

Constructing *taohpwoh*:
Journeying through Pwakanyaw
Christian model communities and their
indigenous social paradigm

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Declaration

This thesis contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university. To the best of the author's knowledge, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text.

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Abstract

My thesis is an historical and anthropological study of Pwakanyaw (also known as Karen) Christian communities, called *taohpwoh*, which emerged at the intersection of British colonisation of Burma and the collapse of the Konbaung monarchy. British colonialism and the resulting upheaval created the conditions in which Pwakanyaw Christians could construct a new form of sociality which responded to and covertly rejected both colonial domination and the experience of marginalisation under Bamar Buddhist monarchies. The sociality that Pwakanyaw created through the *taohpwoh* movement involved acts of self-ascription, where membership was based on ethnicity and religion, and intentionally embraced hybridised practices, engaging with new forms of knowledge and translating them into Pwakanyaw epistemology and ontology. The *taohpwoh* model of community has spread across Pwakanyaw areas of Burma/Myanmar and neighbouring countries, enduring state repression, the creation of sovereign borders and decades of civil war and displacement.

In this thesis, I trace how *taohpwoh* were created, maintained and expanded through the interlinked Pwakanyaw concepts of *tana*, a system of belief, and *tama*, practice, centred on the deity, Ywa. Through the interplay of *tana* and *tama*, *taohpwoh* members created their own form of value and agency that allows *taohpwoh* to manage individual and communal challenges, protect and care for members, maintain autonomy and proliferate. The interplay between *tana* and *tama* structures relationships between human and non-human, Pwakanyaw and non-Pwakanyaw, Christian and non-Christian. This study is based on a consideration of little-examined writing by Pwakanyaw Christians from the early nineteenth to mid-twentieth century, as well as ethnographic fieldwork in two *taohpwoh*: one in the upper Irrawaddy Delta of Myanmar and one in the Andaman Islands of India. This thesis uses translation to centre Pwakanyaw voices and concepts that have been marginalised in English and Burmese language

studies. This contrasts with patterns of the written representation of Pwakanyaw Christians in the gaze of others as loyal subjects of British colonialism or presents their identities as inauthentic. By privileging Pwakanyaw knowledge and voices, I connect this study to the wider project of epistemic decolonisation. As a displaced Pwakanyaw person and *taohpwoh* member, this research is also a personal re-engagement with the *taohpwoh* of my ancestors, and I incorporate my own history and experience into this study, as part of an indigenous methodology.

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Glossary

Ah mà	အါမာ်	Aunty
Ah moh jee	အါမိကုံ	Grandmother
Ah tee	အါတံ	Uncle
Bà ga thèe	ဘာ်ကသံ	Being exposed to drug
Bah Ywa	ဘါယွၤ	Pay respect, worship Ywa
Bweh	ဘဲ	A linguistic group of Pwakanyaw
Daw	ဒီ	Relatedness
Dawkalu	ဒီကလုာ်	A Pwakanyaw Periodical published by KNA
Daw mah wā	ဒီမါဝါ	Husband and Wife/ Couple relationship
Daw hpee lēe	ဒီဖဲလံ	Grandmother and grandchildren relationship
Daw hpoh pā	ဒီဖိပါ	Father and Children relationship
Daw tha göh	ဒီသကိး	Friendship
Èe lāw wāw lāw	အံၣ်လီၤဝီၣ်လီၤ	The act of making oneself insignificant
Gāw lā thoo	ကီၤလၢသူ	Indian decent, black skin people
Gāw lā wah	ကီၤလၢဝါ	European decent, White skin people
Göh bah ywa/mā bòo ywā	ကိးဘါယွၤ,မၤဘျုးယွၤ	Collective praying, making merit to Ywa
Hta	ထါ	poetry
Hta htoo hta ywa	ထါထူထါယွၤ	Pwakanyaw oral literature about Ywa
Htee hsēh mēh ywā	ထံဆဲးမဲးယွၤ	Pwakanyaw mythical place
Kaw/ Hteekaw	ကီၢ်,ထံကီၢ်	Land, Country
Kawlah	ကီၢ်လါ	Myanmar
Kaw Hawkata	ကီၢ်ဟိကတး	Hawkata Country(known in Burmese as Hinthada)

Kaw Pathee	ကီၼ်ပသံၼ်	Pathi Country (known in Burmese Pathein)
Kawthoolei	ကီၼ်သ့ၼ်	Pwakanyaw imaginary country
Kwëh kwä	ခွဲးခွဲး	Stirring, mixing and seeking
Kwekabaw	ကွဲၼ်ကဘီ	A mountain in Kayin State
Mä mä	မးမး	Older sister
Maw	မိ	Rules
Māw Nāy Pwā	မိၼ်နီၼ်ပုၼ်	A Pwakanyaw linguistic group
Moh lü pa la	မိၼ်လုၼ်ပၼ်လၼ်	Tradition (also known as animism)
Nāw koh	နီၼ်ခိ	Physical body
Nāw thä	နီၼ်သး	Mental/ spiritual
Pa Goo	ပကူ	A Pwakanyaw linguistic group
Pa lü pa pwāy	ပၼ်လုၼ်ပၼ်ပုၼ်	Value
Pēe yāw	ပယီၼ်	Burman
Plone	ပွၼ်	A Pwakanyaw linguistic group
Pwakanyaw	ပုၼ်ကညီ	Human
S'gaw	စကီၼ်	A Pwakanyaw linguistic group
Ta lä goo/ telekhon	တလးကူၼ်	A Pwakanyaw religious sect that incorporate Buddhism and Animism.
Tama	တၼ်မၼ်	Conduct, practice
Tana	တၼ်နီၼ်	Belief/faith
Ta nā	တၼ်နီၼ်	Harp
Tā teh	တၼ်တဲ	Stories
Tā pōh teh tha göh/ tapoetethakot	တၼ်ပိၼ်တဲသကိး	Chat
Taohpwoh	တၼ်အိၼ်ဖိၼ်	Pwakanyaw Christian Community
Tha läy	သလ့ၼ်	January

Thara	သရဉ်	Teacher, guardian
Thoo kòh hpoh	သုခိဉ်ဖိ	Non-Christian
Wee	ဝံ	Healer, those who can predict the future
Ywa	ယွၤ	Pwakanyaw supreme deity
Ywa ga lụ ywa ga hta	ယွၤကလုၢ်ယွၤကထါ	Words and teaching of Ywa
Ywa hpoh	ယွၤဖိ	Ywa's child/children
Ywa moh	ယွၤမိၢ်	Ywa's mother
Ywa pụ day	ယွၤပုၢ်ဒဲ	Ywa's younger sibling

Notes on language use and Romanisation

This thesis uses terminology in Pwakanyaw language that is Romanised using a system developed by the Thai-based non-profit organisation, Drum Publications. Pwakanyaw terminology is shown in the glossary in Romanised form and S’gaw script using the alphabet associated with Baptist Christianity. In text, I only use Romanised forms of S’gaw terms. Translated quotes, *hta* and passages are in English within the text, while three extended translations are provided in the appendix in S’gaw script and English translation.

Burmese language sources are quoted in English translation and references are listed in the bibliography in Burmese script and Romanisation following the Library of Congress system.

Burmese place names are in their British form when referring to the colonial and pre-colonial period, such as “Burma” and “Rangoon”, and are in their Burmese form, “Myanmar” and “Yangon”, when referring to the post-colonial period. Pwakanyaw language places names that are unrecognised are in italics.

For the security of research participants, I used pseudonyms for names of people and *taohpwoh*.

Introduction

Eating sticky rice with dried fish and frog makes the taste richer. (Ko San Lu, 1953)

The project of creating is about transcending the basic survival mode... creating is not the exclusive domain of the rich, nor of the technologically superior but of the imaginative. Creating is about channelling collective creativity to indigenous problems... that was before colonialism. Throughout the period of colonization indigenous people survived because of their imaginative spirit, their ability to adapt and to think around the problem. (Smith, 1999)

His dress, his form of speech, his manners and customs, and his extraordinarily receptive attitude towards the truths of Christianity singled him out as an accessible and profitable field for the labours alike of the ethnologist and the minister of religion, while his undoubted loyalty and his prowess as a fighter drew the official eye upon him. The missionaries have retained their hold on the Karen with unflagging zeal, but the interest of the student of manners and customs has shifted gradually northwards into fresh realms of research. (Lowis, 1902, p. 120)

In the early nineteenth century, Indigenous Pwakanyaw¹ in Burma sensed the effect of their changing world through the whirling forces propelling towards them from different directions: the gushing power of colonialism and Christianity from the West, and the receding control of

¹ Pwakanyaw is a S'gaw language term, which implies human becoming and is a process, not a fixed identity. The word pwa is a prefix for people, kanyaw means to seek progress or prosperity, with ka denoting a future tense verb. I use the word Pwakanyaw instead of the word Karen in this thesis, which is self-ascriptive. Karen and Kayin are terms used by others to refer to Pwakanyaw, including in derogatory ways. I choose to use the term Pwakanyaw as a political act to re-center Pwakanyaw knowledge of who we are and how we understand ourselves, rather than according to the gaze of others. 'Pwakanyaw' as an identity applies across religious differences, but my thesis focusses on Christian Pwakanyaw communities.

Bamar monarchical power in their vicinity. Social movements among Pwakanyaw became more prevalent during British rule of Burma, which began in 1824, though this connected to a longer tradition of Pwakanyaw social engagement. Consequently, Pwakanyaw were prepared and engaged prior to the introduction of Christianity and the advance of colonisation. For Pwakanyaw who have long inhabited the social and geographic periphery of Burma and Siam, the world is fundamentally unstable, transitory and changing. The violent and transformative shifts associated with colonialism and the weakening of monarchical power created an environment where new forms of sociality could emerge in the 1830s.

