. 151. For more detailed religion of Pau Cin Hau, see Vumson, *Zo History*, pp. 147-153 under the sub title of “The Religion of PAUCINHAU”.

Pau Cin Hau boldly and ceaselessly preached about the attributes of the divine, which he claimed to have revealed to him. He identified the revealing deity with *Pathian* and declared that *Pathian* had be commanded him to abolish *Zo (Chin)* traditional sacrifices to *Dawi*. Indeed, he was able to practically abolish the sacrificial customs not only in Tedim area, but also in Falam area. He won converts numbering 26,000 in Tedim area and 9,700 in Falam area.²¹¹

The census of India, 1931²¹² reports, “The Deputy Commissioner of the Chin Hills district has estimated the number of followers in his district at 35,700 (26,000 in Tiddim subdivision and 9,700 in Falam subdivision) but there are also followers on the other side of the frontier [that is, in India]”.²¹³ The number stands for almost the whole populace of the region at the time. Vumson comments on Pau Cin Hau and his movement, “Whatever background he might have had Paucinhau brilliantly executed his role as a prophet.[...] Paucinhauism [...] spread like wildfire in the Tedim and surrounding areas. [...] The religion also spread to West Zoram [Mizoram in India], Haka and Manipur.”²¹⁴

One may say that whilst the American missionaries were so busy in

²¹¹ Sing Khaw Khai, *Zo People and Their Culture*, pp.118-119.

²¹² The 1931 Census of India recorded the *Pathian* cult movement as Para. 135. “The Pau Cin Hau Movement in the Chin Hills” in *Census of India, 1931*, Vol. XI, Burma Part I, Chapter XI., pp. 217-218., reported by J. J. Bennison.

²¹³ Robert G. Johnson, “The Pau Cin Hau Cult: Impact on the Churches” in *History of the American Baptist Chin Mission*, vol. 1(Pennsylvania: Self Published by Robert G. Johnson, 1988), 399. Note: Johnson quotes from *Census of India, 1931* pages 217-218.

²¹⁴ Vumson, *Zo History*, 152-153.

attempting to civilize the ‘uncivilized’ and educating the ‘illiterate’, God had directly revealed God-self to the ‘uncivilized’ in their vernacular name of the traditional deity—*Pathian*, and even granted a script for literature. To their surprise, the missionaries came to be aware of the new religious movement among the ‘northerners’ only some time later. Johnson observes, “It seems obvious that many of Pau Cin Hau’s reforms were an improvement over the old animistic customs. His followers were free from the fear of the evil spirits and the expensive and constant sacrificial system which was a major cause of the poverty of the Chins.”²¹⁵

In contrast to the Pau Cin Hau’s *Laipian* new religious movement in *Laipianism*, the American missionaries’ missionary movement at the time was not effective in the process of converting the indigenous peoples. Regarding the effects of American missionaries’ missionary movement Stevenson, a British political officer of the Frontier Services, observes:

[...] the A. B. M. [American Baptist Mission] was the sole one operating in the central hills [i.e. Haka regions among the ‘southerners’] and of all the tenets followed by this Mission the only one which had any real effect on the progress of the Christian faith was the prohibition of beer-drinking and feast-giving. [...]

²¹⁵ Robert G. Johnson, “The Pau Cin Hau Cult: Impact on the Churches” in *History of the American Baptist Chin Mission*, vol. 1 (Pennsylvania: Self Published by Robert G. Johnson, 1988), 397. Also see, Khup Za Go, “The Pau Cin Hau Script and Religious Movement in the Chin Hills—1931” in *Zo Chronicles: A Documentary Study of History and Culture of the Kuki-Chin-Lushai Tribe* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, First Published 2008), pp. 93-99.

The people simply ignored the Mission and only 3% became converts to Christianity over the course of several decades.²¹⁶

Accordingly, by contrast, the Pau Cin Hau new religious movement had been progressive in the region of the ‘northerners’ while conversion in Christianity was moving slowly. Why had the *Laipian* movement been progressive in the local societies of the ‘northerners’? Stevenson will give us a reasonable explanation:

But while converts did not increase, the Mission teachings had the not unforeseen effect of awakening the Chin to imagined defects in his own social system. Of these the collections for communal sacrifice, bringing as they did only a remote and indirect benefit to the individual villager, seemed one of the worst. The result has been, as elsewhere throughout the world, the appearance of an indigenous variation of Christianity better suited to local conditions—the *Pau Chin Hau* new religion.²¹⁷

Stevenson furthermore observes, “By 1936 almost the entire Zanniat tribe had been converted to this new religion and a total of about 27% of the whole population of the Falam Sub-division professed allegiance to the Chin Prophet.”²¹⁸

Now we have come to know what had been happening among the

²¹⁶ Stevenson H. N. C., *The Economics of the Central Chin Tribes* (Bombay: The Times of India Press, 1943), 161.

²¹⁷ Stevenson H. N. C., 161.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 162.

‘northerners’ while the American missionaries’ were attempting to Christianize the ‘southerners’ in Haka areas under the British rule of the early twentieth century. There the *Pathian* religion had emerged at the time the missionaries would attempt the framework of their missionary translation of ‘vernacular operation’ so that the Christian preachers would find God among the *Zo* people in *Zo* vernacular name.

5. Missionaries’ Options in their ‘Vernacular Operation’

When the Protestant missionaries first arrived at hill villages of the Chin Hills during the last year of the nineteenth century, they had three options to transliterate the divine name of the Christian God for the people of the Chins: *Pathian*, *Zinmang* and *Khuazing*. The missionaries’ selection was *Pathian* as the Universal Supreme Being and the Christian God and their choice has turned out to be an appropriate one. In other words, the Protestant missionaries has Pathianized all the deities of the different sub-ethnic Chin peoples into one divine name of God—*Pathian*. What then are the religious connotations of *Pathian*, *Zinmang* and *Khuazing*? What was the role of the native peoples in the process of semantic reconfiguration of the term, from the traditional *Laipian Pathian* to the Christian God, *Pathian*? What was the missionary role of the Pau Cin Hau new religious movement for the new

rendering of the divine term, *Pathian*? To answer these questions, we shall first analyze the characteristics of *Pathian* and *Zinmang* the two Supreme Beings of Zo people the ‘northerners’.

i. *Pathian* vs. *Zinmang* First Two Candidates for the Name of the Christian God among the Chin People

We have known that there had been among *Zo-mi* the ‘northerners’ a belief in *Pathian* as the *de facto* Supreme Being. Before the Christian missionaries came to their territories, the ‘northerners’ would believe in *Pathian* independently within their own animistic framework. They also would regard *Zinmang/Zinleng* as their “Personal God” in daily living, while *Pathian* had been regarded as “the Universal Supreme Being,” so to speak. Interestingly they never had any types of sacrificial worship ceremonies to *Pathian* in their social and religious systems while *Zinmang/Zinleng* had been worshipped.²¹⁹

As for the *Zo-mi* Chin, *Pathian* is not a personal or regional supreme one, but rather a universal one, like an ideological concept of the Holy Divinity. They would believe in *Pathian* as the Universal Being who

²¹⁹ The ‘northerners’—*Zo-mi* believe that *Pathian* is not a cruel one, and never hurt the people. That is why they never have a formal sacrificial worship or offering to appease *Pathian*. Rather they fear evil spirits and believe that the evil spirits cause the people harm; and in regards of this, they have sacrificial worship or appeasement for *Dawi*, the evil spirits, which they call *Dawi-bia* or *Dawi-thoih* meaning appeasing evil spirits.

provides the Sacred Canopy to the Zo people, to use Peter Berger's term, but they also would need the performance of traditional priests or shamans to worship or to appease the local spirits on the other hand. Since they would believe that *Dawi* the evil spirits are occasionally harmful to them, they would have to seek divine protection of *Zinmang/Zinleng*. It would be more accurate to say that Zo people made bargains with the regional *Dawi*, the evil spirits, appeasing them to get protection and advantages. They would just appease to the various local spirits and to the chief spirit *Zinmang* as well. Among the Chin Christians, the name of the Christian God has been transliterated as *Pathian*, which had been the Supreme Being of *Zo-mi* the 'northerners'. As mentioned above, they had practical worship or appeasement ceremonies of *Zinmang* in their traditional belief system, but not of *Pathian*. Then how could the Christian God be transliterated as *Pathian* instead of *Zinmang*? Why did the Western missionaries choose *Pathian* to introduce the Christian God to the animistic Chin peoples? Why and how did the Chins accept this kind of missionary translation of the divine name into their vernacular language, even though the name and the concepts were already there among them? If the primitive Chin already had in their primal religion a belief in *Zinmang*, the personal supreme one, then how could they accept *Pathian* as the Almighty One and Eternal God from

another religion? Can we then define *Pathian* as an equivalent of *Zinmang*? What is the concept of *Pathian*? I will now provide a brief study of the traditional understanding of *Pathian* and *Zinmang* among *Zo-mi* the ‘northerners’.

Let us see first the story of an event. Sometime not long before the British colonials annexed the Chin Hills, there a treaty of alliance between two major powers at the time in the Northern Chin Hills: the Sukte chiefs of Mualbem and Lunmun chiefs of Thuklai, Siyin. Reportedly, they met at Bel-lei in order to negotiate an alliance between the two powers of groups, namely Sukte and Lunmun by their clan names. They would ritually compose poems and sing together the traditional folk songs called *Ai-lawng-la* exchanging between the two friendly parties.²²⁰ What is interesting here is the folk song sings describing the belief of *Zingleng*²²¹ and *Pathian*: “Ka nuai ah *Zinleng* hong dong zi lai tong e, ka tung ah *Pathian* hong dong zi lai tong.”²²² A rather free translation is the following: let me inquire first *Zingleng* underneath of me, and *Pathian* above me as well. Now one could

²²⁰ Since the Chins were preliterate, they had a unique way of composing poems and singing together as folk songs, exchanging with each other. Thus, they memorialized the historical events. A story with a poem would be composed that could be sung as folk song. Every man and woman both old and young were good poets.

²²¹ *Zinleng* is the poetic form of *Zinmang*, meaning literally the ruler of darkness.

²²² Ally between the Sukte chief of Mualbeem and Lunmun chief of Thuklai, Siyin, namely Pu Za Pau and Pu Thuk Kham was renewed at Bel-lei. For the detailed poem ‘*ai-lawng-la*’, see Vum Ko Hau, *Profile of A Burma Frontier Man*, p. 181.

obviously see that the ‘northerners’ had a belief in *Zinleng/Zinmang* and *Pathian* as the two Supreme Beings. Then does one can define *Zinmang* and *Pathian* as an equivocal Supreme Being?

Sing Khaw Khai suggests that the term *Pathian* “seems to have had originated with the concept to Heaven” since the word *Pathian* originally represents “an object sacrifice” to Heaven, and *Pathian* “was never viewed as bearing demonic characteristic feature although the deity was not clearly conceptualized.”²²³ Among the Chins, since *pa* refers to male and masculine in gender as well as father, and *Thiang* means holy, clean, tidy, etc., the deity name of *Pathian* perhaps implies Holy Father. Nevertheless, at any rate, the present study does not intend to emphasize this kind of etymological interpretation of the deities. However, the meanings of the deities in the vernacular languages shall simply be interpreted. In terms of religious function of *Pathian* in the folk tales among the Chins, *Pathian* can also be found as the Supreme Judge of the Universe.²²⁴ Meanwhile, the *Zo-mi* Chin

²²³ Sing Khaw Khai, *Zo People and Their Culture, A Historical, Cultural Study and Critical Analysis of Zo and Its Ethnic Tribes* (New Lamka, Manipur: Khampur Hatzaw, 1995), 112 and 117.

