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‘Jesus Is Not A Foreign God’: Baptist Music Making in Burma/Myanmar

Christians in the Southeast Asian country of Burma, also known as Myanmar, make up approximately five percent of the national population. The Christian community of Burma includes both Catholics and Protestants, and the Protestants are divided into many denominations. Baptist Christians are predominant among this group, and they provided most of the ethnographic information upon which this article is based. In the article I argue that twenty-first century Baptists in Burma fulfill both aspects of a “twofold legacy” bequeathed to them by Adoniram Judson, the first Baptist missionary to Burma, and that their fulfillment of this legacy is manifest in their musical practices. I further argue that it has been, and continues to be, to Burmese Baptists’ advantage to emphasize both aspects of this religious legacy, because at various times both aspects have highlighted their affiliation with more powerful groups inside Burma.

Context

Burma is a predominantly Theravada Buddhist country. Scholars generally agree that about eighty percent of the country’s fifty million people identify as Theravada Buddhists, and Theravada Buddhism pervades national public life.¹ Pagodas proliferate in the built environment; they can be found in population centers both large and small. Buddhist monasteries are similarly common, and monks and nuns can be seen daily collecting donations from lay Buddhists in cities and villages across the land. Buddhist holidays punctuate the calendar, and the large majority of families participate in some kind of Buddhist ritual on at least a yearly basis. Unsurprisingly, given the influence of Theravada Buddhism on the country and its people, scholars of Burma have devoted themselves to understanding Buddhism and its

¹ Khua Khai Chin. “The Assemblies of God and Pentecostalism in Myanmar.” In *Asian and Pentecostal: The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia*, ed. Allan Anderson and Edmond Tang. Second edition. (Eugene, OR: Regnum Books International, 2011), 211.

impact.² Work on the intersection of Buddhism and music in Burma is, however, scant.³ Burmese monks do chant Pali scriptures regularly, but both monks and laypeople distinguish this practice from music-making.⁴ In this article, I rely on the general understanding of most Burmese people, which is, that many so-called traditional musics in Burma are, if not explicitly Buddhist in their lyrical content, then at least Buddhist-inflected by their extra-musical associations.

However, the main focus of this article is the diversity of the music-making of Burmese Christians, and specifically, Burmese Baptists. As a small minority of the Burmese population, Christians have received a proportionate amount of attention from scholars of Burma/Myanmar. As recently as 2008, in a review article about the study of religion in Burma, Juliane Schrober wrote that research about Christianity in that country was “altogether absent”.⁵ Schrober was not entirely accurate in her assertion. English-language scholarship dealing with Christianity in Burma includes both scholarly articles and books; notably, a good number of these works were written by indigenous scholars. With that said, Schrober’s statement is on point. To date, relatively little has been written about Burmese Christians; not much of that literature is ethnographically-based, and none of it is about music.

The literature on Burmese Christianity has focused largely on the history of conversion to the faith. Catholicism has been present in Burma since the sixteenth century, but for the first two hundred years it was limited to the Bayingyi ethnic group, who were the descendents of

² For example: Matthew Walton, *Buddhism, Politics, and Political Thought in Myanmar* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Juliane Schrober, *Modern Buddhist Conjunctures in Myanmar: Cultural Narratives, Colonial Legacies, and Civil Society* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai’i Press, 2011); Ingrid Jordt, *Burma’s Mass Lay Meditation Movement: Buddhism and the Cultural Construction of Power* (Southeast Asia Series No. 115. Athens, OH: Ohio University Research in International Studies, 2007); Gustaaf Houtman, *Mental Culture in Burmese Crisis Politics: Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy*. Monograph Series No. 33 (Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa (ICLAA), 1999); Melford Spiro, *Buddhism and Society: A Great Tradition and Its Burmese Vicissitudes* (New York, NY: Harper and Row Publishers, 1970).

³ Paul D. Greene, Keith Howard, Terry Miller, Phong T. Nguyen, and Hwee-San Tan. “Buddhism and the Musical Cultures of Asia: A Critical Literature Survey,” *The World of Music* 44 no. 2 (2002): 154.

⁴ Paul Greene, “The Dhamma as Sonic Praxis: Paritta Chant in Burmese Theravada Buddhism,” *Asian Music* 35 no. 2 (Spring-Summer 2004): 45.

⁵ Juliane Schrober, “Communities of Interpretation in the Study of Religion in Burma,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 39 no. 2 (June 2008): 265-266.

Portuguese sailors who settled in Burma and brought their faith with them.⁶ Baptist missionaries arrived in the early nineteenth century and soon began converting local people to the Christian faith. Adoniram Judson was chief among these missionaries; he was the first to translate the Bible into Burmese and he wrote an English-Burmese dictionary that is still in use today. Judson was so influential in perpetuating Christianity in Burma that historians summarize the first fifty years of Protestant missionizing in Burma as “the Judson era in Burma missions.”⁷ In twenty-first century Burma, Burmese Baptists continue to name their churches, seminaries, and even baby boys after Judson. He died in 1850, but the pattern of conversion that emerged during his lifetime persists today. Although Judson aimed to convert Burmese-speaking Burmans - the ethnic group known as *Myanmar lu-myo* in the Burmese language - his efforts bore fruit mostly among members of ethnic minority groups who spoke Burmese as a second language, if at all.⁸ At present, very few Burmans are Christians, and the anti-British slogan that gained popularity in the early twentieth century - “To be Burman is to be Buddhist” - is still largely accurate.⁹

On the other hand, more than ninety percent of people in Burma’s Chin and Kachin ethnic groups now identify as Protestant Christians, as do a large percentage of those who self-identify as Karen, and most of them are Baptists.¹⁰ Members of ethnic minority groups have, since early in “the Judson era,” served as missionaries to their countrymen. Ko Tha Byu, a Karen man converted to Christianity by Judson, is the pre-eminent example; he is remembered as a great evangelist, and he too is memorialized in the name of a seminary in southern Burma. Another Karen missionary, Maukeh, is credited with converting some of the very first Kachin

⁶ Marip Ja Naw, “Myanmar,” in *A Dictionary of Asian Christianity*, ed. Scott W. Sunquist (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 574.

⁷ Samuel Hugh Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia, volume II: 1500 to 1900* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 330. See also Maung Shwe Wa, *Burma Baptist Chronicle*. (Rangoon, Burma: Board of Publications, Burma Baptist Convention, 1963), 127.

⁸ Maung Shwe Wa, *Burma Baptist Chronicle*, 132-133.