This thesis is an historical and ethnographic study of a Pwakanyaw ethnoreligious community, known as *taohpwoh* in Pwakanyaw S'gaw language. *Taohpwoh* formed at the intersection of British colonisation, the spread of Christianity and Pwakanyaw peoples' own engagements with Western modernity in a way that foregrounds an indigenous paradigm. *Taohpwoh* is a collective social innovation, both planned and spontaneous, created by Pwakanyaw people to provide a solution to their communal problems of marginalisation, social stagnation and insecurity, and to harness belief systems and practices as a form of power. Through the intertwining of belief and action, *taohpwoh* unleashed a wide range of activities and put forward an agenda for Pwakanyaw self-determination and a holistic form of development that many continue to strive for today. My thesis explores this creative project of Pwakanyaw Christians, examining how *taohpwoh* emerged and endured over almost two centuries. I have chosen to privilege Pwakanyaw accounts and theories, in an attempt to question and reframe narratives produced by others which have objectified Pwakanyaw. By doing so, I hope to open a space for our own telling of Pwakanyaw history using our own ways of seeking, interpreting and disseminating knowledge. This is done through following the conventions of *hta*, a poetic form of oral literature that is passed down through writing and speaking, which I explore in this introduction. There is a large body of poetry, letters, journal entries, newspaper articles

and books by *taohpwoh* elders in Pwakanyaw language that has been mostly ignored in English and Burmese language scholarship about Pwakanyaw. To give space for my intellectual ancestors to be heard and respected, I have translated their words into English, and this work of translation is one of the contributions of this thesis. Excerpts of translations are incorporated into each chapter, and a small number of key texts are included in translation in the appendix. By privileging Pwakanyaw voices, including my own, I intend to contribute to the wider intellectual project of decolonisation. My own voice in this thesis is rooted in displacement from *taohpwoh* and from the state of Myanmar, as a result of civil war. Through fieldwork in *taohpwoh* in the Andaman Islands of India and the upper Irrawaddy Delta of Myanmar, I could reconnect with the *taohpwoh* of my ancestors, gain insight into a past that I had been disconnected from and access associated knowledge that is available through being physically present in a *taohpwoh*. *Taohpwoh* are significant because of their position in Pwakanyaw society and politics, and important as a creative, social response to various forms of domination.

Taohpwoh are loosely organised social systems that incorporate the interdependent Pwakanyaw concepts of *tana* (a system of beliefs) and *tama* (practices and conduct), which merge Christianity and ancestral teachings to form a totality that operates in a cycle. *Tama* is needed to animate *tana*, while *tama* is only imbued with power through *tana*. These concepts of belief and action are centred on Ywa, the Pwakanyaw deity with authority over living beings and things.² Ywa is also an abstract concept that can translate as flow. Ywa as flow is an everyday term and source of power grounded in the movement of natural processes: the flow of water and rivers, the flow of blood, the flow of air and the flow of heat. Ywa is also an organisational concept that connects humans with their environment and underpins the order

² I capitalise Ywa when referring to the Christian Pwakanyaw deity. Ywa is not capitalised when referring to non-Christian forms.

of things, shaping a Pwakanyaw worldview. The concepts of *tana* and *tama* are central to the creation, operation and reproduction of *taohpwoh*, which is the focus of this thesis.

Despite *taohpwoh*'s importance to Christian Pwakanyaw and its endurance over almost 200 years, it has been overlooked by scholars and is largely absent from the sizable body of social science scholarship on Pwakanyaw history, politics and religion. Hayami Yoko (2018, p. 262), an anthropologist who studies Karen religiosity, has identified the importance of "church organisation" and another anthropologist, Charles Keyes (1977, p. 56) wrote that Karen Christian churches "provide a network of connections and an organisation that is more than local." These may be indirect references to *taohpwoh* but the word 'church' downplays the centrality and expansiveness of *taohpwoh* in Pwakanyaw Christian everyday reality and collective localised identity. The word 'church' also emphasises an institutional form from the West, rather than what Pwakanyaw have consciously created and practiced. Some anti-colonial Bamar Buddhist nationalists saw Christian Pwakanyaw as subjects without agency who were easily tricked and exploited by colonisers. This has parallels with missionary and colonial views of Karen as loyal subjects and helpless people who the white missionary and colonial official had supposedly liberated. Pwakanyaw were not unthinking dupes: they critically considered the knowledge that foreign missionaries and colonisers introduced and interpreted it within Pwakanyaw ontology, epistemology and axiology. The *taohpwoh* movement helped shape a Pwakanyaw "imagined community" (Anderson, 1983) and laid the foundation of contemporary Pwakanyaw nationalist movements, including those that later sought legitimacy to create a Pwakanyaw nation state or to gain autonomy, and that launched an armed rebellion which continues today.

In this introduction, I will first briefly discuss *taohpwoh* and the historical context that led to its creation and proliferation. I will then discuss the development of a literary culture within *taohpwoh* as a strategy to negotiate shifting power relations related to colonialism and the

Bamar monarchical system. This involved the adaptation of Pwakanyaw oral culture, *hta*, and related cultural practices. I then link the *taohpwoh* movement and its intellectual culture to the idea of decolonisation, a project which this thesis is part of, through centring Pwakanyaw writing and voices, both past and present, along with the hybridised paradigm they have constructed. I see *taohpwoh* as both a methodology and a method in producing knowledge about a repeatedly colonised community and the world it inhabits.

The context of *taohpwoh*

Taohpwoh formation was the outcome of complex and interconnected factors. Primarily it was Pwakanyaw people's inspiration to be culturally and politically autonomous, spurred through a historical relationship with Buddhism and Buddhist subjects, and to a lesser degree Hindus and Muslims. Pwakanyaw are an oral community among who have been surrounded by and operated alongside text-based communities such as Mon, Bamar and Tai whose social order was influenced by Tipitaka, the Buddhist canon. Through these sacred, religious texts, social belonging was constructed and maintained before the vernacularisation of print culture (Anderson, 1983, p. 12). Pwakanyaw have had a strong connection to Buddhism, which some adopted and practiced in pre-colonial times. As the religion of the monarchy, Buddhism carried cultural capital. However, for many, the monarchical system was a source of coercion and suffering, through the extraction of tax and corvee labour (Taylor, 2009, p. 40). Pwakanyaw had an additional disadvantage in gaining status through Buddhism given their social marginalisation and their oral culture which was understood as distant from the sacred literary culture of the Pali canon. Exploitation and social and cultural marginalisation by Bamar ruling monarchies further hindered a sense of belonging to and promoted disassociation from the dominant state and society.

The Konbaung monarchy went into a decline after its loss to the British in the First Anglo-Burman War in 1824. The monarchy lost its control of some southern provinces which resulted in a political vacuum, and created a space for social reform and re-creation in lower Burma. In this context, the subjects of land occupied by the British could create their own social systems in the gaps left by the retreat of the monarchy. *Taohpwoh* is one such social system that emerged as a strategy to negotiate power at the beginnings of colonial rule and as a response to inevitable war and disorder during the nineteenth century, as the Konbaung monarchy collapsed. Social transformation that came along with modernity was amplified through the colonial order, Christian proselytisation, and the available technological apparatus and knowledge of that time, enabling Pwakanyaw to make a strategic push for an autonomous network of *taohpwoh* communities that could address historical experiences of marginalisation and social stagnation.

Taohpwoh was one of many Pwakanyaw religious-based movements,³ and its establishment was brought about through Pwakanyaw co-optation of Christianity. The first Pwakanyaw person associated with Christianity is Ko Thabyu and his baptism was an event that helped formalise *taohpwoh* formation. Ko Thabyu was baptised by the American Baptist missionary Reverend George Boardman in a pond in Tavoy town on the southern coast of Burma's Isthmus of Kra. The event took place four years after the British took control of parts of lower Burma and fifteen years after the first American Baptists began proselytisation in Burma. T. Thanbyah, an influential colonial-era *taohpwoh* guardian and writer, defined this baptism as a new beginning for Pwakanyaw people: "In this lake, an old *thoo kòh*⁴ was buried and became alive in Christ." (Thanbyah, 1913, p. 132). Ko Thabyu's baptism has served as a marker for a

³ Other examples of Pwakanyaw religious movements that emerged during British colonisation include leke, telekhon and minlaung movements. See Gravers 2012; Stern 1968; Kelly 2018; Yoko 2011.

⁴ *Thoo kòh/ Thoo kòh hpoh* is a term that describes inhabitants of the earth. Christians also use the term to describe non-believers of the Pwakanyaw deity, Ywa.

particular Pwakanyaw social trajectory in which Christian and pre-Christian practices became hybridised through *taohpwoh*.

Some theological perspectives of Christianity view baptism, a symbolic ritual of conversion, as a “complete transformation”.⁵ Conversion, in this sense involves the abandonment or rejection of a belief system associated with the past and the adoption of a new one. It implies that a convert, by adopting Christianity, diverges from past practices and rituals, a conceptualisation that has been criticised within anthropology. For instance, Frédéric Laugrand (2012, p. 4) argues that the anthropology of Christianity continues to “preserve the ideological model of conversion as a complete break with the past.” However, the actual event of conversion into Christianity has been of less interest within anthropology compared to the idea of Christianity as a path to modernity. This conception of conversion as a radical transformation is not helpful in making sense of Pwakanyaw conversion, nor of *taohpwoh* and Pwakanyaw Christianity in general, in which everyday practices and belief systems incorporate pre-Christian ontology and epistemology. Laugrand has problematised the notion of transformation in relation to conversion processes happening in indigenous communities and argued that the “adoption of Christianity or modernity is organized by complex processes of transitions and continuities” (Laugrand, 2012, p. 2).