²²⁴ For example, see *Neino Tangthu*, meaning the Myth of *Neino* in *Zomi Chin Elementary School Reader No.4*, made by the American Missionaries. [In fact, it was Rev. Herbert J. Cope, as the honorary inspector of the schools in the British colonial period, who made the Chin Readers, namely *Zo Laisim Bu* for the Colonial period primary schools among *Zo-mi* the ‘northerners’ in Kamhau dialect.] In the traditional *Zo-mi* Chin myth, *Pathian*, the Supreme Judge of the Universe, made a rescue of humanity out of the harms of *Dawi*, the evil spirits. *Dawi*, the spirits are continually regarded as bad supernatural living divinities.

had a great fear of *Zinmang* and *Dawi* since they would believe that both spirits could harm humankind anytime and anywhere. The term *Zinmang* was derived from the word *Zing*, literally meaning dark or darkness; then with the suffix *Mang*, meaning the ruling one and its sovereignty, the combined name *Zinmang* thus implies the ruler of darkness literally. To understand the difference between *Pathian* and *Zinmang*, we further need to understand the concept of life after death among the ‘northerners’, particularly in Siyin tribe, from which the first converts to Christianity came. Both divine terminologies—*Pathian* and *Zinmang* are closely connected to the issue. The Siyins, like other sub-ethnic tribes, had an unambiguous belief in life after death and they would usually attempt to go to *Mithi-khua*, meaning village of the dead—a celestial place or heavenly place like a paradise after death as we shall discuss in more detailed later. They traditionally believed in the existence of *Thi-tha*, the spirit of the dead. Just like Korean shamanistic practice in the traditional society, the Siyins used to provide daily meals for the spirit of the dead—*Thi-tha*—for several days after a person’s death. With the prefix *Thi*, meaning die or dead the combined word *Thi-tha* thus implies spirit of the dead; thus, *Mihing-tha* means human spirit, and with the suffix *Thiangtho*, meaning clean or holy *Tha-Thiangtho* means Holy Spirit. Accordingly, the direct missionary translation in the

‘vernacular operation’ of the Holy Spirit as *Tha-Thiangtho*²²⁵ in the semantic Siyin vernacular dialect seemed to be intelligible to the early twentieth century ‘northerners’. Furthermore, traditionally animistic Siyins had a belief that one’s sickness or wellness depends on *Tha*’s (the spirit’s) going out from the body and/or coming in to the body. When a person’s *Tha* leaves the body, the person suffers bodily illness; and when it comes back into the body, the person then feels well again. Sing Khaw Khai interprets the concept of *Tha* that the person eventually dies when the person’s *Tha* fails to re-enter the body. Sing Khaw Khai, in regards of the beliefs in *Tha* among the *Zo-mi* Chins who are the ‘northerners’, continues his interpretation: “So *Tha* looks like the sustainer of the life of man. [...] the life and death of man is virtually determined by the life and death of his spirit. [...] when one is going to die soon, his [*sic*] spirit *Tha* goes to places where he has been before and to those whom he is more mindful of. The spirit wanders not only during sleep but also during his wakefulness.”²²⁶

Tha the spirit is believed to go eventually to *Mithi-khua*, the village of the dead.²²⁷ *Tha* can also bring to the *Mithi-khua* the things *Tha* has been

²²⁵ *Tha Thiangtho*, meaning the Holy Spirit, *Kha-Siangtho* in Kamhau dialect, is a proper missionary translation in the vernacular languages.

²²⁶ Sing Khaw Khai, *Zo People and Their Culture*, 127. For detailed study of *Tha*, see Sing Khaw Khai, *Zo People and Their Culture*, pp. 124-140.

²²⁷ *Mithi-khua* is a celestial place of the dead literally meaning the village of the dead.

given at his funeral occasion and all the wealth *Tha* has got in one's lifetime. A dying person, at the moment of death, is supposed to be transformed into another form of life. The Chins believe that if one was hungry when a person died, then the person's *Tha* would also be hungry. If one is murdered, then the spirit has to become the slave of the slaughterer in the next life; and in addition, he has to go to the unpleasant abode of the *Mithi-khua* until someone makes a blood vengeance for him. Now we need to interpret about the *Mithi-khua* the celestial place and its relationship with *Tha* the spirit of man so that one might come to know the concept of a blood vengeance for the murdered person. Interestingly, Carey, the Political Officer, deeply studied the oral traditions of the belief of the *Mithi-khua* and observes, "When the body dies it goes to a world called "Mithikwa [*Mithi-khua*]" (dead man's village), which is divided into Pwethikwa [*Puthi-khua*], the pleasant abode, and Sathikwa [*Sathi-khua*], the miserable abode of the unavenged."²²⁸ Here we see that in the belief system of the Zo people, the spirit of man, after death, goes to the celestial place called *Mithi-khua*. In addition, *Mithi-khua* is divided [*sic*] by two realms, namely, *Puthi-khua* and *Sathi-khua*, the former the pleasant abode, and the latter the miserable one for the un-avenged, respectively. What is the concept of blood vengeance in

²²⁸ Carey and Tuck, *The Chin Hills*, vol.1. 196.

the Chin animistic beliefs? Carey defines it concisely:

Good deeds and bad deeds do not affect the future of man; he must go to Pwethikwa [Puthi-Khua] if he dies a natural or accidental death, and he must go to Sathikwa [Sathi-khua] if he dies by the hand of an enemy, and there remain disconsolate and restless until his death is avenged by blood, when he will at once enter Pwethikwa [Puthi-khua] and be as happy as those who died a natural death on earth.²²⁹

Now we see that only by avenging of one's blood, in the case of murder, the spirit of the dead could get to the *Puthi-khua* the pleasant realm. Until his blood is avenged, he has to stay at the *Sathi-khua* the miserable realm. Therefore, it has to be avenged for the blood of the slaughtered one so that he might get to the *Puthi-khua*. Again, according to Carey, in his own words, "Kozin [*Khuazing*] does not reside in Mithikwa [*Mithi-khua*]. On arrival there the people live happily, but what they do is not known."²³⁰ Carey describes the Chin vengeance ritual in the following way: "Many southerners, like the northerners, believe that the slain becomes the slave of the slayer in the next world and, although his death may be avenged, nothing can alter the fact that he must remain a slave. Should the slayer himself be slain, then the first slain, [who] is the slave of the second slain, who in turn is

²²⁹ Carey and Tuck, *The Chin Hills*, vol.1. 196.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

the slave of the man who killed him.”²³¹ Among some sub-ethnic groups of the remote regions in the southern Chin Hills, this endless vengeance ritual continued to this day. Carey elaborates:

When the body dies man becomes a spirit and lives in the spirit world of the forests; if a man dies a natural or accidental death, his spirit is content, and he troubles no one; but, if he has been slain, his spirit will remain with his relations until his blood has been avenged in blood. If they do not attempt or if they are unsuccessful in avenging his death, the spirit will haunt [*sic*] and annoy them, especially at night; therefore the relatives of the murdered, to save themselves from the spirit, must shed blood.²³²

Now we can comprehend clearly the reason why vengeance for the murdered one is to be necessarily taken in the Chin primal societies according to their religious cognition. “The avenging of a murdered man by shedding blood in no way frees him from the yoke which he must bear,” as Carey clearly explains in his words, “for the death of his slayer he must meet him [*sic*] and serve him for-ever.”²³³ Therefore, it seems safe to say that the spirit of the murdered has no way to be set free. One has to serve his slaughterer as a slave forever in the belief of Chin animistic cognition.

Now we shall turn to *Lushai/Lushei* tribe who belong to the Mizoram, India, who are well known today as *Mizo* people. They also

²³¹ *Ibid.*

²³² *Ibid.*

²³³ *Ibid.*

believe they are the descendants of *Zo* the ancestral progenitor. In their *Zo* culture, like other *Zo* people, the *Lushei* practiced animism. They called their religious system ‘*Ramhuai bia*’ meaning to worship or appease the local/jungle spirits. *Ramhuai* the jungle spirits, *Ram* meaning jungle, *Huai* meaning spirits, are so cruel that “they could cause illness and even death” in Meirion Lloyd’s words, the priest has to offer sacrifice to the *Ramhuai*.²³⁴ Since the *Lusheis* usually regard the *Ramhuai* as evil spirits, we may say that they would just appease it, but not worship it. Like their cousin *Zomi* the ‘northerners’ *Mizo* the *Lushei* would have a belief in existence of a Supreme Being. In regards of their belief in a Supreme Being, Rev. J. Meirion Lloyd who was a missionary among the *Lusheis* for several years observes:

[...] the Mizos did believe in one high God, but their ideas about him were vague. In general it was he who had created the world. He was powerful and knew what was happening among men. He was also thought to be good and kind, but he never interfered with human affairs or in the daily life of people. As a high remote impassive being did they regard him. Their favorite name for him was *Pathian*, the word later adopted by Christians for God.²³⁵

Besides *Pathian*, the *Mizos* had other deities of divinity that they would never have worshipped. Lloyd expresses the strange names of *Mozo*

²³⁴ J. Meirion Lloyd, *History of the Church in Mizoram: Harvest in the Hills* (Aizawl, Mizoram, India: Synod Publication Board, Mizoram Presbyterian Church, First Edition 1991), 9.

²³⁵ *Ibid*, 11.

deities, in his words, “But the name of Khuavang was also used and there were certain other high beings such as Lasi, Vanchung Nula, Khuanu, Pu Vana and so on.” Lloyd asserts, “Pathian and these other beings were not worshipped, and sacrifices were never offered to them.”²³⁶

Thus one sees now obviously that *Pathian* had originated among the ‘northerners’ *Zo-mi* and their cousin *Mi-zo* the *Lushei*. In addition, J. Shakespear, who was Lt. Colonel at the time in the British Army, is credited in the present study for his knowledge of *Lushei* animism. He did a study of Chin religious beliefs in the *Lushei* tribe. Here we shall have a glimpse of Shakespear’s studies on the *Lushei* tribe in his book *Lushei Kuki Clans*. Regarding the religious beliefs of the *Lushei*, he observes their primal belief in *Pathian* as he asserts, “Practically all divisions of the Lushai-Kuki family believe in a spirit called Pathian, who is supposed to be the creator of everything and is a beneficent being, but has, however, little concern with men.”²³⁷ He introduces *Huai* the evil spirits or demons who inhabits in the jungle [therefore, the jungle spirit is called *Ramhuai*, *Ram* means jungle]. He also introduces the *Puithiam* the priest [sorcerer or shaman] who “is supposed to know what demon is causing the trouble and what form of sacrifice will appease him. To Shakespear, “a Lushai’s whole life is spent in

²³⁶ *Ibid.*

²³⁷ J. Shakespear, *The Lushei Kuki Clans* (London: MacMillan & Co. Ltd, 1912), 61.

propitiating these spirits” in his words.²³⁸ Interestingly he analyses the deities of the *Lusheis*: “In addition to Pathian and the Huai there is a spirit known as Khuavang, who is sometimes spoken of as identical with Pathian, but is generally considered to be inferior to him, and more concerned with human beings. Khuavang sometimes appears to people, and his appearance is always followed by the illness of those who see him.”²³⁹ “My Khuavang is bad” says a *Lushei* when things are going wrong with him.