⁹ Spiro, *Buddhism and Society*, 19-20; see also Schrober, *Modern Buddhist Conjunctures*, 2. Buddhism is ethnically marked in many parts of Asia, and Buddhist temples, like churches, often have specific ethnic affiliations; see Thomas Borchert, “The Buddha’s Precepts on Respecting Other Races and Religions?: Thinking About the Relationship of Ethnicity and Theravada Buddhism,” *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 29 no. 3 (November 2014): 601.

¹⁰ La Seng Dingrin, “Conversion to Mission Christianity among the Kachin of Upper Burma 1877-1972,” in *Asia in the Making of Christianity: Conversion, Agency and Indigeneity, 1600s to the Present*, ed. Richard Fox Young and Johnathan A. Seitz (Boston, MA: Brill, 2013), 109; Lian H. Sakhong, *In Search of Chin Identity: A Study of Religion, Politics and Ethnic Identity in Burma* (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 2003), 225.

Christians.¹¹ Indigenous missionary work became all-important in Burma in 1966, because it was in that year that the military junta - which would control the national government for the next five decades - ordered all foreigners to leave.¹² Christian churches and para-church organizations survived the military regime, and they have continued to engage in mission work inside Burma. Today, most missionaries in Burma self-identify as members of ethnic minority groups; they are mostly Karen, Kachin, and Chin (and I have met Christian leaders who self-identify as Wa, Shan, and other ethnicities). They focus on working within their own ethnic communities, and also evangelize their non-Christian neighbors, including the Burman Buddhists who constitute the majority population.¹³

Indigenous Christians now lead all Burmese churches and Christian organizations; the Baptists do so while understanding themselves to be the spiritual descendants of Adoniram Judson. La Seng Dingrin is a Kachin Baptist; he is also a scholar of his own faith and his own country.¹⁴ Dingrin persuasively asserts that he and his fellow Burmese Christians are the heirs to a “twofold legacy” left to them by Judson.¹⁵ Dingrin argues that this twofold legacy was a “conflicting legacy” caused by Judson’s “simultaneous rejection of Burmese Buddhism and his recognition of its indispensability”.¹⁶ The conflict consists of the seemingly contradictory instructions that Judson gave to converts, instructions implied by both his words and his lived example. One the one hand, Judson taught that converts should discard Buddhist ideas and

¹¹ La Seng Dingrin, “Conversion to Mission Christianity,” 125.

¹² Although all foreign Christian missionaries were expelled in 1966, it seems that Christians - usually from Anglo countries - continued to visit the country with evangelical intent. I have been conducting fieldwork in Burma since 2007, and in that time I have met such people serving, for example, as guest teachers at seminaries and as guest preachers in churches. In 2018, I encountered a couple who stated that they were “undercover missionaries” in Burma.

¹³ This concern is evident in the titles of dissertations written by Burmese Christians who have completed doctoral degrees in the United States. See Tint Lwin, *Contextualization of the Gospel: an effective strategy for the evangelization of Theravada Buddhists in Myanmar* (Ph.D. dissertation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary), 1997; Lazarus Fish, *Reclaiming the zayat ministry: Witness to the Gospel among Burmese Buddhists in Myanmar* (Ph.D. dissertation, Asbury Theological Seminary), 2002; Ma Na Ling, *A Christian Witnessing Strategy to Theravada Buddhist of Migrant Burmese Workers in Singapore* (D. Min. dissertation, Union University, 2017).

¹⁴ La Seng Dingrin, “Conversion to Mission Christianity,” 111.

¹⁵ La Seng Dingrin, “The Conflicting Legacy of Adoniram Judson: Appropriating and Polemicizing against Burmese Buddhism,” *Missiology: An International Review* 37, no. 4 (October 2009b): 485.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 485.

behaviors and instead adopt Christian beliefs and practices. On the other hand, Judson relied on the Burmese language and the Buddhist worldview to communicate with Burmans. For example, Judson used the word *paya* as the translation for the word God; in Burmese this refers to sacred things, but not a supernatural creator. For the Christian concept of God's grace, Judson used a Pali word that refers to the Buddhist concept of transferring merit.¹⁷ Dingrin relies on Judson's Tracts 1 and 3 for his analysis, pointing out that while Judson argued in these tracts that Buddhism should be completely rejected, he depended on the Burmese language and the Buddhist worldview to convey his message; between them the two tracts contain eighty Burmese Buddhist terms. Dingrin concludes that Judson's legacy teaches Burmese Christians two conflicting lessons: that they must disassociate themselves from Buddhism, but also, that familiarity with Buddhist thought is "indispensable" to missionary work in Burma.¹⁸

My own argument is that while Judson did leave a twofold legacy, he and his spiritual descendants have not understood it as a "conflicting legacy," but rather as two different impulses which can be pursued simultaneously. Judson himself experimented with different ways to enact both parts of the legacy he was building. For example, he established a Baptist church in Yangon (then called Rangoon) which followed the American Baptist liturgy; he also wore Buddhist monk's robes for a time, and built a *zayat*, which is a resting place for travelers, especially Buddhist monks.¹⁹ Later missionaries fulfilled Judson's twofold legacy in various ways; generally they focused on the first part of it, requiring Christian converts to completely disassociate themselves from their former Buddhist or animist beliefs and practices, and to worship in the ways established in Western Anglo countries.²⁰ But in at least one case that has recently come to light, a nineteenth-century missionary fulfilled the second part of Judson's legacy. Marilla Baker Ingalls, who served as a Baptist missionary in Burma from 1851 to 1902,

¹⁷ Ibid., 487. For a complete explanation of merit and its significance in Theravada Buddhism, see Charles Keyes, "Merit Transference in the Kammic Theory of Popular Theravada Buddhism," in *Karma: An Anthropological Inquiry*, ed. Charles F. Keyes and E. Valentine Daniel (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1983), 261-286.

¹⁸ La Seng Dingrin, "Is Buddhism Indispensable in the Cross-Cultural Appropriation of Christianity in Burma?" *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 29 (2009a): 4.

¹⁹ Maung Shwe Wa, *Burma Baptist Chronicle*, 10 and 15. See also Fish, *Reclaiming the zayat ministry*, 2002.

²⁰ Charles Brant and Mi Mi Khaing, "Missionaries among the Hill Tribes of Burma," *Asian Survey* 1 no. 1 (March 1961): 49.

evangelized villagers in the southern part of the country by using Buddhist objects and symbology. She erected a life-size statue of a dog in her yard and hung a banyan tree with many photos; these objects - or “idols” as Ingalls would have called them - proved extraordinarily popular and attracted many Buddhists to the Baptist faith. Historian Alexandra Kaloyanides asserts that “in this way, Ingalls’ Baptist Christianity became a kind of Burmese religion.....With its famous statue and adorned banyan tree, [Ingalls’ Baptist] congregation must have seemed both familiar and new, both a religion with revered objects and a religion of recently arrived and increasingly powerful foreigners.”²¹ Put another way, Ingalls communicated with Buddhists on their own terms, depending on their Buddhist ways of understanding.