Rather than an abrupt break from the past and an abandonment of pre-Christian practices, baptism for Pwakanyaw can be interpreted as both continuity and transition, as Laugrand suggests. The rebirth of a *thoo kòh* can signify the cycle of life which continues infinitely across generations. The past encounters the present and the future, and the old is incorporated into the new, which can improve life experience, like when dried fish and frog is eaten with sticky rice, making a meal tastier. Rather than Pwakanyaw being subjugated through Christianity, as a

⁵ For instance, see Peace, 2004; Smith, 2001.

powerful religion, I see Pwakanyaw as co-opting Christianity to improve their life and status, and to create space for autonomy and development. Through conversion to Christianity, Pwakanyaw could get support of missionaries with varied skills and resources that were sought. For instance, Pwakanyaw requested a written script and the missionary Jonathan Wade worked with early Pwakanyaw converts to create and trial one. American Baptists imported a printing press that was set up in Tavoy, and Pwakanyaw Christians embraced print culture, creating a Pwakanyaw “imagined community” across lower Burma and using the printing press to disseminate ideas about *taohpwoh* and nationhood. Pwakanyaw with the support of missionaries published a newspaper and books, including a translation of the Bible and a four-volume thesaurus of Pwakanyaw knowledge. *Taohpwoh* members made demands on missionaries for education, scientific knowledge and technological skills to support the development of *taohpwoh*. Early writing from *taohpwoh* members emphasises the importance of learning the Pwakanyaw script and gaining knowledge through reading texts. This seems to have been an incentive in conversion and shows an instrumentality in how early Pwakanyaw approached Christianity and set the conditions that enabled *taohpwoh* to sustain and proliferate. *Taohpwoh* members who learnt the scripts could teach in their own *taohpwoh*. Mass Pwakanyaw education therefore began with *taohpwoh*, and provided a response to the dominance of Buddhism, with its sacred scriptural culture and restrictive system of monastic education. Literacy and numeracy skills gained through education created the conditions needed for Pwakanyaw to seek benefit in the colonial state and this is seen in the growth of *taohpwoh*. The creation and further proliferation of *taohpwoh* were enabled by the economic policies of the British colonial administration.

The British conquest of Burma, through the British East India Company, was a commercial enterprise driven by the desire for profit. The Irrawaddy Delta became a centre of the colonial economy, as the area was transformed from vast wetlands into a zone for intensive rice

production. The introduction of colonial capitalism created one of the biggest internal migrations within Burma, from the mid-nineteenth century to the early-twentieth century, with populations from central Burma moving to the delta, coupled with an influx of workers from South Asia (Adas, 1974; Brown, 2005). Pwakanyaw resided in the Irrawaddy Delta before British colonisation and migration increased as the delta transformed. The project to set up and expand *taohpwoh* in the delta was eased by colonial land policies and growing Pwakanyaw literacy that gave some *taohpwoh* members the skills to engage with the colonial bureaucracy. Pwakanyaw Baptists were one of the first groups to participate in the largescale economic project, which involved the opening up of land for agriculture, a system to claim title and a push for the commodification of agriculture. *Taohpwoh* members acquired land grants, increased agricultural production and gained income that was used to further expand *taohpwoh*. After the Second Anglo-Burman War, which took place from 1852-1853, conflict between the Konbaung monarchy and the British had a profound impact on *taohpwoh* in the Irrawaddy Delta. The Delta became an area of ongoing conflict and lawlessness. *Taohpwoh* were targeted by Konbaung troops and dacoits for their perceived link to the British, symbolised through Christianity, and this necessitated the formation of armed *taohpwoh* defence groups, which is discussed in Chapter Two.

One *taohpwoh* strategy to respond to Bamar domination and colonialism was through literary culture, as writing was long associated with power. However, the *taohpwoh* approach to the construction of a literary culture incorporated forms of oral culture, creating a hybridised knowledge system, which I discuss in the next section.

***Taohpwoh* oral literature, history and decolonisation**

Pwakanyaw are a *hta* making people (Thanbyah, 1906, preface).

Hta, Pwakanyaw oral literature, is a particular way of communicating, of knowing, and of being. *Hta* is the speech of our ancestors, linking our present with our history and our future. *Hta* is central to our epistemology, ontology and axiology. As such, *hta* is an integral part of the constitution of *taohpwoh* and its theorisation, and thus of this thesis. *Hta* is a value that Pwakanyaw uphold. *Hta* contains history and is a signifier of Pwakanyaw identity and place making. The existence of any *hta* must be part of a circle that involves creation, interpretation and translation into everyday life. The act of creation that is not backed by the act of interpretation and translation is considered as incomplete, and even risks the loss of *hta*. Instances of *hta* have been composed, recited and sometimes written down by many different Pwakanyaw, in *taohpwoh* and outside of it, and from all classes of society. Through reciting, singing and heart to heart talks, the epistemology and ontology of Pwakanyaw that connect to the very location or land that we are inhabiting is transmitted. Pwakanyaw are diverse, and therefore the texts that capture the positionality and interests of Pwakanyaw people are broad and varied. Localised experiences and ways of knowing directly effect the way in which each *taohpwoh* translates and makes use of *hta*.

There are numerous forms of knowledge that are made and conveyed through *hta* (Saw Tot, 1963, p. 11). *Hta* contains essential knowledge on all aspects of life such as cultivation, the meaning and rituals of birth and death, love, humour, health, illness and ethical forms of behaviours (Thanbyah, 1906). *Hta* contains knowledge that instructs *taohpwoh* members how to live their everyday life, and how to build relationship with other humans and spirits. Spirits can be in the form of ancestors, animals, insects, trees, flowers and geographical features such as forests, rivers, lakes, mountains and the sea. *Hta* expresses feelings, humour, criticism, claims and demands. *Hta* is a space for *taohpwoh* members to come together to communicate what may otherwise be inexpressible.

Hta as Pwakanyaw epistemology is performative and relational. It is performative in the sense that it is sung, spoken or recited, in a poetic structure through rhyming couplets. *Hta* is interactive, dialogical, enacted and dynamic, always changing depending on the creativity of the speaker and particular contexts. This dynamism is the key to its survival and diversification, through *taohpwoh* and outside of it. *Hta* can now be found in prayer, which are creative, spontaneous and oral. *Hta* is also diffused through everyday speech and sermons, through song, storytelling, social media and books. *Hta* is relational because performing *hta* creates human to human connections that bind *taohpwoh* members together with each other and with their ancestors, and sustains a wider Pwakanyaw imagined community. *Hta* as Pwakanyaw epistemology is embodied. It originates from a space inside someone's heart and travels through the channel of the throat to be vocalised out through the lips (Saw Tot, 1963, p. 12). It enters someone's heart through hearing and experience, adapted through acts of creativity before being transmitted to other hearts through prayer, song, and other forms of speech. Through the connections and interactions of many bodies, Pwakanyaw epistemology is affirmed and flows.

Our knowledge of our history and ancestry are told and retold through *hta*, and our values of familiarity, hospitality, truthfulness and accountability are produced and reproduced in *hta* speech (Saw Tot, 1963, p. 39). Our existence is projected through the making of *hta*. To know is to speak, to have dialogue and listen to *hta*. Within *taohpwoh*, speaking and listening to *hta* is to know oneself, one's family, one's ancestry, one's community and one's environment. These entities are knitted into the conceptualisation of who we are as Pwakanyaw and *taohpwoh* members, and how we are interrelated. In a dominant scientific worldview, facts are linked to principles of objectivity. This practice of rational objectivity hides the position of the self and separates knowledge from values. For Pwakanyaw people, knowledge is subjective and infused with feeling, values and grounded knowledge from ancestors. *Hta* expresses emotion and viewpoints, and does not distinguish between the religious and secular sphere,

contrasting with dominant approaches to the construction of knowledge which involves the separation of science and religion. Scientific knowledge is further regulated into “scholarly disciplines” that are constructed through Western scientific ways of knowing (Smith, 2012, p. 8). *Taohpwoh* epistemology involves no such division. Spirituality is infused through all forms of knowledge about the world.

If spoken correctly, *hta* can bring the dead back to life (Saw Tot, 1963, p. 96). *Taohpwoh* members are entwined in dense webs of kinship, made up of other *taohpwoh* members and their ancestors, animated through *hta* (Po Lin Tay, 1938; Thanbyah, 1906). The colonisation of Pwakanyaw is the colonisation of *hta*. *Hta* has survived through its adaptability, flexibility and pluralistic and non-hierarchical culture of interpretation. *Hta* is the bloodstream of *taohpwoh*. *Hta* has been neglected within English writing about Pwakanyaw. Given its importance in the structure and practices of Pwakanyaw sociality and worldview, I incorporate *hta* into this thesis, not just as an academic exercise but as an expression of myself, my community and my ancestors, as both a source of knowledge and a methodology. Taking *hta* and *taohpwoh* seriously, as both containers of knowledge and ways of learning, is a way to give myself a voice, as a Pwakanyaw researcher.

Centring *taohpwoh* and *hta* in this research is an attempt to revisit and reconsider narratives about Pwakanyaw through our worldview and our interpretation of our own society and history. This involves acts of reconnecting, rediscovering and positioning that can be defined as part of a process of epistemic decolonisation, a growing movement in academia and education.⁶ Decolonisation involves questioning how indigenous and colonised subjects have been objectified within colonial research and power structures of knowledge production and education. Beyond critiques of enduring colonial power structure, decolonial projects may seek

⁶ For instance, see Bhambra et al., 2018; Grosfoguel 2007; Mignolo, 2012; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2021; Smith 2012.

to revitalise and centre indigenous knowledge and practice, based on local epistemologies and ontologies (Chilisa, 2020). What can be considered as decolonial intellectual projects are diverse, reflecting the many different cultural contexts and histories of peoples effected by colonialism. Common across colonised societies is the historical experience of domination and its ongoing legacy which continues to perpetuate harm and needs to be addressed. In social and academic movements of the colonised, the word ‘indigenous’ is a political and intellectual concept that carries power in struggles for rights and liberation. I see *taohpwoh* as an indigenous project and Pwakanyaw as an indigenous community. I use the term ‘indigenous’ in this research as a way to reflect, rediscover and recenter what it means to be Pwakanyaw that is not “externally codified” (Whitinui, 2013, p. 460). The Pwakanyaw communities I study and are connected to through kinship are inherently hybridised and their worldview and everyday practices incorporate varied ontologies and epistemologies. By conceptualising this research as an indigenous project, I intend to explore the possibilities of “centering our own ways of knowing and doing” (Royal, 2009).