Regarding the belief of life after death among the *Lusheis*, Shakespear narrates:

The Lushais believe in a spirit world beyond the grave, which is known as Mi-thi-khua—*i.e.*, dead man’s village—but on the far side of Mi-thi-khua runs the Pial river, beyond which lies Pial-ral, and abode of bliss. Access to this is not obtained by a life of virtue while on earth, but the due performance of sacrifices and the killing of men and certain animals and success in the courts of Venus.²⁴⁰

Lusheis the *Mizo* tribe,²⁴¹ would believe that when a man dies the spirit leaves the dead body and climbs a hill top called *Hringlang Tlang*. Rev.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 62.

²⁴¹ The *Mizo* tribe is also included among the descendants of *Ciim Nuai* groups. They were formerly known as Lushai/Lushei who spoke Duhlian dialect. *Mizo* is a political name that appeared after MNF (Mizo National Front) began an insurgency against the central government of India in the 1960s. *Mizo* also implies *Zo* people like *Zo-mi*.

J. Meirion Lloyd, narrates:

From the top of this [*Hringlang Tlang*] he casts a last lingering glance at the world where he had lived, worked and hunted. Then he would go down the other side of the hill to a little stream where the Hawilopar (Flower of no Return) bloomed. He would pick a bud, put it in his hair and lose the desire to return to the green world he had known. He would drink too from the stream Lunglohtui (the River of Forgetfulness) and would [*sic*] then lose even the recollection of that world.²⁴²

Thus, thereafter the spirit of the dead man has to cross the stream. There, the route is divided into two as one path leads to *Pialral*, meaning beyond the *Pial* river, a place like paradise, whereas the other path leads to *Mithi-khua*, meaning the village of the dead. While *Pialral*, a paradise with its abundant materials and luxurious facilities, is supposed only for the rich, mighty, and brave or skillful men, the *Mithi-khua* is supposed for the average men's destiny. A man has to get a special title, namely, *Thangchhuah*, as the qualification for the *Pialral*. Therefore, a *Lushei* man has to attempt to be rich, mighty, brave, and skillful, etc. to receive the title of *Thangchhuah* in the present life so that he might get to the *Pialral* in the next life. In other words, to be qualified for entering the *Pialral* the spirit of the dead man must be a *Thangchhuah*, the title of a special distinguished one. Then how could a

²⁴² J. Meirion Lloyd, *History of the Church in Mizoram: Harvest in the Hills* (Aizawl, Mizoram, India: Synod Publication Board, Mizoram Presbyterian Church, First Edition 1991), 14.

man become a *Thangchhuah*? It is very interesting in becoming a *Thangchhuah*. There are two ways to achieve this title. One way is to offer a series of feasts, seven or more for the whole village. The other way is through killing wild animals. To become a *Thangchhuah*, a man, as skillful hunter, has to kill seven wild animals such as a bear, a wild boar, a gayal (wild buffalo), an eagle, a big snake, a barking deer, and a flying lemur. Thus, along the journey towards the *Pialral*—beyond the *River Pial* [sic], the wild animals he had killed would escort the man with the title of *Thangchhuah*.²⁴³

It is certain that the Chins have a clear belief in human spirit and the concept of life after death. The Chins, moreover, have wishes and concerns that *Thi-tha*, the spirit of the dead, might go to the heavens or heavenly realm to the blossom of *Pathian*, the heavenly father. We may witness this in the poems of folk songs that have been sung at Chin funerals. Let us see, for instance, a stanza of a folk song: “Ka kawi a Liannu awng e, sawmsial kop ma ciang suan te. Sawmsial kop tawh zang phual mul tawh Zua siang na tuang tut nam maw! ” It may be directly interpreted: “Oh my beloved who I bosomed, you have gone with a pair of mithuns. I sent you with a pair of mithuns and a hornbill, wishing you to get the bosom of our Gracious

²⁴³ J. Meirion Lloyd, *History of the Church in Mizoram* (Aizawl, Mizoram: The Synod Publication Board of Mizoram Presbyterian Church, 1991), 14-15.

Father!”²⁴⁴ The poem was composed and sung as folk song by the deceased’s husband at the funeral ceremony of his beloved wife. The poem means that the husband killed not only a pair of mithuns but a hornbill in the forest as he wished his beloved wife to get into heavens by easy riding the back of mithuns and the hornbill towards the blossom of *Pathian*, the Gracious Father.

I have analyzed the beliefs in the religious systems of the ‘northerners’ Zo people. One sees obviously the magnificent role of *Pathian* in the religious life of the Zo people. Therefore, we would like to argue that the Pathianization of deifying the divine name of God in the missionary translation among the *Zo-mi* the ‘northerners’ has been appropriate. Note that the first converts to Christianity in the Chin Hills were baptized in the name of *Pathian* and began worshipping the Christian *Pathian* since 1904.

ii. The Deity of *Khuazing* and Chin Sacrificial System

The option *Khuazing* for the divine name of God is a representative from Haka areas among the *Lai-mi* the ‘southerners’. The *Lai-mi* sub-ethnic groups also have a belief of a Supreme Being in the name of *Khuazing* in their religious system. The *Lai-mi* groups would practically regard *Khuazing*

²⁴⁴ Lian Za Nang, “The First Fruit of Christian Mission in the Chin Hills (article in Burmese စီးယင်းနယ် ခေါ်ဆွဲမှုမှ ခရစ်ယာန်အပြီးသီး ပေါ်ထွန်းလာခြင်း),” *Chin Christian Centenary Magazine, 1904-2004* (Yangon: Myanmar Baptist Convention Press, 2004), 130.

as their ‘personal god.’ The third possible transliteration of the divine name in missionary translation among the Chin, *Khuazing* needs some further investigation. The divine name of *Khuazing* is a term used by the *Lai-mi* sub-ethnic groups in the Haka region. Literally speaking, *Khua* means a dwelling place, village, town, city, etc.²⁴⁵ In addition to the suffix *Zing* meaning dark or darkness, the deity *Khuazing* therefore may refer to the Ruler of Darkness. In order to define the deity *Khuazing*, I will turn again to Sing Khaw Khai’s interpretation. Sing Khaw Khai thinks that the idea of *Khua* as related with the world “being spirited with somewhat like cosmic energy” in his words.²⁴⁶ Thus, *Khua* the ‘cosmic energy’ has been “deified as *Khuazing*” considering being “the controller of the world under heaven.”²⁴⁷ Sing Khua Khai, therefore, interprets, “So *Khua* in its cosmic sense represents the god of the world that is essentially the Earth. Now it seems clear that in the realm of *khua* exists the human society in relation to the countryside from which people can have or obtain material things. Thus *Khuazing* is believed as the controller of the earthly things.”²⁴⁸ Furthermore, Sing Khaw Khai reports that Christian elders in the Haka area “address to God as *Kan Khuazing*,

²⁴⁵ *Khua* has other etymological meanings in addition to some suffixes such as *khua-hun* meaning climate/ weather; *khua-vak*, light; *khua-zing*, dark or getting dark; *khua-zan*, night time, *khua-lum*, warm weather; *khua-sik*, cold weather/climate, *khua-sia*, bad weather, etc.

²⁴⁶ Sing Khaw Khai, *Zo People and Their Culture*, 106.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

meaning our God". He, therefore, remarks, "At one time *Khuazing* seemed to have been looked upon like the supreme deity of all divinities."²⁴⁹ Then why did the American missionaries not employ the deity *Khuazing* as the Christian God in Haka region where they made their first choice for mission headquarters? Why did they Pathianize the deity *Khuazing* in the Christianity? Why have the missionaries' Pathianization in the 'vernacular operation' been appropriated among the *Lai-mi* the 'southerners' in Haka area? What are the differences and/or similarities between *Pathian* and *Khuazing* then? How and why did the 'southerners' *Lai-mi* groups were converted and baptized in the name of *Pathian* instead of *Khuazing* in the new religion? Sing Khaw Khai asserts, "In fact, the two terms, *Khuazing* and *Pathian*, were not of local origin in Chin Hills. These were brought to Chin Hills probably from Central Asia. The two deities signify the dual nature of Zo cosmic conception."²⁵⁰

However, since *Khua* with the suffix *Zing*, the combined word *Khuazing*, thus, implies "the absence of light in the atmosphere or the state of being invisible", the deity *Khuazing* would be regarded symbolically as "the Invisible".²⁵¹ In other words, the term *Khuazing* is used for a deity of

²⁴⁹ Sing Khaw Khai, *Zo People and Their Culture*, 106.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*

the invisible Supreme One who rules the world. Since the word *Zing* literally means dark or darkness in the semantic meaning of the Chins' vernacular language, *Khuazing* perhaps might be compared with Satan, the ruler of the world, like Lucifer, the fallen archangel, in the Christian tradition. *Khuazing* in the *Lai-mi* Haka dialect also has the same equivalent of the 'Ungracious Ruler'. Furthermore, on the other hand, somebody usually would utter "*Khuazing Pathian!*" mentioning the names of the two deities as equivocal whenever someone would pray or wish something good to happen in bad or dangerous condition. According to Kip Thian Pau, a former minister in the Myanmar Baptist Convention, the Chins regarded *Khuazing* higher than *Pathian*, and *Khuazing* was supposed to be the highest in the hierarchy of the deities. Every child, says he, was dedicated to *Khuazing* at birth, and thus, everybody has his or her own *Khuazing Pathian*.²⁵²

In order to observe the role of *Khuazing* among *Lai-mi* groups the 'southerners' and their religious system, we shall now examine the work of Chester U. Strait who conducted research there for several years. In regards of *Khuazing* Strait asserts, "The ruling good spirit is the creator and maker of all things; but by theological intricacies which are never given much thought, and which cause no mental anguish, this chief good spirit—while creator of

²⁵² Kip Thian Pau, *Trials and Triumphs of the Chin Pioneers* (Yangon: Myanmar Baptist Convention Press, Reprint 2009), 5.

the world—is yet the patron good spirit of the village.”²⁵³ Strait furthermore observes:

Each village or group of villages has its good spirit who is the creator, except that the Chins do not worship or have in their minds the good spirit creator as one. This chief good-spirit is distinctly henotheistic. He is worshipped, and sacrifices at times are made to him, but as he does not meddle much with the affairs of men, in reality he becomes a lesser god. He is a convenient recipient for all blame and all disaster, although not particularly the instigator.²⁵⁴

The conventional term, *Khuazing-nawl*, which implies the will of god, “seems to be a most satisfying and consoling expression” in the case of sickness. Even though a sacrificial ceremony has been made for the cure of the sick, the future condition of the sick depends on the *Khuazing-nawl*, the will of god.²⁵⁵