Today, Burmese Baptists fulfill Judson’s two-fold legacy by adopting a bifurcated stance which is clearly manifest in their musical practices. During Sunday morning services (and at other times when they gather corporately), they participate in music inherited directly from nineteenth-century missionaries and in more recent music created in the Christian West. Sunday-morning musicking represents Baptists’ strong affiliation with religious ideas and musical sounds that are utterly differentiated from Burmese Buddhist (or Buddhist-inflected) musical sounds and practices. By contrast, during outdoor evangelical concerts the other part of Judson’s legacy is fulfilled; during these concerts Burmese Baptists perform Buddhist-inflected song and dance genres in order to communicate the Christian message to Burman Buddhists, using performing arts that have long been the province of Buddhists.

Baptist Worship in Burma: Affiliating with the Christian West

Burmese Baptists engage in a variety of music-making endeavors which are intended for the religious edification of their fellow congregants. These endeavors include collective singing, the creation of high fidelity recordings, and presentational performances of instrumental, choral, and dance pieces.²² In all of these musical endeavors, Burmese Baptists listen to and participate in musical genres developed in the Christian West, thereby demonstrating their affiliation with a faith originally introduced to them by the American Adoniram Judson.

²¹ Alexandra Kaloyanides, “‘Show Us Your God’: Marilla Baker Ingalls and the Power of Religious Objects in Nineteenth-Century Burma,” *Religions* 7, no. 7, article 81 (2016): 3 and 17.

²² Thomas Turino, *Music As Social Life: The Politics of Participation* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 25-26.

Burmese Baptists participate in communal singing when they gather corporately, usually on Sunday mornings and afternoons, but also at denominational and para-church conferences. As I have repeatedly observed, people of all ages and genders present at these events participate in the collective singing, usually with enthusiasm and robust volume. Much of the congregational singing that I have observed (and have participated in myself) during Sunday services consists of hymn tunes taken directly from nineteenth-century American and British hymnals, sung now in the language of the majority of the congregants; music theorists call such songs contrafacta. Four-part hymn singing has been such a central part of Burmese Baptist life for so long that Burma is also home to indigenous hymn composers, and their works too are sung by groups of Baptists all over the country. Here is a video of typical congregational singing in a Burmese Baptist church: [LINK TO VIDEO HERE]

Here is a video showing a Burmese Baptist church choir singing a contrafactum of the Western hymn “Amazing Grace”: [LINK TO VIDEO HERE]

During the past two decades, and especially during the past five years, Burmese Baptists and their fellow Protestant Christians (especially Methodists and Pentecostals) have embraced praise and worship music, and this is now a beloved form of communal singing in many Burmese churches. In some Baptist congregations, praise and worship music still represents something new and possibly controversial. Indeed, praise and worship leaders I met talked about negotiating with their pastors for permission to perform this kind of music in their churches.²³ It is perhaps for this reason that praise and worship music seems to be most common at Sunday afternoon services, which are often dedicated to young people, and at conferences which occur independent of the weekly life of the church. Burmese praise and worship music looks and sounds just like the contemporary worship music which originated in Nashville, Tennessee recording studios in the 1970s and has since been embraced around the world: the music embraces the pop-rock aesthetic. It is accompanied by the usual rock band instruments (a drum kit, an electric keyboard, a bass guitar, and electric guitars); the main melody is sung by the song leader, who also frequently exhorts the congregation and leads them in prayer, and additional singers often sing in harmony with the main melody. The song leader is almost always a young and attractive man, and he and his bandmates, also usually young men, always wear casual

²³ Sonia Khaing, interview, March 2, 2018; field notes, February 18, 2018.

Western-style clothing, such as blue jeans.²⁴ While praise and worship music presents itself as a global phenomenon, in its local manifestations, such as in Burma/Myanmar, it usually adheres closely to its North American origins. Here is a video of a Burmese-language praise and worship service: [LINK TO VIDEO HERE]

Along with their fellow Burmese Christians, Baptists also create high fidelity recordings. They share these recordings, which simulate the live experience of a church service, via social media, usually on Facebook (and hundreds of them can be found on Youtube). “The ideal form of high fidelity music involves the actual recording of live performances in a ceremony or concert to be heard [and] seen at a later time as a representation of that event.”²⁵ The praise and worship music video cited above includes a number of images of camera operators both on the stage and at the front of dancing crowd; these operators were evidently engaged in making a high fidelity recording of this worship service. Such recordings can be enjoyed by individuals outside of the collective meeting times, allowing them to engage in a deeply meaningful ritual by listening to, or singing along with, the recordings. The category of high fidelity recordings also includes “studio recordings that are meant to represent what [a group of musicians] actually does, or could ideally do.”²⁶ Burmese Christians create representational high fidelity recordings, too. Here is one example: [LINK TO VIDEO HERE]

In this video we see a group of Christians gathered in a circle, listening reverently to the soloist; eventually they stand in unison and join him in singing, some with hands raised in the air. The performers’ behavior is intended to represent worshipful actions by Christians at a praise and worship service; the recording is a representation of an ideal, rather than a recording of live event. This is most evident in the fact that the worshippers have not only rehearsed the moment when they get to their feet, but when they stand, they sing into microphones which were previously set in place to amplify their voices. This high fidelity recording shows once again that Burmese praise and worship music is deeply influenced by its North American roots, as exemplified in the gender and age of the song leader and the other singers, and their Western

²⁴ Monique M. Ingalls, *Singing the Congregation: How Contemporary Worship Music Forms Evangelical Community* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018), 210-212.

²⁵ Turino, *Music as Social Life*, 67.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 67.

cosmopolitan garb. Some of the singers' t-shirts have English-language wording, which underlines the fact that the putatively-international tradition which they are performing in their high fidelity recording has an Anglo origin.