Taohpwoh, as a social movement that emerged at the beginning of British colonisation of Burma, might not sound like it could fit the frame of intellectual decolonisation. The timeframe, at the very start rather than during the end of formal British colonisation, as well as the practice of adopting a foreign religion, may seem contrary to ideals of anti-colonial resistance and the reification of an ‘authentic’ indigenous culture. However, in a Pwakanyaw context, British colonisation was not the only instance of epistemic and physical domination. Pwakanyaw use the word *mor* to describe ruling cycles, drawing continuity in the experience of domination. T. Thanbyah (1904, p. 5) wrote, “the country of Pēe yāw, from the beginning until now, has been under three ruling *mor*,” going on to name them as Mon, Bamar and English. In one of the few Pwakanyaw authored books written in English, San C. Po (2001, p. 3) wrote that “the cruelties and oppression practiced by the Burmese for generations cannot be easily effaced from

memory.” While this reifies modern ideas of race, it reflects a common view of pre-colonial monarchies as violent regimes who subjugated Pwakanyaw. Decolonisation for this research is therefore necessarily concerned with a social project that has resulted in violence and objectification from multiple power centres, Bamar, Mon and Tai monarchical domination, British colonial aggression, dictatorship and Burmanisation.

Pwakanyaw created *taohpwoh* as a project to address the problem of prior domination using a strategy of co-optation that was made available through the new structure of British colonisation and the arrival of Christianity. Through the appropriation of Christianity, Pwakanyaw could distance themselves from pre-colonial forms of power, but this same act entangled them in webs of domination that further demanded Pwakanyaw creativity and struggle to retain their existence. Pwakanyaw have been dominated and subjugated multiple times and have practiced varied forms of resistance, both overt and covert. The ability for Pwakanyaw to creatively co-opt and hybridise colonial forms of power, such as Christianity, gave *taohpwoh* members space to thrive, gain autonomy and endure in a way that they could not with overt forms of resistance, which have been repeatedly met with violence, oppression and new forms of domination.⁷ Creative use of discourse and the critical reading of and listening to stories, incorporating *hta*, helped Pwakanyaw position themselves on an equal level with missionaries and the colonial authorities, as those who possess their own knowledge and wisdom.

Through a process of co-optation, *taohpwoh* members created new terminologies that enabled them to lay a bold claim to Christianity as their own religion and not as something newly introduced to them. An example of this is the common Pwakanyaw term in relation to conversion, ‘*bah Ywa*’, meaning ‘worship Ywa’, which implies a return to the past rather than

⁷ An example of colonial violence against overt resistance is in the case of Saya San and U Ottama. See Aung-Thwin, 2011; Charney, 2009; Schober, 2010.

something new. Ywa was a Pwakanyaw deity before Christianity and its incorporation into Christianity created a hybrid god that combines an indigenous discourse of ywa with Christian theology. It therefore represents both Pwakanyaw identity and practices linked to Christianity. Abstract and powerful by its nature, ywa is believed to shape the totality of Pwakanyaw existence and does not separate the material from the spiritual world. Ywa and the various other spirits were already incorporated into human and non-human relationships. Spirits in Pwakanyaw cosmology are commonly viewed as being both beneficial and dangerous. Some can cause harm if relationships are not properly maintained. It is through worship and offerings that these harmful spirits are placated. Ywa is not seen as a threat to humans, so ywa did not need to be appeased. The conversion to Christianity is therefore referred to in Pwakanyaw language as turning back. It is not moving to a new religion but understood as a return to the worship of ywa, after Pwakanyaw ancestors wrongly focused on lesser spirits and turned their back on ywa, who is perceived as the highest Pwakanyaw power. So, moving to Christianity is not seen as a transformational change but as a shift from one source of power to another, while both are perceived as indigenous.

Pwakanyaw practices of Christianity cannot be separated from their pre-Christian rituals and beliefs. Ko San Lu (1953) wrote that according to the sayings of ancestors, White men and Pwakanyaw did not know each other as siblings, and they fought with each other, rather than Pwakanyaw looking up to white men as is often represented. Ko San Lu (1953, p. 7) recounts the story:

White man threw sticky rice at Pwakanyaw and Pwakanyaw threw birds and fowls and dried fish and frogs at white man. When they got tired, both sat down and had a feast and realized that they are brothers. They were happy and laughed together.

With reference to the bible, Ko San Lu metaphorically interpreted Ywa's words as food. So, when Pwakanyaw and white man met, they threw food at each other, symbolising Ywa's words, which were exchanged at first encounter. However, missionaries did not see Ywa's words, expressed through *hta*, as valid, revealing the power imbalance between Pwakanyaw and Western epistemologies, which have been overturned through *taohpwoh*. While for foreign missionaries, the bible was the sole word of God, Pwakanyaw saw the Bible and *hta* as all words of Ywa, making Pwakanyaw methods of religious interpretation rich and multi-dimensional as seen in the metaphor, "eating sticky rice with dried fish and frog makes the taste richer." (Ko San Lu, 1953, p. 7)

In internal missionary texts, this mixing of Christian and ancestral traditions was noted with concern, and as a problem for foreign evangelists to overcome with strategies of control. This was a topic of an 1853 missionary convention, and a solution put forward was the education of natives (1853, p. 94):

We think that a portion of the ministers, especially among an ignorant and superstitious people like the Karens, in whom there is a strong tendency to mix up traditions of men with the teachings of Christ, ought to be educated.

However, Pwakanyaw could maintain autonomy from foreign missionary interference through the creation of *taohpwoh* as self-run and self-supported communities. For Pwakanyaw Christians, co-optation of Christianity involved holistic change to everyday life through *taohpwoh* communities. *Taohpwoh* was lived religion. As the historian Katharine Gerbner (2015, p. 143) wrote in relation to Christian conversion in the Atlantic world, "by focussing on practice rather than doctrine, it de-centres missionaries and seeks, instead, to examine religious practices from the 'bottom up'." The creation, spread and maintenance of *taohpwoh* is how Pwakanyaw co-opted Christianity and made it an indigenous religion.

Māori scholar Lina Tuihawai Smith outlined 25 decolonisation projects driven by indigenous communities, some of which resonate with strategies used in the *taohpwoh* movement. Projects Smith identified include storytelling, creating, theory making and writing back, among many others (2012, pp. 143-163). Within *taohpwoh*, there are many projects that can be considered decolonial and that are centred on everyday actions, *tama*, that Pwakanyaw do to sustain *taohpwoh*. *Taohpwoh* value both written and oral forms of knowledge creation so it is not just a matter of writing but also of speaking back through storytelling, reciting *hta* and praying, in addition to other projects that can be viewed as decolonial, such as the act of care and the act of protection. These acts and many others imply a critique of dominant systems *taohpwoh* are in, along with a creative response. I will elaborate on these everyday acts in this thesis.

***Taohpwoh* and the politics of writing**

From the early colonial period, the act of writing has been important for *taohpwoh* members to create the *taohpwoh* project and to respond to narratives that oppress Pwakanyaw. For Pwakanyaw as a people with an oral tradition, writing must be understood as both orally based and textual, incorporating *hta*. The act of writing with and through *hta* is an assertion of being an agentive Pwakanyaw subject, which is part of what can be considered a *taohpwoh* decolonial project.

As a Pwakanyaw researcher, I am required to respond to the writing by others about my community. I will also incorporate the parallel conversations in Pwakanyaw language, which consist of our own intellectual traditions containing varied forms of critique and which have been largely ignored in global structures of knowledge about us. In the production of knowledge about Pwakanyaw, the initial writing of foreign missionaries and colonial officials has been privileged, and their discourses have been repeated in contemporary scholarship about

Pwakanyaw. Foreign missionaries and their supporters promoted their success of converting Pwakanyaw through extensive writing in English, for an American and British audience. Writing by missionaries and colonial officials placed the white man as morally and intellectually superior, suggesting Pwakanyaw were heathens who lacked the capacity to think rationally and were saved from ignorance and savagery by the arrival of the white missionary who brought Christianity. Accounts of Pwakanyaw describe us as having a “susceptibility of impressions” (Wylie, 1860, p. 45), “timidity” (Marshall, 1922, p. 21), “sunk in ignorance and superstition, worshipping evil spirits” (Clement, 1849, p. 156) and “formerly a wild jungle folk oppressed by the Burmese” (Furnivall, 1948, p. 180). Some noble savage type accounts excitedly represent the supposed Pwakanyaw embrace of Christianity as a success of the civilising mission.⁸ These ideas, which deny Pwakanyaw agency, can be seen in contemporary academic writing. For example, Charles F. Keyes (1977, p. 56) writes that “the activities of the Christian missionaries among the Karen must be recognized as perhaps the most important factor in the development of a Karen national movement.” Similarly, Anada Rajah (2010, p. 523) claims that Karen ethno-nationalism was based on a “template” provided by American Baptist missionaries. Ananda Rajah (2010, p. 526) also writes that the missionary Francis Mason’s interpretation of Karen myths “offered educated Karen a distinctive collective identity and migratory ‘history’ of their own,” adding that missionary interpretation was later elaborated by Karen writer Saw Aung Hla. Ronald Renard (1980, p. 42) writes that “Saw Aung Hla apparently accepted almost all the stories he heard uncritically” and criticised the fact that Saw Aung Hla’s history, which relied on *hta*, had “little proof to support his claims.” Hayami Yoko (2018, pp. 253-254), who has done research about Karen Christianity and the Baptist mission, recognises that “focusing only on the missionary side of the story would mean reproducing the monopoly of knowledge and interpretation” and that encounters between

⁸ For examples, see Bunker, 1902; Smeaton, 1887.