The people of ‘southerners’ the *Lai-mi* sub-ethnic groups in Haka region, thus, would worship or appease *Khuazing* as their personal god but the name of *Khuazing* is not appropriate for the name of the Christian God. Even though powerful and ominous, *Khuazing* is neither a universally acting deity nor an immanent ruler of the world where the evil spirits are prevailing. In the case of *Pathian*, however, the missionaries paid attention not only to

²⁵³ Chester U. Strait, *The Chins' Conception of Death and Future Life* (Th.M. thesis, Berkeley Baptist Divinity School [now American Baptist Seminary of the West], 1932), 19.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

the Universality of Divine Acting but also to indirect relation with the evil spirit in the concept of *Pathian*. In addition, on the other hand, since among the *Lushei—Mi-zo* and *Zo-mi* the ‘northerners’ the first converts in Christianity had already worshipped the Christian God in the name of *Pathian*, it is obvious that the missionaries would compel the ‘southerners’ to worship God in the name of *Pathian* instead of *Khuazing*. Eventually, in other words, *Khuazing* has been Pathianized in the missionary translation since the early twentieth century. Since that time onwards, the ‘southerners’ have also come to worship the Christian God in the name of *Pathian*. Today all the sub-ethnic tribes of the *Zo* people profess Christianity worshipping Christian God in the name of *Pathian*.²⁵⁶ The first converts in the Chin Hills, who are *Zo-mi* the ‘northerners’, namely Pu Thuam Hang and Pu Pau Suan, together with their own wife, were baptized in the name of *Pathian* and began worshipping the Christian *Pathian* in 1904. The same conversion occurred in the Lushai Hills: the first converts Pu Khuma and Pu Khara were baptized in the name of *Pathian* in 1899. The first-born grandson of Pu Thuam Hang, the first convert, was named Thian Khup, in the name of *Pathian*, meaning *Pathian* is superior. It is interesting to understand the

²⁵⁶ For study of *Pathian* and the belief system of the Chin people, see Sangkeun Kim & Cope Suan Pau, “For the Divine Name of the Christian God among the Chin Peoples: Pathian and the Pau Cin Hau Movement in Myanmar” in *Korean Journal of Christian Studies* Vol. 63. (The Christian Literature Society of Korea, April 30, 2009), 229-242.

naming system among the *Zo-mi* the ‘northerners’. The grandfather’s name has to be broken; and a single word, usually the last name, from the broken name has to be taken for the first name of the grandson. The granddaughter has to take her grandmother’s last name. The *Zo-mi* calls it *mintam*, literally meaning name-breaking or broken name: *min* means name, and *tam* means broken, thus, in combined word form—*mintam/mintap*—it refers grandfather or grandmother from whom a grandchild takes his or her first name. For instance, in the case of the first grandson of Pu Thuam Hang, the first convert, he unusually broke the divine name of *Pathian*; and took the broken name *Thian* from *Pathian* regarding *Pathian* as his own grandfather. Since that time onwards, it has so far been customary to naming a child after the broken name of *Pathian/Pasian*—that is called *Pathian mintam*—for instance, Thian Khaw Khai, Sian Do Pau, Cin Thian Khai, Thang Sian Mung, Cin Sian Thang., etc. Thus, the culture of *Zo* people has developed in the religion of *Pathian* and *Pathianization* in Christianity. In other words, Chin or *Zo* people are today in the society of Pathianized Christianity.

Now we will examine the missionary observation and understanding of a Western mission scholar on the Chin sacrificial worship system. Chester U. Strait carefully observed the Chin primal religion particularly the worship

of *Khuazing*.²⁵⁷

Strait was a missionary scholar who had the most positive mission perspectives to the Chins among the several American missionaries who reached to the Chin Hills. The pioneering American missionaries, to their surprise, discovered that there had been no mention of blood in the atonement sacrifices of the Chin peoples. Dr. Strait mentions his astonishment in his dissertation as follows:

In the mind of an occidental, atonement is usually associated with the blood of the sacrifice, but as we have seen there is no atonement expressed by the blood in sacrifice by the Chins. One wonders, though, whether there is any sort of atonement in Chin sacrifice. [...] There are things in the Chin sacrifice which point in that direction but always fall short of atonement in any real sense. The sacrifice establishes agreement, neutrality, or a kind of truce between mortals and the spirits, but there is nothing like forgiveness and reconciliation. [...] Asking forgiveness of the gods was unthinkable; it never occurred; they never thought in such terms. This is amply proved by the slow process by which the Chin comes to comprehend the Christian interpretation of forgiveness. Moreover, why should they ask forgiveness, when they have no positive consciousness of having sinned against the spirit?²⁵⁸

What is interesting here is that why and how the Chins came to

²⁵⁷ *Khuazing* literally means dark or darkness opposite to *Khuavak*, meaning light. Therefore the Chin conception of *Khuazing* might be understood as the supernatural power of darkness. A Chin might utter ‘*Khuazing*’, ‘*Pathian*’, or ‘*Khuazing Pathian*’, etc., when he says a prayer.

²⁵⁸ Chester U. Strait, *A History and Interpretation of Chin Sacrifice* (Th.D. diss., Berkeley Baptist Divinity School [now American Baptist Seminary of the West], 1933), 103-104.

comprehend God's forgiveness through the blood sacrifice of his own son without having knowledge or practice of forgiveness in their rituals. We shall argue that there had been an idea of atonement in the primal Chin animism in their religious beliefs. To do so, I will reinterpret Strait. Strait discovers the Zo people as "animist and not polytheists" who "believe in immortality, a great Creator."²⁵⁹ Then were the entire Zo people monotheists? Strait interprets that the "great Creator" as the "ruling spirit who is Creator of all things." He observes *Khuazing* as "the great good spirit".²⁶⁰ He sees the religion of the Chins as spirit worship in pure animism. Strait observes, "He [Zo person] has developed a religion which includes a spirit worship, an ability to pray, and an appreciation of religion. In his worship he has perhaps over emphasized fear and has found no place for love."²⁶¹ Then why did Strait, the missionary, not let them keep worshipping the *Khuazing* the supreme Being as the Christian God in Christianity? In fact, it is obvious that Strait would surely base his research among the *Lai-mi* group in Haka region. He observes and categorizes the spirits into two groups including 'a third Being' according to their hierarchical positions: the good spirits and the evil

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 61.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 54.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 59.

spirits.²⁶² Strait figures out the third spirit, the ‘Supreme Being’ identifying with *Khuazing* to whom the people would make sacrifice. In other words, the ‘Supreme Being’ that Strait discovers and observes is *Khuazing*. He learns, “The Chins believe firmly in Khua-zing, but they know little about him.”²⁶³ Since “Khua-zing is good”, for Strait, “it is rather uncertain whether a Chin ever makes an actual sacrifice to Khua-zing, the Great Good Spirit”.²⁶⁴ Then, why did Strait not propose *Khuazing* as the candidate to be identified with Christian God?

If Strait were able to have an understanding idea of the Chin sacrifice from indigenous belief, then it seems that he could have seen an idea of atonement in the Chin sacrifice. In fact, Strait attempted to find atonement in Chin sacrifice from an occidental perspective. Thus, he finds no forgiveness, no reconciliation, and no atonement in the Chin sacrifice. It is interesting that he got a chance to observe closely on “the triennial sacrifice in Zo-khua village” where the villager would kill an animal and shed its blood. He interprets, “The shed blood is important because it places

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 73-74. & 169 Appendix. For the categories of spirits who belong to *Lai-mi* group, see Chester U. Strait, *The Chins' Conception of Death and Future Life* (Th.M. thesis, Berkeley Baptist Divinity School [now American Baptist Seminary of the West], 1932), 72, Appendix - A.

²⁶³ Chester U. Strait, *A History and Interpretation of Chin Sacrifice* (Th.D. diss., Berkeley Baptist Divinity School [now American Baptist Seminary of the West], 1933), 73-74.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

the sacrificial animal in a sphere where it can be accepted by the spirit.”²⁶⁵ Nevertheless, to Strait, in this communal sacrifice, “in which the blood is considered seem only to be peculiar customs which have happened to attach themselves to certain of the sacrifices” in his words.²⁶⁶ Therefore, to Strait, there is no correlation between atonement and the shed blood in the Chin sacrifices. That is the main reason why he argues, “[T]here is no atonement expressed in the sacrifice, neither is there any atonement in the purely sacrificial prayer” as he makes his conclusion.²⁶⁷ He further asserts, “If there is any atonement in the Chin sacrifice, it does not center in the blood of the animal slain.”²⁶⁸ In the perspective of an occidental, Strait finds no idea of atonement in the oriental Chin sacrifice. He rather wonders, “[W]hether there is any sort of atonement in Chin sacrifice.”²⁶⁹ He observes that the Chin sacrifice usually establishes ‘agreement’, ‘neutrality’, or ‘a kind of truce between mortals and the spirits’; but he finds there are no terms for ‘forgiveness and reconciliation’. To Strait, no Chin has even ever “thought in such term.”²⁷⁰ Therefore, Strait asserts, “There is intercourse, but no communion; there is agreement, but no reconciliation. Hence, atonement, as

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 103

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 103.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 110.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 103.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 104.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 104.

in any such way as it is conceived in the Christian connotation, does not exist.”²⁷¹ Nevertheless, interestingly Strait observes atonement in the prayer life of a Chin. When a Chin cries out like this: “Maw Khua-zing”, he means “Oh, my God” in Strait’s understanding. Straits therefore asserts, “This genuine crying out the soul to God [*Khuazing*] for help which is so common, and very often expressed apart from the sacrifice, reveals the real prayer life of the Chin.”²⁷² Thus, Strait again for the Chins, advocates, “For this reason, we may say with a degree of assurance, that the prayer of the Chin—as distinct from his ceremonial incantations—is directed to God [*Khuazing*]. In his prayer the Chin approaches atonement, even though he utterly fails to do this in his sacrifice.” To Strait, sacrifice is offered to the local evil spirits whereas prayer to *Khuazing* the good Spirit.²⁷³ Thus, he concludes: “We would say that there is no atonement expressed in the sacrifice, neither is there any atonement in the purely sacrificial prayer. But in the prayer apart from the sacrifice, we have seen the presence of a desire for union with the Divine.”²⁷⁴

If Strait were a Chin animist at the time, he would surely have an idea of atonement in his sacrificial worship to the good Spirit in the name of

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 105.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 106.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 107.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 107.

Khuazing since he usually makes his prayer to the regional Supreme Being. The *Lai-mi* Chins the ‘southerners’ would surely seek atonement to the Supreme Being in worship and prayer in the name of *Khuazing*. Therefore, the present study argues that employing the vernacular term *Khuazing* to designate the Christian God might be appropriate among the *Lai-mi* in Haka region. Nevertheless, the Protestant missionaries’ choice for the name of God was *Pathian*. It is therefore obvious that, as we have talked, the missionaries would surely compel the ‘southerners’, when they converted, to worship *Pathian* instead of *Khuazing* as Christian God in their new religion—Christianity. Consequently, *Khuazing* has thus been Pathianized in the missionary translation in the early twentieth century Christianization of the colonized. Since that time onwards, the ‘southerners’ have also come to worship the Christian God in the name of *Pathian*.