Third, Burmese Baptists are deeply involved in presentational music performance, which “refers to situations where one group of people, the artists, prepare and provide music for another group, the audience, who do not participate in making the music or dancing.”²⁷ It is striking how much presentational music occurs in Burmese Baptist churches, at virtually every service, but especially during the best-attended services on Sunday mornings. At one representative service, at a Karen Baptist church on January 28, 2018, I heard the church choir sing an anthem in English (“Travelling With Jesus”), followed by a group of teenagers who sang to a recorded track, a soloist who accompanied himself on guitar, another soloist who sang to a recording, and finally a group of seminary students who sang a hymn in four-part harmony. All of this presentational musicking took place during a service that lasted about 1.5 hours. Presentational music is such a prominent part of Baptist church services that, at the largest and best-resourced churches in central Yangon, certain services function like concerts for Buddhists who would not otherwise attend. As I have explained elsewhere, Christians are overrepresented in Burma’s professional popular music industry, and many of them perform presentational solos at the churches they grew up in.²⁸ Burmese pop music fans know that, for example, Chit San Maung, the most renowned rock guitarist in the country, is a faithful member of the Young Crusaders church in North Yangon and can be heard playing there at the 4:00 pm service on Sundays.²⁹ Phyu Phyu Kyaw Thein, one of the most successful pop singers in Burma, still sings solos during the 8:00 am service at Immanuel Baptist Church in central Yangon, and fans know they can hear her sing for free if they are willing to attend the church service.

Most rank-and-file Burmese Baptists perform presentational music at their churches. Some are grouped into music-specific ensembles, most often choirs. Church choirs and seminary-based choirs form such an important part of Baptist life in Burma that they regularly

²⁷ Ibid., 26.

²⁸ Heather MacLachlan, *Burma's Pop Music Industry: Creators, Distributors, Censors* (Rochester, NY: Rochester University Press, 2011), 21.

²⁹ Ibid., 99-100.

meet to compete.³⁰ However, I have also observed string orchestras, wind bands, bamboo flute bands, a group of soprano recorder players, and a so-called traditional ensemble that plays hymn tunes on “traditional” instruments (including a mandolin and a one-string upright bass). In addition, every conceivable grouping of people within a congregation assembles to present a song on a semi-regular basis. I have observed all of the following groups performing during Sunday services: men’s fellowship, women’s fellowship, youth group, Sunday school students, seminary students, summer campers, and home cell groups (“home cell” is the Burmese-English term for a neighborhood-based Bible study and prayer group). I have observed these kinds of presentational performances not only in large urban churches but also in smaller congregations, in a tiny church in the Bagan region, and in diaspora churches in Canada and the United States. It is not an exaggeration to say that members of every demographic group in a Burmese Baptist congregation – if not absolutely all the members of that congregation – are expected to present music during their church’s services, and they do so without fail. This expectation applies to foreign researchers as well when they visit, as I can attest. During my very first visit to three different Burmese Baptist churches, I was asked to either play the piano or sing as part of a presentational performance.

Presentational performance sometimes includes dance, as is evident in this video of a Baptist Women’s Fellowship group performing at a Sunday service: [LINK TO VIDEO HERE]

Another example of presentational musicking by rank-and-file church members is here: [LINK TO VIDEO HERE]

Note that the above video was labeled as “Singles” by the person who posted it on Youtube. Evidently this is a group of unmarried people in a congregation. The second example demonstrates that some of the church members are somewhat uncomfortable with the expectation that they present music, but they nevertheless gamely rise with their peers to do so. It is well accepted by Burmese Baptists that church members will perform even if they have insufficiently rehearsed, or never rehearsed at all. It is because this expectation is so broad and

³⁰ Alexander Horstmann, “Sacred Networks and Struggles among the Karen Baptists across the Thai-Burma Border” *Moussons* 17 (2011): paragraph 34; Sonia Khaing, interview, March 2, 2018.

clear that I have agreed when I have been invited – or rather, pressed – to join in presentational musicking before congregations which were completely new to me.

The ubiquity of presentational performance in Burmese Baptist churches begs an explanation. I argue that Burmese Baptists, like Christians everywhere, are influenced by the context in which they live. That is to say, they share the Theravada Buddhist ethos of the majority of their fellow citizens. Specifically, they share their Buddhist neighbors' valuing of self-reliance.³¹ This is an enormously important Buddhist priority – not the only idea in the rich tradition that is Buddhism, but a prominent and life-directing orientation nonetheless. For Buddhists, one's situation in the present, as well as one's station in life when reincarnated, is entirely dependent on one's own efforts to make merit and thereby to attain good karma. I have observed this belief in, and indeed confidence in, one's own abilities manifest in a variety of ways among Burmese people. For example, among the class of eighteen adult students I taught at a Yangon university in 2018, not one of them said that they wanted to eventually work for a non-governmental organization (NGO), or at a school, or for a political party. Rather, all of them said that they planned to start their own NGO, or their own school, or their own political party. Another example: among the dozens of pop musicians I interviewed for a book I published in 2011, the large majority said that they taught themselves how to sing and play by listening to recordings, rather than by taking lessons.³²

The idea that one must rely on oneself – indeed, the need to do so – was greatly exacerbated for all Burmese people alive today beginning in 1962, when a military junta took control of the national government. The junta extolled a socialist ideology, but in fact served only itself, with the result that Burma became, over the course of the past sixty years, one of the poorest and least-developed countries in the world. The lack of a social welfare net forced ordinary citizens to turn to themselves for basic services, such as paving of roads, provision of electricity, and acquisition of education.³³ For Burmese Christians, the need to rely on their own

³¹ Ardeth Thawngmung, *Everyday Economic Survival in Myanmar* (Chicago, IL: University of Wisconsin Press, 2019), 100. The valuing of self-reliance, especially at the community level, is being reinforced by state officials who determine whether local communities are eligible for development aid and poverty alleviation funds by evaluating their apparent “self-reliance” (Gerard McCarthy, “Democratic Deservingness and Self-Reliance in Contemporary Myanmar,” *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 34, no. 2 (July 2019): 329).

³² MacLachlan, *Burma's Pop Music Industry*, 75.

³³ *Ibid.*, 71.

resources was amplified when the junta forced all foreign missionaries to leave the country in 1966. At that point, many people who had founded (and still led) churches, seminaries and hospitals in Burma departed, and local Christians took charge of all of their own churches and ministry organizations. It is in this context of both valuing and needing to be self-reliant that presentational music making occurs. In Burmese Baptist churches, musical performance is not solely the province of people identified as musicians. It is everyone's responsibility – and therefore, it is assumed that everyone can and will do it. Congregants do not expect that presentational performances during church services will be, or even ought to be, a job for designated music specialists. They are delighted to listen to such specialists, but they share equally in the task of making music, relying on themselves to present performances each and every Sunday.