Pwakanyaw and foreign missionaries involved interaction with “unexpected consequences” rather than a “unilateral process of domination and imposition of hegemonic truth.” However, Hayami Yoko goes on to undermine this view by dismissing Pwakanyaw-language written accounts from so-called native evangelists in the nineteenth century as “neither numerous nor systematic” (2018, p. 255). These selective extracts have similarities in that they reproduce a particular historical narrative, a “template” about Pwakanyaw, and are written according to the conventions of the Western academy, rather than *hta*.

Taohpwoh leaders were aware of missionary and colonial narratives. In response, *taohpwoh* members engaged in what could be characterised as writing back. “Writing back” involves using texts to challenge, resist or disrupt dominant narratives that subjectify indigenous people (Ashcroft et al., 2003). Pwakanyaw writing back makes use of *hta*, proverbs, prayer and storytelling and, since the early colonial period, has been used to repeatedly assert a Pwakanyaw worldview that markedly contrasts from colonial and missionary accounts, and asserts Pwakanyaw agency. Instances of writing back are mostly in Pwakanyaw language and have therefore required my translation to be heard in this thesis, although there are English examples too, such as San C. Po’s (1928) book, *Burma and the Karens*. Some Pwakanyaw intellectuals have engaged in the writing of history which challenges the narratives and position of foreign missionaries in subtle but marked ways, such as Saw Aung Hla (1999 [c. 1932]). In one instance, a Pwakanyaw writer turned the tables and wrote biographies of white missionaries, shifting their representation (San Lu, 1953). One common theme in Pwakanyaw writing back concerns the interpretation of Pwakanyaw conversion to Christianity. To understand the Pwakanyaw intellectual movement linked to *taohpwoh*, it is important to further dissect what early *taohpwoh* leaders were writing back to.

Missionary accounts of Christianisation emphasise Pwakanyaw receptiveness to Christianity as a result of the parable of the 'lost book', Pwakanyaw belief in Ywa, interpreted as a

monotheistic god and the absence of idolatry (Wylie, 1859; Western Literary Messenger, 1849, p. 156). Since the early period of missionary activity in Burma, American Baptists appropriated Pwakanyaw oral literature as a strategy to spread their religion to natives. This involved recording *hta* that missionaries used as a way to communicate Christianity to Pwakanyaw people. In the Proceedings of a Convention of Burman and Karen Missionaries (1853, p. 12), for instance, it was decided that “a tract for the heathen should present the saving doctrines and enforce the simple precepts of the gospel in the idioms of the people, and in the spirit of Christianity.” One early and influential missionary who deployed this strategy was Francis Mason. He published a book in Pwakanyaw language called *the Book of Elders*, first printed in 1837. In order to do that, he collaborated with local people who shared their stories, although Pwakanyaw storytellers are not credited with authorship, which reflects colonial structures of knowledge production. The book makes a comparison of Pwakanyaw oral literature from elders with the Christian bible, putting forward a narrow and partial interpretation which serves the work of the American Baptist Mission. This contrasts with practices of *hta*, in which each *hta* is said to be open to interpretation in seven ways and therefore cannot carry a single, correct meaning (Ba Htoo Tin, 1963, p. 9).

One Pwakanyaw story central to Mason and other missionaries, and referenced later by writers and scholars of different fields in the study of Pwakanyaw, is the story of the “lost book” (Marshall, 1922; Mason, 1853; Silverstein, 1980). According to Mason’s telling, which influenced later missionaries, Pwakanyaw as the oldest brother was given a book by Ywa of Ywa’s literature. However, Pwakanyaw was careless and lost the book, resulting in a long period of illiteracy, ignorance and poverty. The book was safeguarded by their *gāw lā wah* brother. According to Mason, Ywa asked *gāw lā wah* to spread his word to alleviate the suffering he saw Pwakanyaw were going through. Through the use of *hta*, Mason tried to communicate that white missionaries to Pwakanyaw were fulfilling a Pwakanyaw prophecy

and therefore should be accepted. He used *hta* to emphasise Pwakanyaw really did lose their book and therefore literacy and that their 'lost book' had now returned in the form of the Christian bible carried by white missionaries. Mason attempted to show that Christianity was the true religion for Pwakanyaw, by appropriating *hta* of the 'lost book'. By doing so, Mason tried to exercise power through access to the printing press and influence over the written record to solidify one telling of *hta* and his own interpretation of it as 'truth' in an act of epistemological colonisation.

Writing back, *taohpwoh* leader T. Than Byah (1903) used the story of the lost book, referencing part of the same *hta* as Mason, to interpret *gāw lā wah* as a thief, which was a subtle way to critique foreign missionary narratives, without naming any of the missionaries themselves (see Appendix II). Both Mason and T. Than Byah therefore emphasised the importance of the "lost book." But in T. Than Byah's positioning, the *gāw lā wah* was a villain, not a saviour. The *gāw lā wah* brother deceived Ywa and Pwakanyaw, stealing the book from Pwakanyaw and this caused Pwakanyaw suffering. As the Pwakanyaw book is with the white brother, he has a duty to return it to Pwakanyaw as the rightful owner. T. Than Byah's subtle description of *gāw lā wah* brother as a thief was not addressed by missionaries and later writers and this reflects the order of power within knowledge production. There is systemic inequality where missionary accounts of Pwakanyaw history became fact. Missionary interpretation of Pwakanyaw *hta* became accepted truth while Pwakanyaw control of our own literature in English was denied within "fact-based" narratives. The unequal power relation in the production of knowledge about Pwakanyaw was identified by Charles F. Keyes (1977), who stated that "the fact that missionaries were the first to record these myths has led to their interpretations colouring the understanding of them ever since" (p. 52). Keyes rightly identifies the problematic influence of missionary representation of Pwakanyaw, however he fails to recognise divergent

interpretations from Pwakanyaw, as well as our own body of knowledge and our history. Pwakanyaw have been writing back for generations, a project that this thesis is part of.

The project of Pwakanyaw writing back also responded to narratives and tropes by nationalist, anti-colonial writers on Pwakanyaw. These include those writing in Burmese who are critical of missionaries and their work among Pwakanyaw, seeing missionaries and the colonial state as a single entity. Some Bamar nationalists also saw missionaries/colonisers and their closeness to Pwakanyaw as part of a divide and rule policy that separated Pwakanyaw from Bamar and other ethnic groups, which favoured Pwakanyaw, furthering divisions. This argument is linked to a discourse that Pwakanyaw are colonial stooges to be treated with suspicion, that they have a “slave mentality” (a racial slur that is still in use) and that they are “loyal” to their colonial rulers. For instance, influential nationalist Thakin Lwin (1969, p. 124) wrote that Pwakanyaw Christians sided with the British colonial state (and I translate): “Most Karen nationals who are Christian appreciated and trusted the British, depending on them and being loyal to them.” In the official history of the Tatmadaw,⁹ divide and rule is explained as a motive of Christianisation, and I translate:

As the rule of English colonialists over Myanmar went on for longer, they used techniques to divide and rule different ethnic groups. They conquered through the use of religion and granting favourable positions to some, instigating disputes among races, and though the creation of Myanmar since ancient times was a united nation, they divided it into separate smaller nations, and as a consequence, the system of slavery had persisted. (1994, p. 3)

⁹ The official name of the Myanmar Armed Forces.

Again, the idea of Pwakanyaw national consciousness, which *taowpwoh* is a key part of, is represented as a template created by others that Pwakanyaw were duped into believing.

Tohpwoh writing back is therefore a project with a long history that has been largely absent from English and Burmese accounts of the history of Burma and Pwakanyaw, and which I attempt to highlight as part of my own strategy of writing back in this thesis.

Methodology and structure

The data for this thesis come from both historical material and ethnographic fieldwork. The historical material includes published and unpublished monographs, newspaper articles, diaries and letters, which are mainly written in Pwakanyaw S'gaw language and which were predominantly written during British colonial rule. Some writing is in prose, some is *hta* and some combines forms. The textual sources describe different aspects of *taohpwoh*, largely written by *taohpwoh* leaders. They cover daily life, social and economic conditions, war, displacement and social organisation. Published materials were found in the library of the Karen Baptist Theological Seminary in Yangon, and some were from the archives of the American Baptists Historical Society. Unpublished materials were shared by relatives of the writers and gathered during fieldwork in *taohpwoh*.

Ethnographic fieldwork for this thesis took place over 18 months, divided between the Andaman Islands of India and the upper Irrawaddy Delta of Myanmar. I spent most of my time in a *taohpwoh* in each of the two locations, and recorded my interactions with *taohpwoh* members, participating in key aspects of everyday life such as ceremonies, cultivation, gathering, cooking, animal rearing, trading, hospital visits, homelife, storytelling and informal, heart to heart talks. *Taohpwoh* was both the topic of my research and informed my methodology. The Canadian scholar Shawn Wilson (2008) described indigenous research as a

“ceremony” with knowledge formed through webs of relations between humans, their environment and visible and invisible objects. This resonates with my experience of research in Pwakanyaw communities. The word “research” does not exist in Pwakanyaw S’gaw, but the acts of researching and disseminating knowledge are embedded in everyday sacred practices, such as reciting and singing *hta*, prayer, acts of care and heart-to-heart talks. Research is therefore part of *taohpwoh* life. As a Pwakanyaw researcher studying *taohpwoh*, I gathered and produced knowledge through my relations with *taohpwoh* members, structured through kinship that required me to actively participate in the everyday acts that inform the *taohpwoh* world. Respect and accountability were key principles of my methodology, in which knowledge is formed through mutual relationships within *taohpwoh*, which guided research for my thesis.