Chapter Four

Conclusion: Reflecting the Framework of the Cross-Cultural Missionary Translation in Colonial Burma

1. A Reflection on the Protestant Christian Mission among the Hill Tribes

The framework of the cross-cultural missionary translation process in colonial Burma, from the indigenous perspective, had been obviously Western colonial hegemony by Christianizing the colonized. Protestant missionaries' mission theory during the colonial period was to 'Christianize the colonized' by demolishing their primal religions and their culture absolutely so that the kingdom of God might be established among the 'heathen' in a Westernized Christianity. For instance, in the Chin Hills, especially the first thing they would attempt to demolishing was *zu*-drinking ritual. The only difference between a Christian and a non-Christian was *zu*-drinking person and a non-*zu*-drinking person. *Zu*, 'rice beer' in the missionary term, would play a very important role in the Chin societies.

Without *zu*-drinking ritual, no sub-ethnic groups of the Zo/Chin people were able to perform their social functions. The American Baptist missionaries absolutely demolished the *zu*-drinking ritual of social function in Chin Christianity. The most outstanding characteristic of Christianity in the Chin Hills was being non-*zu*-drinking.

Thus together with giving up of the *zu*-drinking ritual, a Chin/Zo Christian has to abandon his cultural practices. With regard to the conversion of Zo people into Christianity in colonial times, Vumson, a *Zo-mi* scholar, criticizes, “Being a Christian however means the ruination of all knowledge of authentic Zo folklore, folk songs and even Zo ways of eating and drinking. It is similar to cutting oneself off from Zo culture, [...]”²⁷⁵

Vumson furthermore comments, “Zo Christians are no longer to take part in any Zo cultural or social functions, [...] Thus Zo grow up in an environment of a foreign culture, where knowledge of their own culture is regarded as non-Christian. A Zo is deprived of his natural heritage through his puritan Christian upbringing.”²⁷⁶ Regarding the elimination of the Chin/Zo ritual in the framework of the Protestant missionaries in colonial era, Vumson would surely respond like this: “In their own countries the missionaries allowed their cultures to grow and their folklore to be preserved.

²⁷⁵ Vumson, *Zo History*, 146.

²⁷⁶ Vumson, 146.

Social dancing and the singing of folk songs are as natural as living and dining. The prohibition of cultural development is one of several devastating actions the missionaries introduced to the Zo people.”²⁷⁷

The first missionary couple to the Chin Hills, the Carsons, had a very negative perspective on the Chin primal religion and civilization. Johnson the last missionary to the Chin Hills properly comments, “In the early days, Arthur Carson held a rather low estimate of the Haka Chin vocabulary. He remarked in February, 1900, that the Chins had no word for hell, heaven, sin, forgiveness, repent, pray, and no word that really meant love.”²⁷⁸ Johnson in 1988 argues, “But it is not wrong to say that the essentials of the Christian faith can be understood when spoken in the Chin languages.”²⁷⁹ To Johnson, in his words, “one of the proofs of the Bible’s divine origin is that it can be rendered so well into thousands of languages and among these the Chin tongues, as befitting a Book meant to teach all nations.”²⁸⁰

Pathianization of Chin Christianity also is problematic among the other sub-ethnic groups of Chin/Zo peoples. It seems that *Pathian* is intelligible only among the ‘northerners’ *Zo-mi* and the ‘southerners’ *Lai-mi*.

²⁷⁷ Vumson, *Zo History*, 147.

²⁷⁸ Johnson, 69-70.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 70.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 70.

Nevertheless, the real southerners such as Matu, Dai, Khumi, Asho, and so on have no idea about *Pathian*. They have their own deities with different names. Since the colonial administrators did not accommodate the American missionaries at the time to the southern, the real southern Chin Hills had no opportunity to be Christianized throughout the colonial period.²⁸¹ Only in the postcolonial period, the northern Chins who had already been converted mostly in Christianity got started sending their local missionaries to the southern Chin Hills. Thus, the southern Chin people have been Pathianized again in postcolonial time Christianization. In fact, *Pathian* seems to be meaningless or unintelligible today among the southern Chin sub-ethnic groups. Therefore, we herewith would like to argue that for each sub-ethnic group of the southern Chin tribes, the names of their primal deities ought to be employed and semantically reconfigured as Christian God today so that they might worship God in their own culture and tradition in the name of their own deities.

In the case of the Kachin people, just like their cousin Tibeto-Burman-speaking Chin/Zo people, the American Protestant missionaries

²⁸¹ At the time, the colonial administrators in the southern Chin Hills prohibited the entrance of the missionaries.

Christianized them in the name of *Karai-Kasang* the *Jingphaw*²⁸² vernacular Supreme Being. Thus, all Kachin sub-ethnic peoples today worship *Karai-Kasang* in Christianity. In fact, all the sub-ethnic groups of the Kachin peoples surely would have had a belief in the existence of a Supreme Being whom they would rather pronounce in almost common *Hpan Wa Ningsang - Chye Wa Ningchyang*. *Hpan Wa Ningsang* means “the Almighty One who creates” and *Chye Wa Ningchyang* means “the Almighty One who knows”. A Kachin would pray uttering “*Hpan Wa Ningsang - Chye Wa Ningchyang*” especially when he encounters danger and difficulty. According to Khao Voyao, the American Baptist missionaries proposed a new and formulated name of God, namely *Karai-Kasang*, *Karai* means creator, *Kasang* means lord, thus, the combined term of *Karai-Kasang* literally implies the ‘Creator our Lord’.²⁸³ Why did the American Baptist missionaries employ a formulated combined name *Karai-Kasang* to designate the Christian God?

Herewith we need to have a brief study of *Karai-Kasang* the Supreme Being of the Kachin people. Rev. C. Gilhodes’ book *The Kachins: Religion and Customs* is perhaps the best research about the Supreme Being

²⁸² Kachin peoples are also called *Jingphaw* in the tribal name of the majority: there are some at least six more sub-ethnic groups among the Kachins, namely, *Jingphaw*, *Maru* (Lawngvaw), *Atzi*, *Lashi* (La chid), *Hkahku*, *Rawang*.

²⁸³ Khao Voyao, a native Kachin scholar, is presently making his doctoral program at Seoul Christian University. He contributes, through communication, the beliefs of the Kachin peoples in their primal religious system.

among the Kachins. Based on his research, Gilhodes lists the different names of a common Supreme Deity:

1. Karai Kasang, who is also called Karai Kasang Makam, Karai Wa, Karai, Ngarai Kaseng, Ngarai Wa.
2. Phan Ningsang.
3. Cheng Ningchang or Che Ningchang.
4. Phan Dum Sakia, Phan Sakia or Sakia.
5. Jau Dum Phara, or Jau Phara.²⁸⁴

The native Kachins would say that these different names designate ‘*langai sha*’, meaning only one: *i.e.* the same Supreme Being. The Reverend Gilhodes explains, “This spirit is called by various names according as he turns himself and looks to one side or to the other [...]”²⁸⁵ Gilhodes continues explaining the naming of *Karai-Kasang*, in his words, “Each one has feigned to be Karai Kasang, and seated on a footstool, has turned his face to different sides, and in doing so , has, according to his position, applied to himself the various name of the Supreme Being.”²⁸⁶ In addition, Gilhodes asserts, “Therefore the Savants of the country do look upon Karai Kasang as on a unique spirit. Moreover, their affirmations seem to be confirmed by the meaning of the terms which are used to designate the Supreme Spirit.”²⁸⁷ In fact, *Karai-Kasang*, *Phan-Ningsang* and *Cheng-Ningchang* are Kachin

²⁸⁴ C. Gilhodes, *The Kachins: Religion and Customs* (New Delhi: Mittal Publication, 1995), 94.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 95.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid*.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid*.

vernacular words whereas *Phan-Sakia* is a Burman loan, and *Jau-Phara* a Shan loan word.²⁸⁸ Gilhodes asserts that the Kachin theistic term *Karai-Kasang* “to be pure Kachin and to mean Supreme Being” in terms of identical name with the Christian God. In addition, Gilhodes has at least two advocates for his assertion: 1) Mr. Rae, who had informed him that *Karai-Kasang* means ‘Supreme Lord’; and 2) Rev. O. Hanson who had already given the name *Karai-Kasang* to ‘God’ in his translation of the Genesis in the Holy Bible.²⁸⁹ The former was a former British official who administered the Kachins for several years and lived among them; and the latter, a pioneering American Baptist missionary. In fact, it was Rev. J. Lyon and his wife who first came to Bhamaw area of the Kachin Hills as pioneering missionaries. They arrived to Bhamaw on February 1878. Tragically, suffering from violent malaria within the very week of their arrival Lyon fell ill with a high fever and passed away within a month. Unfortunately, the Kachin Hills region has so far been violent malaria area. Due to the urgent need for a missionary to replace Lyon, young William Henry Roberts with his wife voluntarily arrived to Bhamaw on January 12, 1879. Roberts sadly also lost his beloved wife within a year and a half of their arrival. They initiated school and taught a few children. Mr. Roberts

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

tried to translate the Holy Bible. After his repeatedly request to recruit a scholar for translation work, the Mission finally dispatched Ola Hanson who arrived in Rangoon in 1890.²⁹⁰ Hanson's view and his missionary translation of the divine name should be studied here briefly. He found out that there was an idea of belief in the existence of a Supreme Being among the Kachins. "A great spirit, *Karai Kasang*, is above all the *nats*, and he alone is the original Creator, he is Supreme One. Several names are given to him, among them the Omniscient One," explains Hanson.²⁹¹ Furthermore, Hanson describes:

The Supreme One never had a human birth and how he came into existence no one can tell. Still the Creator (*Hpan Wa Ningsan*), the Omniscient One (*Chye wa Ningchyan*), the One Higher than the Clouds (*Sumwi Sumdam*), a term having almost a magical meaning with many, and the Supreme One (*N-gawn Karai Kasang*) are one and the same.²⁹²

It is interesting to note the etymological explanation on the strange names of the Kachin Deity as Gilhodes puts:

As to the words Phan Ningsang and Cheng Ningchang, they seem to designate simply attributes of the divinity. In Kachin, indeed, phan means "to create" or "to hold up"; and Cheng or Che, "to know" [...] are surely perfections which are rightly attributable to

²⁹⁰ Donald M. Crider, "The Work Among Kachins" *Burma Baptist Chronicle* (Rangoon: Board of Publications, Burma Baptist Convention 1963), 368-369.

²⁹¹ Ola Hanson, *The Kachins: Their Customs and Traditions*, (Rangoon: American Baptist Mission Press, 1913), 168.