To summarize: congregational singing, high fidelity recordings, and presentational music-making among Burmese Baptists constitute a fulfillment of the first part of Judson's twofold legacy. Each of these fields of artistic practice involves musical genres which originated in English-speaking Western countries, and sometimes, specific hymns and praise and worship songs are even sung in the original English. The sounds of Burmese Baptists' various musics could not be more different from those musical sounds most closely associated with Burmese national identity - and by extension, with Buddhism. Christian music, all derived from Western sources, stands in complete contrast to the *Maha Gita*, the "great music" of Burma's classical tradition. The instruments in these two traditions have very different timbres, the nasal vocal production prized by classical singers is unknown among Christian singers, and the textures of the two traditions are utterly different (because Christian music uses triadic harmony while the *Maha Gita*'s repertoire is always performed heterophonically).³⁴ In their corporate music making, Burmese Baptists affiliate themselves completely with sounds originating in the homelands of Anglo Christian missionaries - and thereby, they fulfill the first part of Judson's twofold legacy.

Baptist Evangelism in Burma: Using Buddhist-Inflected Musical and Performance Genres

³⁴ Gavin Douglas, *Music in Mainland Southeast Asia* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010), 43.

Burmese Baptists began to cross the musical boundaries between themselves and their Buddhist countrymen in the mid-1970s. Saw Hlaing Bwa, a great proponent of interfaith dialogue proposed and then spearheaded an evangelization project centered on performances of musical and theatrical genres linked to Buddhists.³⁵ The project continues to this day; a relatively small group of Burmese Baptists, almost all of whom self-identify as Karen, create and perform comedic song and dance revues, called *anyeint*, and classical dance, and *mono* songs (which are a hybrid of classical song and Western instrumental accompaniment), and *doba thachin* (which is a kind of call-and-response folk singing).³⁶ During fieldwork I conducted in Burma in 2018, I was able to document instances of each these genres being performed by Christians for the purpose of preaching the Christian gospel to Buddhist audiences. In each case, the traditional musical sounds and the visual components, such as costumes, were reproduced faithfully; however, the spoken and sung words of the performances focused on the existence of a Creator God, humanity's need for a savior, and Jesus Christ (called *Yeshu Krit-daw* in Burmese) as the answer to that need.

I argue that the “traditional” genres listed in the above paragraphs, some of which date back hundreds of years, are Buddhist-inflected - that is, they are strongly associated with Theravada Buddhism and with its practitioners. I make this argument with the full acknowledgement that the lyrics in traditional Burmese stage performance do not always explicitly proclaim Buddhist ideas. They often do so, however, and this is documented in the small literature about these art forms. The biography of Po Sein, arguably the leading figure in traditional Burmese stage performance in the twentieth century, reveals that he “included the teaching of the Buddha in the words of his songs, openly propagating religion from the stage, a practice accepted by his audiences without question.”³⁷ Furthermore, stage performances like *anyeint* have always, and continue to be, performed by Burmese Buddhists at events related to

³⁵ Sayama K. Ja Nu, interview, March 26, 2018. Saw Hlaing Bwa, “Why Interfaith Dialogue is Essential for Myanmar’s Future,” *Review of Faith and International Affairs* 13 no. 4 (December 2015): 71-78.

³⁶ It is perhaps unsurprising that Karen people are pre-eminent in evangelizing efforts. Karen Baptists have manifested a “culture of evangelism” since the very earliest years of Karen conversion to Christianity. Yoko Hayami, “Karen Culture of Evangelism and Early Baptist Mission in Nineteenth Century Burma,” *Social Sciences and Missions* 31 no. 3-4 (2018): 262.

³⁷ Kenneth Sein and J. A. Withey, *The Great Po Sein: a Chronicle of the Burmese Theater*. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1965), 67.

the practice of Buddhism. The *anyeint* performance which is analyzed below includes, for example, the U Shway Yoe and Daw Moe dance. This dance is often performed by villagers during a *shin-byu*, which is the celebration of a novice being initiated as a Buddhist monk.³⁸ As scholars of Buddhism acknowledge, the *shin-byu* is “by far the most important of all Burmese Buddhist ceremonies.”³⁹ The example below also includes a kind of antiphonal chanting called *than-ja*, which is prominent during the Buddhist New Year celebrations in April, a time of year when many Buddhists renew their commitment to Buddhism by going on meditation retreats and making special donations.⁴⁰ Given all of these extra-musical associations, Burmese people, both Christians and Buddhists, understand such genres to be strongly Buddhist-inflected, if not inherently Buddhist.⁴¹ Not only are such performances linked with events that are deeply important to Buddhists, they have - until recently - always been performed by Buddhist people.

When Burmese Baptists perform these Buddhist-inflected genres during evangelical concerts, they communicate the Christian gospel using (what are understood to be) Buddhist sounds and conventions. Said another way, in so doing they fulfill the second part of Judson’s legacy, relying on Buddhist ideas and conventions to convey the Christian message to Buddhists. To exemplify how they do so, I offer an analysis of one *anyeint* performance that occurred in Yangon, Burma’s largest city, in the Aung San Stadium, in 2013. The video of the performance is here: [LINK TO VIDEO HERE]

Anyeint has not been much studied by English-language scholars; Robert Garfias’ brief description, published in 1975, remains authoritative: “The *anyeint* makes use of a small group of players dominated by the *anyeint* herself, a woman who is a singer and dancer and who requires the help of auxiliary actors, most especially a number of clowns.”⁴² The male clowns

³⁸ Field notes, March 21, 2018.

³⁹ Spiro, *Buddhism and Society*, 234; Keyes, “Merit Transference,” 273; Charles Brant, *Tadagale: A Burmese Village in 1950: Data Paper number 13* (Ithaca: NY: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1954), 21 and 24.

⁴⁰ Ward Keeler, “What’s Burmese about Burmese rap?: why some expressive forms go global.” *American Ethnologist* 36 no. 1 (February 2009): 3.

⁴¹ Field notes, February 8, 2018.

⁴² Robert Garfias, “A Musical Visit to Burma,” *The world of music* 17 no. 1 (1975): 7; see also Sein and Withey, *The Great Po Sein*, 43-44 and Tasaw Lu Hsin-chun, “The Burmese Classical Music Tradition: An Introduction.” *Fontes Artis Musicae* 53 no. 3 (July-September 2009): 265.

talk and joke and engage in mock dancing; the *anyeint* herself then sings and dances, and the entirety of this rather short performance is accompanied by the Burmese classical orchestra, the *hsaing waing*. The *anyeint* performance contained in the cited video begins with two stock characters, well known to Burmese people; the man is called U Shway Yoe and the woman, the *anyeint* dancer, is Daw Moe. The U Shway Yoe and Daw Moe dance is invariably comedic in intent, with the male character being the butt of the joke. After about thirty seconds, the video shows two young men performing another Burmese folk tradition; this is called *than-ja*. *Than-ja* is a call-and-response rhythmic chant in steady duple meter; during the past two centuries it has been used as a praise chant in the royal courts, for flirting during agricultural rituals, and in festival performances.⁴³ In the cited performance, the *than-ja* chanters play the role of the clowns. This performance was accompanied by a recording rather than a live orchestra, but the instrumental sounds clearly and consistently index the Burmese classical music tradition, which originated during the pre-colonial era when Theravada Buddhism was dominant in Burma, embraced by the majority of the population and propagated by Burmese kings. Here is the translation of the complete text of the *anyeint* performance:

0:01 We want to welcome these famous people, U Shway Yoe and Daw Moe.
 There are two famous people in the center of town; we want to call them onto the stage.
 They are Nidaw and Naungdaw [*names of than-ja chanters*]

0:30 We want to tell the good news of Jesus to the people.
 We want everyone to know how God helped us.
 We want to call the two famous people from the center of the village for this special occasion,
 To tell all the people in the audience how God helped us, G-O!