The two *taohpwoh* I have researched are from the same network of *taohpwoh* in the upper Irrawaddy Delta. In the 1920s, a group of *taohpwoh* members travelled from the upper delta to the Andaman Islands as part of a colonial resettlement scheme, thereby creating new *taohpwoh* while maintaining links to the *taohpwoh* of their ancestors. With the end of colonial rule, these *taohpwoh* became subjects of different sovereign nation-states, and therefore have different characteristics that reflect how the *taohpwoh* adapted to the states they found themselves within, while maintaining core Pwakanyaw values. Unlike *taohpwoh* communities in the Irrawaddy Delta who have a high level of distrust towards the state due to deepening cycles of state repression, *taohpwoh* members in Andaman Islands see the state with some suspicion but simultaneously as a source for benefits, protection and employment. While *taohpwoh* in the Irrawaddy Delta are near the centre of organised *taohpwoh* networks, which operate their own pan-*taohpwoh* institutions, those in India are isolated from Myanmar and have had to make do with limited resources available to them on the Indian periphery. Regardless of their context, both *taohpwoh* have been able to maintain their own structure and autonomy. By doing

fieldwork in two *taohpwoh* located in very different contexts, I gained a varied insight into how *taohpwoh* are created, into diversity of form and practice, and into how they continue to evolve.

My field sites are connected through a *taohpwoh* network of over one thousand eight hundred *taohpwoh* in Myanmar and India, with a population of approximately three hundred thousand (Karen Baptist Convention, 2023). The number of Pwakanyaw *taohpwoh* will be significantly more when considering *taohpwoh* in Thailand and the diaspora, which are outside of the sovereignty of the Karen Baptist Convention (KBC). KBC is an umbrella organisation that supports and connects *taohpwoh* and that provides key resources to the *taohpwoh* movement, through education, health and the maintenance of Pwakanyaw print culture.

Power in KBC is diffuse and is based on practices of consultation and consensus. Participation in KBC is voluntary and individual *taohpwoh* join KBC as an expression of *tana* in Ywa and to strengthen the *taohpwoh* project. Participation in KBC is therefore an act of *tama* for Ywa and Ywa's followers, however activity at an individual *taohpwoh* is prioritised. KBC has 22 *kaw* in Myanmar and each *kaw* consists of hundreds of *taohpwoh*, each with their own territory. This model of *kaw* is culturally and geographically flexible. The KBC's demarcation of *kaw* places both the Andaman Islands and upper Irrawaddy Delta in the same *kaw* unit of Hawkata (Hinthada, formerly Henzada). This means that both my ethnographic field sites are located in the same demarcation, despite being located in two different nation states: India and Myanmar.

This research is about one movement of Pwakanyaw Christians, and does not represent Pwakanyaw history and society in all its diversity. It is about the *taohpwoh* movement that began in the 1830s in Burma, and it is about two communities in Myanmar and India which have adapted that movement to their particular social and political circumstances to create individual forms of identity and autonomy.

This thesis consists of six chapters and an introduction, which explore key elements of *taohpwoh* and which help to explain how the movement and indigenous paradigm emerged and has persisted. With the exceptions of chapter one and six, which explore *taohpwoh* and associated concepts and my own experience, each chapter is loosely centred on individual *taohpwoh* members in either India or Myanmar. *Taohpwoh* is both a collective and a wide, decentralised network spread across multiple countries. Focussing on individual stories to some extent helps to elaborate how *taohpwoh* operate but one individual members' experience or that of their *taohpwoh* cannot represent the diversity within the *taohpwoh* project.

Chapter one details *taohpwoh* and its associated concepts that shape this research. I argue that Pwakanyaw established *taohpwoh* as a creative response to autonomously manage, seek safety and benefit from the social and political transformation that arose from British colonisation. To do this, Pwakanyaw made use of different cosmologies to form a hybridised epistemic system that bridges ancestral values, knowledge and practices with modernity, and brings together human and non-human, physical and invisible beings. Central to *taohpwoh* is the Pwakanyaw concepts of *tana* (belief) and *tama* (conduct or practice). Using a decolonising approach and making use of *hta*, Pwakanyaw oral literature, I interpret the deity Ywa as an infinite source of energy observable and experienced through both the psychical and natural environment. The meaning of Ywa and how it is intertwined with *taohpwoh*, *tana* and *tama* will be discussed. The existence of *taohpwoh* depends on belief as well as actions that are centred on Ywa. *Tana* in Ywa is fundamental to *taohpwoh* belonging, maintenance and growth. *Tana* generates *taohpwoh* systems of value, formed through *tama*. As *tana* has Ywa as its object, *tama* similarly is connected to Ywa, which in turn, produces a localised form of power and agency to affect change. After introducing these interconnected concepts, I elaborate on key acts of *tama* in relation to *tana* that sustain *taohpwoh*: acts of prayer, acts of care and

protection, acts of self-reliance and acts of expansion, which are elaborated on in the rest of the thesis, and form a *taohpwoh* paradigm.

In chapter two, I explore the acts of establishment, protection and continuation of a *taohpwoh* in the Irrawaddy Delta in the context of storytelling. *Taohpwoh* were established in part as a means to provide security and protection as well as to guarantee both moral and material progress. In this chapter, I argue that the historical experience of violence and suffering, retold locally, is productive of *taohpwoh* sociality. In the *taohpwoh* today, stories of violence and survival emphasise the centrality of *tama* and *tana* in providing security and protection for the *taohpwoh* and in gaining power and agency. I explore the life stories of two *taohpwoh* guardians, which provides insight into the effect of conflict and upheaval and how it continues to influence *taohpwoh* everyday acts. I discuss *taohpwoh* ways of interpretation and how members make use of these life stories as a way to understand the past and seek a path into the future, as they face deep insecurity and future violence in Myanmar.

In the third chapter, I explore how *taohpwoh* members construct value that is integral to *taohpwoh* paradigm, through interlinked sacred acts of gardening, animal rearing and gift exchange. Action linked to belief, as *tana*, involves both ritual acts and the everyday exchange of gifts and commodities, which produce value within a hybridised system that incorporates both capitalist and non-capitalist Pwakanyaw approaches to value. The production of value in *taohpwoh* and the way it operates through *tana* and *tama* is demonstrated through an incident captured in ethnographic research in my field site the upper Irrawaddy Delta, in which a *taohpwoh* member's geese were killed by another member's dog, causing tension between the parties involved. The issue was resolved through ritual acts of exchange of prayer and asparagus, demonstrating an understanding of value informed by ancestral teachings, belief in Ywa, and ideas of value within capitalism.

The fourth chapter explores the act of expansion and growth of *taohpwoh* in the Andaman Islands that began with Pwakanyaw migration in 1925. I argue that expansion is a key act which I link to agency, as a result of the linked process of *tana* and *tama*. Seeing themselves as agents of the Pwakanyaw deity, Ywa, *taohpwoh* members relocated to the Andaman Islands, displacing indigenous people, as part of the British settler colonial project. While they made an informed choice to migrate to the Andaman Islands, *taohpwoh* members lacked agency within the structure of settler colonialism. However, through their parallel political structure of *taohpwoh*, they created their own sense of agency, which is an integral part of the *taohpwoh* ethos, and which has sustained them in the Andaman Islands until today. This chapter traces the story of migration from the upper Irrawaddy Delta to the Andaman Islands, centred on one *taohpwoh* member and her struggle to establish *taohpwoh* amid isolation, disease, poverty and the Japanese occupation. The success of the establishment and localisation of *taohpwoh* in the Andaman Islands is explained as a result of the interplay between *tana* and *tama*.

The fifth chapter explores how performative action at an individual and collective level within *taohpwoh* re-constitutes *taohpwoh* as a social unit through the waning and strengthening cycles of *tana*. My argument centres on an ethnographic case study of prayer healing, which I link to Pwakanyaw practices of agency, in which individual *taohpwoh* members channel the resource of *tana* to make changes to their everyday life and community. I discuss agency as a capacity to make changes to one's environment and ground the concept within *taohpwoh* as a form of shared social entity. Within the scope of *taohpwoh* everyday life, agency is not limited the external power of the deity, Ywa, but resides in human *taohpwoh* members and their ability to channel localised forms of power.

This chapter follows a *taohpwoh* member in the Andaman Islands and her community in seeking treatment for her physical illness. Through the course of various attempts, key ideas that form the basis of *taohpwoh*, *tana* and *tama*, is negotiated and interpreted in the quest for

healing. *Tana* and *tama* is not only confined to Pwakanyaw but transcends ethnic and geographic boundaries. In this case, *taohpwoh* members in the Andaman Islands pursue an alliance with prayer healers in eastern Assam and, through *tana* and *tama*, find temporary remedy to the cycle of illness and suffering. Common ground found with indigenous people in Assam demonstrates the pragmatic constitution of *taohpwoh*.

The concluding chapter reflects on my own experience as a Pwakanyaw researcher, a member of *taohpwoh* and my own dislocation from my ancestral *taohpwoh* as a result of civil war and state repression. I reflect on my personal history as a displaced person, as well as my fieldwork experience to reflect on varied Pwakanyaw concepts and practices of place-making, which includes *taohpwoh*. I also argue that *taohpwoh* is a unique social system given its commitment to hybridity in its belief system and practices, and this differs from indigenous movements based on revitalisation and claims to authenticity and uniformity. I give an example of the Pwakanyaw idea of nation, *hteekaw*, and how that has been adapted within the *taohpwoh* movement. *Taohpwoh* conceptions of its formation are diverse, given the varied practices of *hteekaw*, and this illustrates the decentralisation and flexibility of the *taohpwoh* movement. This has expanded my idea of Pwakanyaw nation which continues to shift and change as time flows.

I also reflect on my research journey, which involved reconnecting with the *taohpwoh* of my ancestors and its own knowledge paradigm. I discuss a *taohpwoh* methodology in connection with indigenous research methodologies and the project of epistemic decolonisation. I argue that to decolonise research on Pwakanyaw as an indigenous community on the margins equally requires self-location and reflexivity on the part of the researcher. As part of a decolonial approach, part of the conclusion is in *hta* form, in Pwakanyaw language, with an accompanied translation.