²⁹² *Ibid.* [Rev. Ola Hanson (1864-1929) was well-known as the missionary translator and the inventor of the Kachin literature writing system as well.

the Supreme Being and which can designate that Supreme Being in the Kachin tongue, just as in English the words Creator and Omniscient mean God.²⁹³

Thus, we come to understand *Karai-Kasang* in the two alternative titles: *Phan-Ningsang* as the one who created everything, and *Cheng-Ningchang* as the one who knows everything in the Kachin animistic belief. It is very interesting that the remaining two strange names, *Phan-Sakia* and *Jau-Phara*, are loan words: borrowed from the Burman and the Shan respectively. By *Phan-Sakia*, *Phan* ဖန် in Burmese word means to create and *Thakia* means *Thagya* သီကြီး the *Nat* spirit—i.e. *Thagya Min*. Thus, Gilhodes explains, the combined name *Phan-Sakia* means ‘Creator Spirit’. *Jau-Phra* originated in the Shan name Jau, Zao or Sao meaning ‘chief, master, and lord’; and *Phra* is the same with *Paya* [Buhra ဘုရာ] in Burmese.²⁹⁴

With regard to the animistic worship ritual of the Kachins, Gilhodes comments, “Although all the Kachins know Karai Kasang and hold him as the greatest spirit, yet they do not offer him a worship [...], and the reason of it is that the Nats do harm or can harm [...]”²⁹⁵ Just as their cousin the Chins did not worship *Pathian* in their primal religious system, the Kachins did not worship *Karai-Kasang*. Rather they would surely appease the other

²⁹³ C. Gilhodes, 96.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 100.

evil spirits simply because of fear. Gilhodes advocates for *Karai-Kasang* regarding him as ‘a good being’ in the primal religious system of the Kachins. Eventually, the Kachins worship *Karai-Kasang* in Christianity. Today, a Christian Kachin, in whatever sub-ethnic rate, will surely say in his prayer, “*Wa Karai-Kasang e!*” meaning oh, father God! Alternatively, one may also utter, “*Phan Wa Ningsang e!*” Or, “*Chye Wa Ningchyang!*”

Sir E. R. Leach, a British anthropologist, assumes “the Christian God *Karai-Kasang* seems to have been well assimilated to Kachin ideas; he is *Karai Wa* [meaning Creator Father] and treated as a kind of superior sky nat.”²⁹⁶ Herewith Leach’s analysis of the beliefs and religious system of the Kachin is quite interesting. Leach states, “As might be expected the missions [Protestant missionaries] maintain that the Kachins had the notion of a superior high god from the beginning and *Karai Kasang* is supposed to be the name of this deity.”²⁹⁷ In his words, Leach argues, “If so he [*Karai-Kasang*] was a deity with no myth and an unintelligible name.” Thus, Leach eventually suggests that *Karai-Kasang* the Christian God to be “simply a confused pronunciation of ‘Christian’”.²⁹⁸ Alas! This kind of studies about the semantic correlation between the animistic Supreme Being and the

²⁹⁶ E. R. Leach, *Political Systems of Highland Burma: A Study of Kachin Social Structure* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Univ. Press, First published 1954), 246.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.* Footnote.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

missionary translation in the vernacular language seems to be unintelligible to the Western scholars in anthropology. F. K. Lehman also seems to have no idea about the origin of *Pathian* the Christian God of Chin people. He assumes that the name might have been borrowed and adopted from the *Lushai* without knowing the *Lushai* tribe also is involved in the *Zo* ethnicity. He thus erroneously interprets again here, in his words, “The Chin, perhaps under Christian influence, have also adopted the Lushai word *pathian*, meaning God, as roughly equivalent with *khuazing*.”²⁹⁹ Note that, like the Chins, almost 100% of the Kachins today profess Christianity in the name of *Karai-Kasang* the primal deity.

In the case of the Karen tribe, the Christian Karens today worship God in their traditional name of *Y’wa* the primal deity. Unlike the Burman, as it will be seen, the Karens promptly and almost immediately embraced the gospel message at the first impression. Ko Tha Byu, a recent robber and murderer, converted when he first heard the good news. Ko Tha Byu, just after being baptized, would initiate testifying about his experience and faith to his fellows who were the countrymen dwelling in the jungle. The Karen fellow citizens got a breakthrough by hearing the message of Ko Tha Byu. Why and how did the Karens embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ at their first

²⁹⁹ F. K. Lehman, *Structure of the Chin Society: A Tribal People of Burma Adapted to a Non-Western Civilization* (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1963), 177.

impression? It was because the message they heard from Ko Tha Byu exactly fitted to the traditional mythical story of *Y'wa* their supernatural progenitor who had now been in the celestial places. It is very interesting that the Karen tribe had a rapid religious conversion to Christianity in the name of *Y'wa* the primal deity. The case of Karens, the most advanced in Christianity in Myanmar, they traditionally had some biblical legends even including a story that tells the consequence of eating the forbidden fruit from a tree of death. The legend of *Y'wa* the creator seemed to be helpful for Karens to receive the gospel of the white people. The legend tells there was a creator called *Y'wa* who had seven sons, of whom Karen was the first-born, the white man the youngest. *Y'wa* was to go on a journey and he asked Karen to go along with him. But Karen refused due to having to clear his field. Burman also refused but both Burman and Karen each presented their father a gift. White brother, the youngest one, finally went along with *Y'wa* his father. When they reached the celestial shore, *Y'wa* made a silver and gold mixed book for Karen; a palm-leaf book for Burman and a parchment book for the white man. But *Y'wa* their father and their white brother never came back. Thus, the Karens had been waiting for the day that their white brother might return home. Furthermore, in the Karen legends, *Y'wa* created the first man, then Naw Ee Oo the first woman out of the first man's rib. They were placed in a

garden to serve Y'wa; but due to eating the forbidden fruit as the serpent persuaded, Y'wa cast them out of the garden and they became mortal. Karen legends also told of a great flood and a high tower, and the scattering of men.³⁰⁰

The legend seemed to have a huge influence upon the primitive Karens that they had expectantly been longing for the coming back of their white brother to bring them the book made of silver and gold. The white missionaries found that when they first reached to the Karen hill tribe, the Karen people eagerly responded to the gospel message especially as they saw the Holy Bible with silver or gold lining. Then the missiological discovery was that they “were much easier to convert to Christianity than the Burmese”. Courtney Anderson describes:

They [Karens] were a primitive people. Jungle dwellers, not even accustomed to live in villages, and their simple animistic beliefs offered no such resistance to a highly developed religion as did Buddhism. Christianity could flow into a religious vacuum, so to speak, instead of having to displace an already well organized doctrine.³⁰¹

Here we would argue that the Protestant missionaries' transliteration of the name of God, at any rate, among the hill tribes, is appropriate. One

³⁰⁰ Hillel Halkin, *Across the Sabbath River: In Search of a Lost Tribe of Israel* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002), 31.

³⁰¹ Courtney, Anderson, *To the Golden Shore: The Life of Adoniram Judson*. (Boston: Little & Brown Co., 1956), 401.

obviously sees that Christianity has been expanding in the different vernacular names of God.³⁰² With regard to the study of religious conversion and in search of the Supreme Being among the Karens in their primal religious systems, herewith we recommend three archival books:

- 1) *The Karen People of Burma: A Study in Anthropology and Ethnology* written by Rev. Harry Ignatius Marshall, published in 1922.
- 2) *The Loyal Karen of Burma* written by Donald Mackenzie Smeaton, published in 1887.
- 3) *A Star from the East: An account of American Baptist Missions to the Karen of Burma* written by Rev. Edward Norman Harris, published in 1920.

When the American Protestant missionaries reached the Karen jungle dwellers, there they found three distinct concepts of religion, namely, 1) *Pgho* that is magical power or force; 2) *Hpi Bi Yaw* that is animistic goddess; 3) *Y'wa*, that is the Creator.³⁰³ The Reverend Marshall narrates, “Among the Karen we find traces of three distinct religious conceptions, which have left their impress upon the people.”³⁰⁴ Accordingly, Marshall explains that the Karens believe the deities have *pgho* the power or force to perform wonderful things. A person who performs a magical works is called “*pgha a*

³⁰² There also are other minority ethnic groups among the hill tribes of Myanmar who profess Christianity: for instance, Lisu, Laho, Akha, Pa-O, Wa, etc., who have their own vernacular names of God. The present study has been being challenged to investigate also the other tribal peoples’ religious conversions.

³⁰³ Harry Ignatius Marshall, *The Karen People of Burma: A Study in Anthropology and Ethnology* (Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio State University, 1922), 211.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

pgho” meaning a man of power—*pgho*. In their primal animistic beliefs of religious system, the Karens had numerable spirits with various powers including the goddess [of harvest] *Hpi Bi Yaw*. The Karens, like Chins and Kachins, would appease the spirits “by continual offerings, sacrifices, and tabus [taboos]” as Marshall says. With regard to the animistic religious thought of the Karens, Marshall asserts, “To keep on good terms with these numerable spirits consumes a large part of the time and thought of the Karen.”³⁰⁵ The third and most vital conception of the Karen primal religious system is the belief in existence of a Supreme Being, namely, *Y’wa* in Karen vernacular theistic term. *Y’wa*, according to Marshall is “Eternal One” in the primal beliefs of the Karens. According to him, the Karen animistic beliefs and the *Y’wa* conception was a contrast. *Y’wa* was the creator in the Karen primal religion in which they had the legend of Genesis of the Holy Bible.³⁰⁶

Smeaton remarks, “The Karens are remarkable for believing in one eternal God, Creator of all things, [...]”³⁰⁷ With regard to the primal belief of the Karens, Smeaton advocates, “Their belief in the character and attributes of God is absolutely identical with the teachings of Christianity,

³⁰⁵ Marshall, 211.

³⁰⁶ For detail about *Y’wa* tradition in Karen primal religion, see Marshall, *The Karen People of Burma: A Study in Anthropology and Ethnology* (Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio State University, 1922), 210-222.

³⁰⁷ Donald Mackenzie Smeaton, *The Loyal Karen of Burma* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1887), 178.

and requires no modifications to make it a fully developed Christianity save the teachings of Jesus Christ as the revelation of God and the Savior of Man.”³⁰⁸ He contrasts the primal belief of the Karens with the concept of Buddhist Burmans: “Their conception of the destiny of the human soul is totally different from that of the Burm[an]. The Karen believes that the soul will be actively employed. The Burm[an], who are all Buddhists, believe in *nirvana*, [...]. The Karens believe in a living personal God; the Burman is a blank atheist.”³⁰⁹ It is obvious that Smeaton did not see here the primal belief of supernatural beings and the *Nat*-worship ritual that has been actively practiced so far among the Buddhist Burmans. Then how could the Karens had their belief in the Supreme Being and the *Y’wa* tradition? Did they belong to the lost tribe of Israel? Their primal name of the deity *Y’wa* is very similar to the Hebrew name of *YHWH*. Did then they have a worship ritual to the *Y’wa* in their primal religious system? Rev. Edward Norman Harris argues, “But, although the Karens knew of God [*Y’wa*], they did not worship him.”³¹⁰ Then what was the primal religion of the Karen? To Norman Harris “the religious beliefs of the Karens are a jumble of

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 187.

³¹⁰ Edward Norman Harris, *A Star from the East: An account of American Baptist Missions to the Karen of Burma* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1920), 34.

superstition without system or consistency.”³¹¹ Harris argues, “In fact their ideas are so vague and unrelated that they are frequently twitted by the Burmans with having no religion at all. Whatever they have is pure animism or so-called spirit-worship, [...].”³¹² So then, how could the Karen eagerly embrace the gospel of Christian faith? Eventually, it was interestingly ‘the white brother’ myth that stirred the souls of the Karens up to embrace the gospel message of the Christian faith in their first impression.³¹³

Consequently, the Protestant missionaries took advantages through the traditional myth of Y’wa the Supreme Father who had already been in the celestial places and the ‘white younger brother’ who will be coming back and bringing them two sacred books: a golden sacred book and a silver literature book. Thus, the Karens cordially received the Protestant scripture as the golden sacred book, and the literacy as the silver book of the mythical ‘white brother’. As a result, the preliterate Karens discovered a new religion in the name of Y’wa with a new Karen script elaborated by the Protestant missionaries.³¹⁴

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, 38.