1:08 We will tell people about U Shway Yoe; he is famous. His eyebrows are shaped like the moon.
 Come here, U Shway Yoe! [*3 times*]
 Here comes Daw Moe. U Shway Yoe loves her.
 Daw Moe is the best, she's good, we love her. Here comes Daw Moe!

2:05 [*Daw Moe sings*], I will call him Ko Ko – Ko Ko Shway Yoe and Maung Maung Shway Yoe.
 Did you not miss me? I missed you but no one called me.
 I was waiting for you, trying to find out where you were.
 You were acting shy. You didn't want to talk. In front of others, you were talkative.
 But I missed you! I'm your wife, I wanted to die!

2:30 This is how human beings began. Adam and Eve from the beginning didn't listen to God.
 They broke the commandments. Because of their disobedience, their punishment is death.

⁴³ Keeler, "What's Burmese about Burmese rap?", 3.

Where will your soul go after you die?
 In a day or a moment, can you do a good deed? What can you do to earn merit?
 Non-meritorious actions outweigh merit.

3:00 Because bad deeds accumulate, you can't do enough good [make enough merit] in front of God.
 You have to do everything on your own [you are responsible for yourself].
 What is it that you have? You have the air we breathe. It's proof that He [God] created you.
 So brothers and sisters, let me ask you a question.
 You have anger, lust, and ego. Where will you go when you die?
 Since we - all human beings - are sinners, the only place we will go is hell.
 If you do one good deed [make merit once], you will do 100 bad deeds.
 If you do two good deeds [make merit twice], you will do 200 bad deeds.
 If you do three good deeds [make merit three times], you will do 300 bad deeds.
 If you donate a lot of money, but with evil intention, you will earn a small amount of merit and one whole viss of demerits.⁴⁴

3:30 traditional dance

4:25 Come, come, hey, hey! Let's sing praise songs while dancing and singing. [*repeat*]

4:50 Don't lose hope, O human, don't lose hope, here, here.
 In order to save humans, there is a way to go to the right path.
 But we, human beings, have lust, anger and ego. So, if we die we can't go to heaven.
 Finally, a savior came to tell us the gospel.
 Since we can't be saved by practice [by actions] we must be saved by the gospel.
 A God, a real God, came to earth in disguise.
 He came to wash away your sins and our sins.
 We have to face death, we cannot escape it.
 Because tomorrow is unsure [*repeat*].
 Don't say "No" to salvation [*repeat*].
 If you believe in Christ, you can go to heaven.
 We should accept this, before it's too late [*4 times*].

5:50 Shake, shake, Shway Yoe, and dance with Daw Moe.
 Shake, shake, Daw Moe, and dance with Shway Yoe.
 Give Daw Moe a kiss. Give Shway Yoe a kiss. [*repeat*]

These lyrics are Buddhist-inflected, because they repeatedly reference two characters strongly associated with Buddhist celebrations, U Shway Yoe and Daw Moe. And they are also explicitly Buddhist, in that they take for granted that human beings earn merit in correspondence with each of their righteous actions.⁴⁵ For example, donating money is an obvious way to earn merit (although, if one does so with evil intention, this action will result in demerits). Furthermore, merit making has eternal consequences: as Theravada Buddhists would agree, if one's demerits ultimately outweighs one's merit, one may go to hell. In addition, the lyrics state that not only are anger and lust sinful, but so is having "ego," meaning a sense of self that experiences desire, and therefore, attachment to the present world. (The ultimate goal of

⁴⁴ A *viss* is an old unit of measurement for weight; it is equivalent to about 3.5 pounds.

⁴⁵

Keyes, "Merit Transference," 264.

Buddhist meditation is to cultivate a sense of detachment, a sense of not desiring, so that one can finally attain nirvana and cease being reincarnated). Most tellingly, the lyrics insist that “you have to do everything on your own [you are responsible for yourself].” The lyrics maintain that humans are obligated to rely on themselves; self-reliance is not only an admirable virtue, but an inescapable condition. Of course, the lyrics go beyond this premise, arguing that self-reliance will ultimately fail humans, because they can never accumulate enough merit. Therefore, listeners should rely on a savior, a god in disguise who can intervene in the action-merit-fate cycle, allowing humans to go to heaven rather than hell. This performance also proclaims unapologetically Christian ideas, most notably that a Creator God exists, and that the human story began with Adam and Eve. However, this elucidation of the Christian gospel rests on fundamentally Buddhist premises, making the Christian argument using Buddhist terms and ideas. It is an excellent example of how twenty-first century Burmese Baptists fulfill the second part of Judson’s twofold legacy.

The Significance of Fulfilling Both Parts of the Twofold Legacy

Burmese Baptists pursue the first part of Judson’s legacy by participating in, presenting, and recording Western sounds during their own worship services. This phenomenon can be understood in at least two different ways. As Joel Robbins, the leading anthropologist of Christianity, points out, Christianity prioritizes the idea of discontinuity, or rupture - that is, a sudden dramatic change.⁴⁶ Rupture is central to the faith because the founding story of Christianity is about a god born as a human baby, suddenly emerging into the world of humans and creating a powerful change in human history. The life of Jesus Christ, therefore, is the ultimate example of rupture, and people who convert to Christianity generally understand that they too must undergo a dramatic change (sometimes phrased as being “born again”). One common way to incorporate rupture into the life of Christian churches around the world - one way much encouraged by missionaries of the nineteenth century - is to reject local musical sounds, that is, instruments and songs and dances associated with parishioners’ previous religious commitments and rituals. The anthropological study of Christianity and Christians in the twenty-first century shows a wide variety of responses by Christians to the challenge of

⁴⁶ Joel Robbins, “The Anthropology of Christianity: Unity, Diversity, New Directions: An Introduction to Supplement 10,” *Current Anthropology* 55 no. S10 (December 2014): S167.