Chapter I: To believe is to engage in action:

Conceptualising *taohpwoh* as grounded epistemology and ontology

Soon after Ko Thabyu's baptism, he departed for the jungle east of Tavoy where many Pwakanyaw reside and began sharing Christianity in ways relatable to Pwakanyaw people. Ko Thabyu's teachings drew many Pwakanyaw to Christianity. The gradual increase of Pwakanyaw Christians led to the establishment of *taohpwoh*. In 1834, the first *taohpwoh* was set up in M̄e Tah (Metta) village with an initial 200 members (Thanbyah 1913, p. 133). Metta *taohpwoh* is likely the first *taohpwoh* in Pwakanyaw Christian history, although it is difficult to confirm this due to the limited sources available from Pwakanyaw people in the early colonial period. The setting up of *taohpwoh* is not merely the joining together of newly converted Pwakanyaw Christians. It is a complex social organisation and set of activities, that includes institutions and conventions around learning, caring and protection. These are activities necessary to deal with the calamitous effects of colonialism and post-colonial states. These key elements of *taohpwoh* and the immediate benefits of organising communities spread rapidly to inspire Pwakanyaw to establish *taohpwoh* elsewhere, responding to local needs and conditions. News of the establishment of *taohpwoh* and its effects travelled north and southwest, and Pwakanyaw *taohpwoh* were formed in Moulmein, Rangoon, Pegu, Henzada, Bassein, Toungoo and to the east in Siam (Thanbyah 1913, p. 133). These *taohpwoh* members were comprised of diverse Pwakanyaw language communities such as S'gaw, Plone, Bweh, Māw Nay Pwā and Pa Goo. The establishment of Metta *taohpwoh* and the social movement's spread from the jungle of Tavoy helped shape Pwakanyaw understanding of their collective identity within colonial society.

Taohpwoh is both a methodology and method. It is a key location where Pwakanyaw Christians seek, process and give meaning to their existence and place in the world in their own terms, where theories and symbolic meanings and practices are intertwined through *tana* (system of knowledge, belief and value) and *tama* (conduct and practice). This chapter will explore the idea of *taohpwoh* and its related concepts, which will be unpacked through the use of *hta*, stories, prayers and other Pwakanyaw texts. Central to *taohpwoh* is the notion of the deity, Ywa, which is intrinsically linked to the concepts of *tana* and *tama*. I will first discuss the concept of Ywa, and then explore the concept of *taohpohoh*, what constitutes it and how it has proliferated. I will then introduce the related concepts of *tana* and *tama*, which are key elements of *taohpwoh*, and examine them through acts of prayer, protection, self-reliance and learning, and which are discussed throughout this thesis.

Conceptualisation of Ywa

The supreme authority in every *taohpwoh* is Ywa, which underpins social structure and everyday action. The Pwakanyaw conception of Ywa is revealed in *hta*, which are categorised by diverse themes and forms. One key theme of Pwakanyaw *hta* is *hta htoo hta ywā*, which means *hta* about Ywa/ywa and the elaboration of Ywa's nature and capabilities. Ywa's identity is sometimes abstract and sometimes structured by Pwakanyaw kinship system, Ywa as a father, patriarch figure, meaningful only through his relation to Ywa *moh* (mother Ywa, matriarch), Ywa *hpoh* (children ywa) and Ywa *pu day* (ywa's younger sibling). In kinship, Ywa observes and fulfils his given roles and duties as a son to his parents and as a brother to his siblings. Ywa is a body that engages in varied actions grounded in the material world, yielding consequential effects. Like humans, Ywa configures his status as both creator as well as a source of destruction, and possesses psychical elements such as fear, rage, bravery,

stubbornness and hesitation. A common depiction of Ywa in *hta* is as a potent being, who is also deeply flawed and subject to illness and ageing. For instance, in one stanza of *hta*, Ywa is represented as an elderly man with dementia (Saw Tot, 2022, p. 13). Ywa was a Pwakanyaw deity that existed before the arrival of foreign missionaries and, for Pwakanyaw Christians, stands for the Judeo-Christian deity. According to Charles Keyes (1977, p. 52), “Y'wa cannot in fact be seen (at least prior to Christian missionization) as a high god that approximates the biblical conception of God.” Within *taohpwoh*, Ywa is interchangeably and simultaneously Christian and non-Christian, operating within a Pwakanyaw system of representation.

Following conventions of *hta*, I interpret *ywa* as power, energy, forceful movement and a generalised capacity to change and transform. In Pwakanyaw S’gaw and Plone language the word *ywa* literally means flow, the movement of energy and the source of life (see Appendix III). *Ywa*, as a verb, gives insight into Pwakanyaw ontology, of a world animated by *tama*, conducts and practices. *Ywa* can represent a sentient environment that Pwakanyaw interact with on a daily basis, as well as a cosmological foundation that intertwines Pwakanyaw within a complex network of relationships involving human and non-human physical beings and spirits. Power as *ywa* resides in toads, sparrows, rainbows and thunder, which exist in and animate the order of the universe. *Ywa* is observable in flowers and is sometimes described as the veins of leaves (Saw Tot, 1962), and as the life cycle of living organisms. *Ywa* as a life cycle is reflected in a Pwakanyaw *hta* about banyan trees, and I translate (Ko San Lu, 1953, p. 31):

ywa ga gāy ywa glāw klùh day	ယွၤကတုၤယွၤကျီၤချၢ်ဒဲ	ywa cut banyan's branch and left
klùh dōh sạ ywa kòh wāy gāy		ywa returned when young banyan
ywa ga gāy ywa glāw klùh sōh	ချၢ်ဒီးစၢ်ယွၤခိၣ်ဝုၤကတုၤ	sprouted
klùh dōh sạ ywa kòh wāy hkāw	ယွၤကတုၤယွၤကျီၤချၢ်စိး	ywa broke banyan's buds and left
		ywa came back as young banyan
	ချၢ်ဒီးစၢ်ယွၤခိၣ်ဝုၤယီၤ	sprouted.

This *hta* captures the nature of *ywa* as a cyclical, flowing energy. It moves freely in multiple directions and against tensions and contradictions; inward versus outward, up versus down, left versus right, like a banyan tree which was broken and could restore itself through a continuous flow of life forces that people witness in their everyday life. According to Htoo Hla E (1955, p. 25), a *taohpwoh* guardian and writer from Bassein, *ywa* is a delicately forceful and powerful life that rests inside an egg which could turn into a magnificent thing:

With an egg you can see a shell and its yolk inside but the power which is the seed of life cannot be seen. With the help of a hen, that egg can then become a chick, and later, a hen or a rooster.

Another example which Htoo Hla E gave of *ywa* is as the healing properties when particular ingredients are combined to make of medicine:

Look at someone who cooks medicine. First, they take different leaves, roots, flowers and fruits and cook them. The mixing of these materials creates a powerful product that can cure illnesses. (1955, p. 25)

It is a common theme in Pwakanyaw literature to represent *ywa* as an abstract force that is capable of doing magnificent things that cannot be easily observed and comprehended.

Examining Pwakanyaw conceptions of *ywa* illuminated through *hta* also reveals perceptions of space and time within *taohpwoh*. The spatial organisation of *taohpwoh* is foundational to the concept of *Ywa/ywa*, as a space co-inhabited by multiple living organisms with their environment, under and of *Ywa*. As *ywa* in the form of flow is characterised by instability, the spatial elements that are part of the *taohpwoh* paradigm are therefore unstable and constantly subject to change. In Pwakanyaw society, a core spatial concept is *hteekaw*, which means water, land, space, country and nation. Like *taohpwoh*, *hteekaw* is also fluid and reflects a non-

bounded conception of space that differs from spatial practices constructed through modern technologies of cartography. *Hteekaw* is co-habited by physical beings and spirits, and therefore is central to Pwakanyaw practices of spirit worship. This fluid merging of physical and invisible space continued through the *taohpwoh* movement, with Ywa located in *taohpwoh* like spirits in *hteekaw*. The spatialisation of Ywa expanded through the creation of *taohpwoh*, forming a networked archipelago that transcend the borders of modern nation states. Through ritual acts like praying, distance and space between Pwakanyaw and Ywa, and Pwakanyaw and other humans, are eliminated. Expanding *taohpwoh* means expanding Ywa's territory, however, this conception of sovereignty is unstable, according to the characteristics of Ywa. The exact cartographic demarcation is therefore unnecessary for *taohpwoh* legibility of space and territory. Pragmatism and co-optation of the instability of Ywa rather sustains *taohpwoh* and has enabled its expansion and adaptation across changing environmental and political contexts.

Time, within the *taohpwoh* paradigm, is centred on ywa as a flowing energy that shapes the universe. This is observable through the natural features such as the sun, moon, clouds and fire. Within *hta* about Ywa, time can be interpreted as cyclical but with a breaking point between day and night, and between seasons. Time is relational in *hta*. For instance, day is dependent on night and night is not meaningful without day. Within the *taohpwoh* paradigm, the present is more important than the past and future, and all are experienced through cycles in which there is continuity through relationships with Ywa. Pwakanyaw grammar similarly privileges the present, and there is no formal past or future tense but only words to describe time that is not in the present, such as “finished”. Similarly, the word for history in S'gaw language translates as “stories” or “sayings”, and can be about the past, present or future. *Taohpwoh* is built upon the fluctuating nature of ywa which defines spatial and temporal experiences of Pwakanyaw Christians. *Taohpwoh* are constructed to manage this instability, with the

presupposition that Pwakanyaw cannot be in control of the order of things, which depends on Ywa/ywa.

What is *taohpwoh*?

Taohpwoh” is a compound noun. A four-volume work published in 1848, titled as both a “thesaurus of Karen knowledge” and a “native Karen dictionary” does not include an entry for *taohpwoh*. It does include entries for the two words that make-up “*taohpwoh*”: “*ta*” and “*ohpwoh*.” According to the thesaurus, “*ta*” includes everything that can be seen with one’s eyes, both big and small, leaving nothing out. It includes everything on earth that Ywa created: trees, stones, animals, humans (Sau Kau-Too & J. Wade, 1848, p. 249). “*Ohpwoh*” is a verb that the thesaurus defines as ‘when we come to live together in large numbers’ (Sau Kau-Too & J. Wade, 1850, p. 299). So, if we combine those two words, all living beings and all elements of their habitat come together to form a community. All matters related to living beings and their habitat are part of *taohpwoh*.