³¹² *Ibid.*

³¹³ Norman Harris calls this “special preparation for the reception of the gospel” in his work. For detailed story of ‘the white brother’ myth, See, Norman Harris, pp. 47-53.

³¹⁴ Sang-Keun Kim and Cope Suan Pau, “Peace Talk as Mission: Protestant Mission and Ethnic Insurgencies in Ethnocratic Buddhist Myanmar Today” *Korean Journal of Christian Studies*, Vol. 84. (The Christian Literature Society of Korea, October 31, 2012), 290.

2. A Reflection on the Protestant Christian Mission among the Burmans

The framework of the missionary translation among the Burman has so far been problematic in the cross-cultural process. Adoniram Judson's employment in the missionary translation of the atheistic divine name *Paya* ဘုရား [Buhra] suffixed with *Th'khin* သခင် meaning lord or master thus the formulated combined name *Paya-Th'khin* ဘုရားသခင် for Christian God has been problematic since the very first impression to the contemporary Burman king at the time. When Judson made his first visit to the well-known Ava palace of the last Burman dynasty, he met King Bagyidaw, who might also perhaps had been called Bagyidaw-Paya, son of Bodaw-Paya, son of Alaung-Paya the founder of Konbaung dynasty.³¹⁵ It was by the end of January 1820 after six and half years of his arrival to Myanmar, that Judson greeted the monarch the first time at the palace. There the first impression of the formulated name for Christian God *Paya-Th'khin* made the emperor furious. Judson, indeed, would attempt to submit a sample translation of the Holy Bible and a gospel track in Burmese vernacular version covered with gold

³¹⁵ The founder of the dynasty was well-known as U Aungzeya, a chief of a village, who became the monarch with the title Alaung-Paya, meaning the becoming or future Buddha. The son of Alaung-Paya, a successor of the dynasty, was named with the title Bodaw-Paya wishing to be Buddhahood. Now, King Bagyidaw also might had been undoubtedly wishing the Buddha-hood as a monarch. Thus, *Paya*, Judson's best choice for the name of God for the Burman encounters with the title of the monarch.

leaf as a petition to the emperor. The Burman monarch, while reading the first two sentences of the tract in his own hand, would dash it on to the floor angrily. What was the reason that the king responded emotionally? It was but obviously due to two facts: 1) the employment of *Htawara-Paya* ထာဝရဘုရား meaning Eternal *Paya* that, Judson formulated and employed as Christian God, made the king lose his temper. Note that there has been neither eternity ထာဝရတရား nor eternal *Paya* ထာဝရဘုရား in the concept of Buddhism; and 2) it also directly encounters with the monarchical title *Paya*—*i.e.* the king ဘုရင် *Bayin* [Buhryin] was regarded as ဘုရား *Paya* [Buhra].

There has been neither eternity nor eternal thing that is permanent in the concept of Buddhism. The tract that Judson petitioned to the king would read something like this: “There is one Being [eternal God ထာဝရဘုရား] who exists eternally; who is exempt from sickness, old age, and death; who is, and was, and will be, without beginning and without end. Besides this, the true God [*Paya-Th’khin* ဘုရားသခင်], there is no other God [*Paya* ဘုရား] [...]”³¹⁶

Thus, the missionary translation of the name of God in Burmese vernacular was obviously confronted and rejected at the first impression of

³¹⁶ Courtney Anderson, *To the Golden Shore: The Life of Adoniram Judson* (Toronto: Little, Brown & Company Ltd., 1956), 251. Also see, Maung Shwe Wa, *Burma Baptist Chronicle* (Rangoon: Burma Baptist Convention, Board of Publication, 1963), 26.

the Buddhist monarch. Nevertheless, the Protestant missionaries stubbornly would employ *Paya-Th'khin* ပုရားသခင် the combined name of the Buddhist atheistic term *Paya* ပုရား with the suffix *Th'khin* as the Christian God. We have seen that *Paya* ပုရား is not a Burmese vernacular term equivalent to the Christian God. It is just the honorary title of the Buddha. Then why did Judson make his choice to employ that formulated name of atheistic term *Paya-Th'khin* ပုရားသခင် to designate the Christian God? Were not there any options to designate the Christian God among the deities of the indigenous religious system? It seems that Judson had to choose *Paya* ပုရား the atheistic masculine term to identify with the name of Christian God since he found no other name for a native Supreme Being in the semantic Burmese vernacular language and their religious system. In other words, there has been no Supreme Being in the Burman Buddhism to be identified with the Christian God. It is therefore obvious that Judson had no other options for the name of Christian God when he began his missionary translation. It seems that eventually he had to employ the atheistic term *Paya* ပုရား regarding the Most High of the Buddhists. The problem is that employing *Paya* ပုရား as the Christian God in missionary translation makes controversial interfaith dialogue with the Buddhist Burman intellectuals. Judson himself had the first experience in his interfaith dialogue with Buddhist intellectuals. Unlike the

hill tribes, every Burman at the time had already socially professed Theravada Buddhism when Judson attempted to make his missionary translation. Obviously, he would surely find that there had been no ideas or no intelligibilities of the existence of a Supreme Being or a Creator in the religious thought of the Buddhist Burmans. Eventually, Judson, in order to prove his gospel message, would claim the existence of an Eternal *Paya*. He then thus formulated a new vocabulary in the semantic Burmese spelling *ထာဝရပုဏ္ဏား*: *Htawarah-Paya* in which *Htawarah* *ထာဝရ* is an adopted Pali vocabulary for eternal/eternity—which the Buddhist Burman intellectuals would have never accepted in interfaith dialogue while he would have approached in person-to-person teaching as his usual method.

Judson categorizes the Burman people into two distinct groups: ‘the orthodox Buddhists and the skeptical “semi-atheists”’. By “semi-atheists”, Judson would mean those who no longer practice the Buddhist rituals but have a kind of beliefs in such “Wisdom.”³¹⁷ Note that the Theravadins do not believe the Buddha as “a person who exists permanently”.³¹⁸ There is no permanent thing in Theravada concept. A reflection of a Buddhist Burman intellectual on the work of Judson and the Protestant missionaries should be

³¹⁷ Maung Shwe Wa, *Burma Baptist Chronicle*, (Rangoon: Burma Baptist Convention, Board of Publication, 1963), 40.

³¹⁸ Phra Sriyansophon, Bhikkhu Sugandha, Paul Dennison ed., *Phra Buddha Dhammacakra* (Bangkok: Phra Buddha Dhammacakra Creation Committee, 2001), 29.

considered here. Dr. Htin Aung, formerly Vice-Chancellor of the University of Rangoon, in his 'forward' message to Hellen G. Trager's book *Burma through Alien Eyes: Missionary Views of the Burmese in the Nineteenth Century*, writes:

Dr. Judson and his missionaries also felt frustrated because they found among the Burmese no religious vacuum which their religion could fill. Since the beginning of their history, the Burmese had professed Buddhism, one of the noblest faiths mankind has ever known; and the Burmese way of life itself had always been under the all pervading influence of Buddhism.³¹⁹

From the perspective of an indigenous Buddhist intellectual, therefore, obviously Judson and his colleagues the pioneering Protestant missionaries were frustrated in their missional failure. Furthermore, with regard to Judson and the Protestant missionary translation, Dr. Htin Aung asserts, "As years passed and their endeavors among the Burmese continued to meet with failure, the missionaries were forced to seek converts in the remoter areas where Buddhism had not penetrated and where the pre-Buddhist religion of animism still prevailed."³²⁰

³¹⁹ Helen G. Trager, *Burma through Alien Eyes: Missionary Views of the Burmese in the Nineteenth Century* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1966), xi.

³²⁰ *Ibid.* Dr. Htin Aung was formerly Vice-Chancellor of the University of Yangon, and Chairman of Burma Historical Commission. He had been to Columbia University in New York in 1964.

Consequently, the response of Buddhist Burman intellectuals to the Christian mission usually sounded like this: “Your religion is good for you, ours for us. You will be rewarded for your good deeds in your way—we in our way.”³²¹ Thus, it is obvious that approaching the ‘heathens’ through their atheistic Theravada faith was ineffective in missionary translation of the Christian faith.

Then in order to designate the Christian theistic God did Judson attempt to find any theistic name of supernatural beings in the animistic beliefs of the Burmans? We do not know if Judson investigated Burmese supernaturalism. It is therefore rather obvious that Judson absolutely ignored supernatural beliefs and its huge practice in the *Nat*-worship ritual among the Buddhists—the indigenous Burmans. What if Judson made his missionary ‘vernacular operation’ targeted to the belief of the existence of supernatural beings in the *Nat*-worship ritual among the Buddhist Burmans? Could then, for instance, *Thagya Min* သိကြာမင်း, the imported Indra of Hindu [Sakka in Pali semantic name], be a candidate for Christian God for the Burman? Kachin and Chin, the Tibeto-Burman-speaking cousins of the Burman, have already converted in Christianity worshipping God in the name of the Supreme Being in their primal religious system. A proper name of a Supreme

³²¹ Helen G. Trager, *Burma through Alien Eyes: Missionary Views of the Burmese in the Nineteenth Century* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1966), 75.

Being is needed for the Christian God among the Burman today. Like Kachin term *Karai-Kasang*, *Phan Wa Ningsang*, *Chye Wa ningchyang*, *Phan tagya*; and Chin term *Pathian*, Karen term *Y'wa*, Christian God needs a new name in Burmese term. It might be *Phan-zin-shin* ဖန်ဆင်းရှင်, directly translated as the creator.

3. Future Possibility of Christian Mission in the Region

The Protestant Christian missionaries had misidentified the divine name of God when they used the atheistic masculine enlightened one as equivalent to God to the Theravada Buddhists in the early nineteenth century. Thus after almost two centuries of employing the atheistic term *Paya* ပုရား as the divine name of God, Christianity in Myanmar has been declining together with its neighboring Theravada countries such as Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia. After some centuries-long Christian mission enterprises,³²² today the twenty-first century sees modern Suvarnabhumi still having a very low percentage of Christianity in her 'land of gold' with Myanmar the golden

³²² Myanmar is going to commemorate next year (2013) the bicentennial anniversary of arrival of her first Protestant missionary to her land. Note that Myanmar Protestant Christianity makes today its population some three percent with majority Chin, Kachin, Karen, and other minority hill tribe ethnic groups. The Christian Burman church has to survive with a handful members who almost disappeared. There are also other minority citizens' churches such as Chinese Methodist, Tamil Baptist, and Telegu Methodist church.

land a 4% Christians (3% Protestants, 1% Catholics); Thailand even a less than 1% (some 0.7%); Laos 1.3%; and Cambodia 2.0% out of tens of millions of her population. The status quo of the Christian percentage in the region shows obviously the need of a new way of Christian mission. At the same time, it also challenges the viability of the old colonial time missionary translations of the Protestant missionaries. In Myanmar, for example, the colonial time name of God *Paya-Th'khin* ဘုရားသခင် has been so far employed throughout the postcolonial era in local Christian mission. Today it seems that Godself needs a new vernacular name so that God shall be introduced anew in this twenty-first century new millennium period in the region. Then God shall find a proper way to access among the Theravadins with a new and proper name. What shall then be a proper name of God for the future Christian mission in Myanmar and neighboring Southeast Asia?