discontinuity.⁴⁷ Much of the most recent writing has focused on how Christians communities “localize” musical practices, adopting either local/indigenous or foreign elements into communal worship.⁴⁸ However, cases of virtually complete rupture - that is, complete rejection of non-Christian musical sounds - have been documented as well. Among neo-Pentecostal Navajo Christians in the United States, for example, there are no Christian songs composed in the traditional Navajo song style, because to sing in the traditional style would be “to sound like the medicine man”.⁴⁹ In another example of dramatic musical rupture, Full Gospel churches in Trinidad are full of North American gospel choruses (songs written by composers like Bill and Gloria Gaither and Andrae Crouch), because these choruses do not have any extra-musical associations with bacchanalian styles like calypso or dancehall. Trinidadian Full Gospel adherents reject these local styles and affiliate with a style that is “fundamentally other.”⁵⁰ A third example of rupture comes from South Korea, where “Western music music...is essentially squared with Christianity, while traditional music is not...traditional music has still hardly found a place in Christian worship.”⁵¹ It is possible to understand Burmese Baptist church music as analogous to that of the Navajo neo-Pentecostal church, the Trinidadian Full Gospel church, and the South Korean church. The total commitment to Western musical sounds in the Burmese Baptist church can be interpreted as an instance of Christian commitment to rupture, or discontinuity with the surrounding non-Christian culture.

It is also possible to hear Burmese Baptists’ pursuit of Western musical genres as a kind of identification with the Western Anglo missionaries who brought the Christian faith to Burma

⁴⁷ Steven Kaplan, “The Africanization of Missionary Christianity: History and Typology,” in *Indigenous Responses to Western Christianity*, ed. Steven Kaplan (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1995), 9-28.

⁴⁸ Monique M. Ingalls, Muriel Swijghuisen and Zoe Sherinian, “Introduction: Music as local and global positioning: how congregational music making produces the local in Christian communities worldwide,” in *Making Congregational Music Local in Christian Communities Worldwide*, ed. Monique Ingalls, Muriel Swijghuisen and Zoe Sherinian (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), 8-9.

⁴⁹ Kimberly Jenkins Marshall, *Upward, Not Sunwise: Resonant Rupture in Navajo Neo-Pentecostalism* (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), 90.

⁵⁰ Timothy Rommen, *‘Mek Some Noise’: Gospel Music and the Ethics of Style in Trinidad* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), 66.

⁵¹ Keith Howard, “Christianity and Korean Traditional Music,” in *The Oxford Handbook of music and World Christianities*, ed. Jonathan M. Dueck and Suzel Ana Riley (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 630 and 643.

during the nineteenth century - and by extension, with the Christian West. Indeed, this is how many Burmese people themselves, both Christian and Buddhist, understand it. Among Baptists, these missionaries are still remembered and valorized.⁵² For example, the graves of Justus Vinton and D.L. Brayton, which are located directly outside the main entrances of the Sgaw Karen and Pwo Karen Baptist churches they served in the Ahlone neighborhood of Yangon, are still lovingly tended - as was pointed out to me when I visited. Children are still named after the early generation of Anglo Baptist missionaries, with the result that some have distinctly un-Burmese names - such as a man I met in the Ahlone quarter named Saw Hackett (after Paul Richmond Hackett, who served from 1913 to 1943). This open affiliation with foreign missionaries of the past emphasizes to both insiders and outsiders that Baptists in Burma enjoyed a close and privileged relationship to power during the colonial era, when Burma was a part of England's dominion in the Indian region. Christians - almost all of whom, as we recall, were members of minority groups - were allies of the British in their campaign to subdue the majority population of Myanmar Buddhists.⁵³ Indeed, one of the best-known books by a colonial administrator written during the colonial era makes exactly this argument, as is evident in its title: *The Loyal Karens of Burma*.⁵⁴ Twentieth century historians have debated how closely allied Anglo missionaries were with the British regime, and we know that the situation on the ground was more nuanced than simple narratives would allow.⁵⁵ Adoniram Judson himself, often viewed as nothing more than an "agent of imperialism" served in fact as a translator on behalf of the Burmese in their negotiations with British invaders.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, it is fair to say that many Burmese Baptists had close relationships with missionaries and colonial power brokers, and that these relationships disproportionately benefited Baptists during the colonial era.⁵⁷ By singing the songs their ancestors learned from colonial missionaries, contemporary

⁵² Maung Shwe Wa, *Burma Baptist Chronicle*, 277.

⁵³ J.S. Furnivall, J.S., "Burma, Past and Present," *Far Eastern Survey* 22 no. 3 (February 1953): 22.

⁵⁴ Donald Smeaton, *The Loyal Karens of Burma* (London, UK: Kegan Paul, Trench and Co., 1887). Smeaton's book has been reprinted many times, most recently as an ebook).

⁵⁵ Jörg Schendel, "Christian Missionaries in Upper Burma, 1853-85." *Southeast Asia Research* 7, no. 1 (March 1999): 61-91.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 62; also Maung Shwe Wa, *Burma Baptist Chronicle*, 50.

⁵⁷ Michael Aung-Thwin and Mairii Aung-Thwin, *A History of Myanmar Since Ancient Times: Traditions and Transformations* (London, UK: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2012), 192. One example of the British regime's willingness

Burmese Baptists fulfill the first part of Judson's twofold legacy and underline their continuing affiliation with the international faith these songs represent.

While this connection with colonial authorities did serve many Baptists well while the British controlled Burma, it became a liability after the country gained independence, and it remains a liability in the twenty-first century. In 1961, scholars Charles S. Brant and Mi Mi Khaing argued that Christianity was a force working to destabilise Burma's new and fragile democracy, claiming that conversion to Christianity "alienated" converts not only from their Buddhist neighbors but also from the central state authority. In this way, Baptist groups, who were already distinguished from the Myanmar majority by virtue of their ethnicity, become marked as "differentiated, alien and potentially hostile."⁵⁸ We can interpret the subsequent history of the country as proof that Brant and Khaing were correct: ethnically-based civil war tore the union apart during the following decades.⁵⁹ Even today, the idea that Burmese Christians are not committed to the common good of their countrymen remains relevant. As recently as 2016, a Burmese scholar wrote: "Buddhist nationalists typically characterise Christianity as a Western religion and accuse Burmese Christians of being disloyal to their own people and country, claiming that they become Christians in order to be associated with foreigners and to benefit from what the missionaries can do for them...Buddhist nationalists maintain that Christianity is a religion of foreigners, especially Westerners, and their followers."⁶⁰

QUOTE/CITE MICHAEL EDWARDS HERE? This characterization is problematic because Burmese history is marked by a "rampant xenophobia that consists of stigmatizing the other."⁶¹ Throughout the twentieth century, the economic devastation that the country experienced was

to privilege Christian subjects is the concluding chapter of Smeaton's book: "We, as a Christian power, occupy common ground with the Karens in regard to religion....They are at heart true to the British Government; the Burmese [meaning, those of Burman ethnicity] are not. Let us, then, cement the Karen allegiance. They owe all they have to their missionaries under the protection afforded by British rule...It is the highest and best policy to bind them closely to ourselves, to show by our attitude towards them that we wish them to be a strong and prosperous community, and to give them every facility for developing a national civilization and a national religion" (Smeaton, *The Loyal Karens of Burma*, 233 and 237).