Therefore, herewith regarding the future Christian mission and the cross-cultural missionary translation in the region of Southeast Asia, the present study would like to claim that the colonial name of God should be changed or renamed. *Paya*, *Phra*, *Phayao*, etc. is, in fact, the vernacular name of the Buddha in the region. Not only the name of God, but also the other names of vernacular terms ought to be revised in the cross-cultural 'vernacular operation' for the twenty-first century Christian mission in the

region. A semantic reconfiguration has been in need of today's vernacular language in terms of missionary translation. For example, in Myanmar, angels is translated in its literal meaning as the agents of heaven, namely, *Kaung-gin-t'man* ကောင်းကင်တမန် that is unintelligible in the vernacular Burmese. There is no *Kaung-gin-t'man* ကောင်းကင်တမန်, meaning the angel of heavens, in Burmese vernacular language. Instead, why did Judson not employ *Nat* နတ် the vernacular term for angels who are spirits and resides in the heavenly realms, namely Tavatimsa—“(Trayastrimsa in Sanscrit and Tawadentha in Burmese) Heaven of the old Indian and now Burmese Buddhism”³²³—in the belief of the indigenous primal religious system? There are generally two categories of *Nats*: good *Nats* and evil *Nats* in the animistic Burman belief.³²⁴ If Judson and the American missionaries made a survey on the animistic belief of the indigenous people, then they would have surely discovered Buddhism in Myanmar was a mixed religion with animism in Hinduized culture.

It is interesting about *Thagya Min* သိကြားမင်း, meaning literally king of omniscience—that might be understood as all-knowing and all-hearing spirit, who had been appointed as the chief of the 36 *Nats* the spirits by the first

³²³ Sir Richard C. Temple, *The Thirty-Seven Nats* (London: W. Griggs, 1906), 34.

³²⁴ Angels are known as *Nat-tha* နတ်ဘား or *Nat-thami* နတ်သမီး, masculine and feminine terms respectively in gender in Burmese vernacular language.

monarch Anawrahta in the eleventh century Christian era when Theravada Buddhism was first Burmanized at Bagan city. Together with the *Thagya Min*, the modern Burmese societies in Theravada Buddhism, thus, have 37 lords of *Nats* in traditional rituals. Then what has been the role of the *Thagya Min* in the Burmanized Buddhism? Sir Richard Temple would surely be no doubt to help us understand the role of the King of the *Nats* in the Burmanized Buddhism:

The Pali word *Tavatimsa* means “belonging to the Thirty-Three” and the Thirty-Three compose an Order of supernatural beings with *Sakra*, *i.e.* *Thagya*, as their head, just as he is head of the modern Burmese Order of the Thirty-Seven *Nats*. In another view, which is a confused reference to the old Indian idea of the changing personality from time to time of the chief of a Buddhist heaven, every one of the Thirty-Three is a *Thagya*, and in this view the head of the Thirty-Seven *Nats* for the time being is one of the *Thagyas*.³²⁵

It is obvious that Judson and the Protestant missionaries totally ignored the traditional beliefs of *Nat* in their colonial era cross-cultural missionary translation process. Furthermore, Judson’s Burmese version of the Holy Bible is a Pali-Burmese version translated in the early nineteenth century. Consider that Myanmar church has been still using today the Judson version of Burmese Holy Bible. Judson was distinguished as the ‘Bible missionary’ to the Burmans spending his whole life as Elisha I. Abbott

³²⁵ Sir Richard C. Temple, *The Thirty-Seven Nats* (London: W. Griggs, 1906), 34.

narrates, “He spent almost his life to give the Bible to the heathen in their own tongue.”³²⁶

The Buddhist intellectuals usually regard the Christian missionaries together with the British colonials tried to eliminate the Buddhist faith and religious practice so that the entire nation might be converted in the Christianity. In the perspective of the colonial time and postcolonial period Burman intellectuals, the British colonials had been eliminating their identity and Buddhist faith as we talked previously in Chapter Two. Recently, a Buddhist monk from near Yangon, sent a report to the incumbent president and head of parliament members, with many demands including to resolve the problematic identification of the deities particularly the name of Christian God and the Buddha by using the same term *ဘုရား Paya* or *ဘုရားသခင်. Paya-Th’khin*.³²⁷ The monk complained that since the divine name of Christian God means the creator of the universe, it should not be identified with the lower position of the Buddhist term *Paya* that implies just a masculine super human being, who was just a great teacher, a master and lord. Furthermore, he argues that using the same term *Paya ဘုရား* in the two world religions in

³²⁶ Elisha I. Abbott, “Missionary Sense” in Walter N. Wyeth, *A Galaxy in the Burman Sky* (New York: Ward & Drummond, 1892), 188.

³²⁷ Agga Dhamma, Buddha Gonyi Sasana Saunt-shyout-ye-ah-phweih အရှင် အဂ္ဂဓမ္မ၊ ဗုဒ္ဓဂုဏ်ရည်သာသနာစောင့်ရှောက်ရေးအဖွဲ့, sent a report to the incumbent president and the parliament complaining the use of *ဘုရားသခင် Paya-Th’khin* as Christian God.

Myanmar makes controversies and misunderstanding between the two religions.

Accordingly, we would like to argue that a new name of God is needed for the twenty-first century cross-cultural missionary translation among the Theravadins so that the name of God will be appropriate and intelligible. The present study would like to suggest that the name of God should be translated directly in the literal meaning of the creator to the Theravadins who technically and doctrinally deny the existence of a creator or a Supreme Being. For Myanmar, the name of the Christian God ought to be a kind of *Phan-zin-shin* ဖန်ဆင်းရှင် simply meaning creator in semantic Burmese modern vernacular language. In addition, the Almighty One [Hebrew *El-shaddai*] ought to be translated as *Tago-Shin* တန်ခိုးရှင် meaning the one who has full power and authority.

Like the other parts of the world, Indochina peninsula also has been religiously assimilated throughout the history. Theravada Buddhism has been today's state religion in Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia together with Sri Lanka. In the process of religious assimilation, could there be a re-conversion of religion in the future Indochina peninsula? If so, what will be the possibility of Christianization in these Buddhized nations?

Could it be acceptable to identify God with Bodhisatta the coming Buddha? Christian mission so far has been trying to penetrate modern Suvarnabhumi the land of gold in various mission strategies and tactics for decades. Nevertheless, the land of gold still finds herself technically and dominantly in the Theravada tradition of Buddhism. The peoples, of course generally speaking, according to the traditional belief in Buddhism, have been waiting for the coming of *Maitreya* the Buddha ³²⁸ for millenniums in the tradition. The Buddhist monarchs usually regarded themselves to be *Maitreya* as a savior of the people throughout centuries. Will it be effective to introduce Christ as *Maitreya* [Pali Medeya] the coming Buddha in their belief? Will it be acceptable for the modern Christian mission to identifying Christ the Messiah with *Maitreya* the Buddha? If so, at any rate, Jesus Christ will have to be contextualized in the context of Buddhism in Southeast Asia in order that the Christian mission might have a proper introduction of Christ. Identifying the Christ with the *Maitreya* Buddha who is to come might be possibly an effective strategy for evangelizing the Buddhists. Since the Theravadins expect *Maitreya* Buddha the greatest teacher who is to come,

³²⁸ A Bodhisattva [Pali Bodhisatta] predicted to succeed Shakyamuni as a future Buddha. Some accounts view him as an historical personage who preceded the Buddha in death. He is said to have been reborn in the Tushita Heaven where he is now expounding the Dharma to the heavenly beings in the inner palace. It is said that he will reappear in this world after Shakyamuni's death, attain Buddha-hood, and save the people in Shakyamuni's stead. Notes are taken from *Seeker's Glossary of Buddhism*. p. 355.

identifying Christ Jesus, who had already come and will be coming soon again, with *Maitreya* a Holy One, a Supremely Enlightened One in accord with the prediction of Gautama the Buddha, might be intelligible to the inhabitants of the regions.³²⁹ As Paul Hiebert states, “Fortunately in our era we have had four Buddhas (the last being Sakyamuni) to show us the way, and the fifth is still to come”.³³⁰ Then, could one identify the fifth Buddha with Jesus Christ who claims that he is ‘the way’? If so, particularly for Myanmar, the Burmanized name of the future Buddha *Arimedeya*, *Ari* meaning enemy and *medeya* meaning the one who can love, thus the combined name meaning the one who can love his enemy, would be designated as Christ the savior of souls who are suffering in the endless cycle of the samsara.

Could it be acceptable to form up a kind of Buddha-Christian movement in the Buddhist nations so that it might develop into a religious phenomenon of the Christian faith in the modernized world society? We had seen that the first century Judeo-Christianity had developed from the local societal movement to the World Christianity through the Hellenic culture and

³²⁹ Alex Smith, *Missiological Implications of the Key Contrasts between Buddhism and Christianity*, in David Lim & Steve Spaulding, ed., *Sharing Jesus in the Buddhist World* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2003), 48.

³³⁰ Paul G. Hiebert, “Conversion in Hinduism and Buddhism” in Newton Malony & Samuel Sourthard, ed. *Handbook of Religious Conversion* (Birmingham, Alabama: Religious Education Press, 1992), 17.

thereby assimilated in many different cultures of different peoples. Today Christianity has become a world religion around the globe among different races and tribes in their own regional traditions. Concerning the possible future religion of the modern Suvarnabhumi, perhaps a practice of Christian faith in the indigenous Theravada tradition mixed with supernatural beliefs of Hinduized culture—a kind of Buddho-Christian religious movement—might have to be developed in a process of religious conversion through cultural assimilation.

When Judson made his missionary translation in Burmese vernacular language, he had obviously two options in order to approach the indigenous peoples and their beliefs of religious systems for his ‘vernacular operation’: non-Buddhism or Buddhism; *i.e.* theistic Burmese supernaturalism or atheistic Theravada Buddhism. He preferred the latter totally ignoring the former. Why did Judson ignore the supernatural belief and *Nat*-worship ritual of the Burmans? Perhaps he would surely have studied the supernaturalism of the Burman since the ritual could be seen obviously so far almost everywhere. If he had a deep study in *Nat*-worship in spiritism among the ‘heathen’, then he might have glimpsed at least a little idea to introduce God as a Supreme Being or a Supernatural Being in another name of deity rather than ဘုရားသခင် *Paya-Thakhin*.

Finally, we might agree with King Anawrahta the champion of Theravada Buddhism in the eleventh century Bagan as he remarked, “Men will not come for the sake of the new faith. Let them come for their old gods [Nats] and gradually they will be won over.”³³¹

³³¹ G. E. Harvey, *History of Burma: From the Earliest Times to 10 March 1924 the Beginning of the English Conquest* (London: Thomas Nelson Ltd., New impression 1967), 33.

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