⁵⁸ Brant and Mi Mi Khaing, "Missionaries," 49.

⁵⁹ Martin Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity* (London, UK: Zed Books, 1999).

⁶⁰ Pum Za Mang, "Buddhist Nationalism and Burmese Christianity," *Studies in World Christianity* 22 no. 2 (July 2016): 157.

⁶¹ François Robinne, "To Be Burmese is Not (Only) Being Buddhist," in *Metamorphosis: Studies in Social and Political Change in Myanmar*, ed. Renaud Egreteau and François Robinne (Singapore: NUS Press, 2016), 349.

blamed on “people...identified as ‘foreign’ (British, Indian, Chinese, etc.)”⁶² Genocidal violence directed at Muslims - another religiously-differentiated Other - has occurred in various parts of Burma for decades, and most recently precipitated the large-scale exodus of Rohingya Muslims from Rakhine State.⁶³ Burmese Christians, therefore, are justified in being concerned for their own safety, given that they too have long been regarded as Other by the Buddhist majority population.

It was in the post-colonial context, in the mid-1970s, that some Burmese Baptists began their project of mastering Buddhist-inflected music and dance traditions.⁶⁴ To date, the evangelical outdoor concerts which feature *anyeint* and other traditional stage performances have not resulted in large numbers of conversions to Christianity. As the General Secretary of the Myanmar Baptist convention phrased it, “We are not persuading, we are only proclaiming the gospel.”⁶⁵ The most important objective of such performances - as three performers who are centrally involved independently explained to me - is to proclaim that “Jesus is not a foreign god.”⁶⁶ They seek to convince Buddhists that Jesus is not a foreign god, and also that Christians are not foreigners. Performances of Christian *anyeint* in Burma are aimed at communicating that Baptists are Burmese, that they value national priorities such as performing traditionally Buddhist-inflected genres, and that - by extension - their faith is as Burmese as is Theravada Buddhism. A similar situation exists in Thailand, and was initiated at Payap University (a Christian institution) in the 1970s, during the same decade when the Burmese efforts began. Thai Christians adapted *likay*, a Thai form of theatre, to tell Christian stories for the purpose of evangelization. According to Erik Cohen, who studied this phenomenon, Christian performances

⁶² Elliott Prasse-Freeman and Phyo Win Latt, “Class and Inequality,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Myanmar* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), 407.

⁶³ Francis Wade, *Myanmar’s Enemy Within: Buddhist Violence and the Making of a Muslim Other*. (London, UK: Zed Books, 2017).

⁶⁴ One decade earlier, the chronicler of Burmese Baptist history advocated for this kind of evangelical activity: “We need to learn to use Burmese words, concepts, art forms and psychological characteristics which can become communicative links from the gospel to the people” (Maung Shwe Wa, *Burma Baptist Chronicle*, 275).

⁶⁵ Reverend Mahn Palmerston, interview, February 7, 2018.

⁶⁶ Rev. Mahn Palmerston, interview, February 7, 2018; Mahn Tin Maung Htay, interview, April 10, 2018; Nant Sabai Thynn, interview, February 26, 2018. Burmese Pentecostal evangelists also identify this as their biggest challenge; see Michael Edwards, “Drowning in Context: Translating Salvation in Myanmar,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* (forthcoming), 3.

of *likay* theatre are generally of high quality and are broadcast on Thai TV, but it is hard to gauge their impact. Cohen acknowledges that Christian *likay* does not seem to have sparked many conversions.⁶⁷ However, he argues, “a more important effect of the plays is the fact that they engender a certain openness, sympathy and receptivity to Christianity on the part of the local Thai public; and even more, since the plays are produced in a Thai style, they convey the important meta-message that one can become a Christian without uprooting oneself from Thai culture, or losing one’s national identity.”⁶⁸ We can understand the fulfilling of the second part of Judson’s twofold legacy in Burma as an analogous project: it is an effort by Burmese Baptists to secure their position in contemporary Burmese society, emphasizing that their national identity is identical to that of the most powerful ethnic and political group in the country, the Burman Buddhists.

Conclusion

Burmese Baptists pursue both aspects of the twofold legacy left to them by Adoniram Judson. They do so for a number of reasons, not the least of which is: they genuinely enjoy the music they make and believe it to be efficacious in helping Christians to worship their God and in preaching the Christian message to non-Christians. With that said, it is important to acknowledge that their music making at various points in their collective history has had political implications. Most recently, a dedicated group of Baptist evangelists have focused on the second part of Judson’s legacy, performing Christianized *anyeint* (and other traditional genres), communicating with Buddhists on their own terms. One important underlying motivation for these performances is to assert that “Jesus is not a foreign god” - and by implication, that his followers are not foreigners, either. This is an urgent task; as long as Christians are perceived as foreigners, they are vulnerable. At the same time, Burmese Baptists continue to specialize in music of the Christian West, and perform this for each other during weekly worship services. On Sundays, they fulfill the first part of Judson’s legacy. In so doing, they enact their discontinuity with the national Buddhist culture and remind themselves of their continuing ties to an

⁶⁷ Erik Cohen, “Christianization and Indigenization: Contrasting Processes of Religious Adaptation in Thailand,” in *Indigenous Responses to Western Christianity*, ed. Steven Kaplan (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1995), 42.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 42.

international, and tremendously powerful, body of believers. I leave the last word to Pum Za Mang, a Christian Burmese scholar who was quoted earlier. He argues that today Christian Burmese people should be regarded as belonging to a “global” faith: “Though the growth of the church has not been phenomenal, it has been steady and consistent over the years since the departure of the missionaries...All in all, Burmese Christians have proved that the faith they embraced is not Western, but global, and Burmese Christianity is now part of the structures of world Christianity.”⁶⁹

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⁶⁹ Pum Za Mang, “Buddhist Nationalism,” 160.

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