The etymology of the term *ohpwoh* means actions or performance. It denotes the collective acts of likeminded humans coming together with non-human agents to form a system of diverse forms of knowledge, experience, values and practices. This thereby creates a loose structure in pursuit of social progress that does not include a clear distinction between spiritual and material domains. For Pwakanyaw Christians, *taohpwoh* is not just a social movement confined to humans, it also makes space for the organising of human relationships with animals and the natural environment. One announcement from *Dawkalu* (1890, p. 223), a Pwakanyaw S’gaw language periodical, described a new *taohpwoh* with an explicit mission to prevent animal abuse. To expand on the social movement of *taohpwoh*, it is necessary to name some of the key elements that can be identified in early *taohpwoh* and that continue to be used in practices

today. I will first briefly introduce how these elements were gathered and organised. These are based on the perspectives and experiences of *taohpwoh* elders at the time of early *taohpwoh* formation, and on some approaches they used in forming and accelerating the proliferation of *taohpwoh*.

Taohpwoh consists of *taohpwoh* guardians, *taohpwoh* elders and *taohpwoh* members, centred on their relationship with Ywa. All *taohpwoh* members have a direct relationship with Ywa and through belief and actions, both sacred and what could ordinarily be considered mundane, power is attained. Each person is considered to have equal access to Ywa. At a community level, each *taohpwoh* acquired power from Ywa so each has power over their own community. One *taohpwoh* cannot make decisions over another *taohpwoh* and there is no absolute power over the confederation of *taohpwoh* apart from Ywa.¹⁰ *Taohpwoh* leaders, writing in Pwakanyaw S'gaw in *Dawkalu* (1890, p. 70), defined *taohpwoh* by emphasising its democratic structure. I translate this passage as follows:

When we say '*taohpwoh*' it means the assertion of every follower that comes together in a group and organises themselves, has the same *tana*, the same hope and the same heart in the work of Ywa. It is not only elders and guardians amid them who have the power to judge the *taohpwoh*. When children receive the spirit of Ywa and become followers, their power is the same as adult followers of Ywa. The same with women, who have equal power with men. Students are equal to their teachers. Therefore, those people unite with one heart and work together with unity to resolve any issue that arises. When the entire *taohpwoh* makes a decision, that is final.

¹⁰ This characterisation of *taohpwoh* organisation is based on my own ethnographic research and on the extensive writing about *taohpwoh* in the Pwakanyaw periodicals, *Morning Star* and *Dawkalu*.

Cooperation between *taohpwoh* has similarly been characterised as voluntary and consensus-based, for mutual benefit (*Dawkalu*, 1890, pp. 84-85). According to one explanation, and I translate (*Dawkalu*, 1890, pp. 55-56):

All the *taohpwoh* matters relate to each respective *taohpwoh* and each has the power to do everything and decide their own affairs. There is neither a person nor an entity above them to make changes to what they believe is good for them. *Taohpwoh* have the power to accept, discipline and expel members. Ywa gave every *taohpwoh* the power to act according to their own interest and others cannot fix them or force them, with the exception of providing one another with advice.

Within this system, British colonial authorities and the post-colonial regimes are external and do not have authority over *taohpwoh*. *Taohpwoh* members therefore did not hold allegiance to the British crown within this structure. *Taohpwoh* operate in a liminal space, initially in the shadows and gaps of colonial rule and later in the gaps of the centralised Burmese state that has still been unable to solidify its sovereignty over the territory of Myanmar and its peoples.

Every *taohpwoh* is socially structured in a semi-hierarchical form, which reflects an amalgamation of influences, including congregational Baptist and Buddhist social structures. *Taohpwoh* guardians and elders are placed above general members. The authority of a *taohpwoh* guardian is acquired and accumulated through an observed, prolonged commitment to serving Ywa and the *taohpwoh*. *Taohpwoh* elders' authority is primarily connected to his or her *tana*. Decision-making and governance in *taohpwoh* are structured through kinship and the power of a *taohpwoh* guardian is in part derived from their kin relationships with *taohpwoh* members. This pattern of kinship influencing governance structures has been observed in pre-colonial Southeast Asian states more broadly (*Andaya*, 2006, p. 8). In *taohpwoh*, webs of relatedness are conveyed through the S'gaw term “*daw*,” representing interpersonal

relationships and dynamics of power within those relationships. Daw is a prefix that denotes a holistic relation (Sau Kau-Too & J. Wade, 1849) and can be seen in relational compound nouns such as *daw mah wā* (wife and husband/married couple), *daw hpoh pā* (child and father), *daw hpee lēe* (grandmother and grandchildren) and *daw tha gōh* (friend and friend). The concept of daw structures the composition of *taohpwoh*, which is made up of grandparents, parents, aunts and uncles, children, grandchildren and friends. Within a *daw* structure, a grandfather, father, husband and brother are incomplete and lack meaning without the relationship and association to their wife, siblings, children and grandchildren. Power in *taohpwoh* depends on the maintenance of these kin relationships, which requires the fulfilment of obligations on both sides of the relationship. If power is abused, the relationships disintegrate, which poses an existential threat to *taohpwoh*.

In order to understand the self-perception and political dynamics of those within *taohpwoh*, it is important to examine some of the early accounts of *taohpwoh* by its members. A large body of Pwakanyaw writings on *taohpwoh* can be found in periodicals like *Morning Star* and *Dawkalu*. The following is an early account of *taohpwoh* in Bassein under the Konbaung monarchy, and I translate (Saw Tha Ree, 1851, pp. 166-170),

The history of *taohpwoh* started like this. At the beginning, Christ's *taohpwoh* was in *pēe yāw kaw* and authorities tried very hard to stop it. The reason is that they did not want us to adopt *gāw lā wah* culture when we worship. However, *a plēh a bàw* did not listen. The reason was because we were happy, and it was so appealing to us. Because we did not listen to *pēe yāw* authorities, some got into trouble and lost assets. The reason for facing persecution came about like this. In order to create fear within those who do not have fear, and to encourage the will to abandon what one does not want to abandon, authorities arrest some of us and put us in jail.

This letter, provided in full in Appendix I, extrapolates some social phenomena that is important to *taohpwoh*. *Taohpwoh* members collectively endured discrimination that sometimes resulted in material loss and physical harm by Bamar officials. They described attacks in this period as being motivated by the appropriation of new ideas and practices that are part of Christianity. This letter also positively emphasised the coming together of households to form larger communities, that is at the core of the *taohpwoh* idea. The act of coming together involved constructing a settlement with permanent houses, a prayer hall and a school as features symbolising a *taohpwoh* and ideals of 'progress'. Another letter by a *taohpwoh* guardian reported a gradual changing mentality of Pwakanyaw in transitioning to *taohpwoh* society, as many Pwakanyaw he worked with showed a stronger willingness to form and live in *taohpwoh*. He described that nine households had already constructed houses on designated *taohpwoh* land while many also promised to join later (Lee Loo, 1851, pp. 171-172). This desire to live together requires contextualisation. Pwakanyaw pre-colonial living arrangements have been characterized as impermanent, mobile and which may only consist of a few families, sometimes staying in a single longhouse (Thanbyah, 1906, p. 10). For Saw Quala, these pre-colonial living arrangements were also a cause of suffering, and in which Pwakanyaw were more vulnerable and exposed to capture and slavery, which was practiced in precolonial Burma (1856, p. 10). Pwakanyaw Christians therefore saw benefits of living in a larger group, being more organised and prepared to defend themselves from outside threats.

With growing populations and new ideas about social organisation, Pwakanyaw developed techniques of enumeration to document the numbers of *taohpwoh* and the numbers of members by *taohpwoh*, with numbers reported and publicised. In cases where *taohpwoh* were not seen to advance in number and population, it was perceived as stagnation and interpreted as ungodly. In some cases, this led to *taohpwoh* being publicly named. For instance, Saw Quala (1851, pp. 121-122), an influential Pwakanyaw Christian leader, wrote a letter in *Morning Star*

questioning the stagnant development of Metta *taohpwoh* and asking for prayers from the wider network of *taohpwoh* members, and I translate:

It's me *thara* Quala, arriving back to Metta *taohpwoh*. Our brothers and sisters here are living relatively peacefully. However, it seems to me that they have not put all their efforts in the act of joining together. I am writing this letter only four days after my return and I could not say for sure whether Ywa's followers here had tried their best and whether they are eager to improve their condition in the future. I would like to write about this so that all Ywa followers everywhere are aware of this. I have a sense that they are very weak at the moment. Therefore, I call on brothers and sisters everywhere to pray for them, so that Ywa returns to Metta *taohpwoh*, grants them with love, grace, purity and kindness. Help them by begging to our Ywa. This year I think I will have to stay at Metta *taohpwoh* because some *tharah* and *taohpwoh* members begged me to stay and help them. Though I am here, without the help of Ywa, we can't do anything. Therefore, do help each other by praying hard to Ywa. Ywa is capable of everything, and we believe that Ywa will help us. Like the saying of our elders, 'when a younger sibling falls, their older sibling helps them up, when an older sibling falls, their younger sibling helps them up'. Members of Metta' *taohpwoh* became Ywa followers before those in Moulmein, Rangoon, Arakan and other parts of Tenasserim. Now, they are weaker and smaller in numbers so we should try to help them. Ywa gave you wisdom so help us.

Saw Quala's letter shows the centrality of population growth within the conceptualisation of *taohpwoh*. The lack of growth in Metta *taohpwoh* posed a threat for the overall Pwakanyaw *taohpwoh* movement. The power of a *taohpwoh* is based on its members and they also carry a responsibility in the eyes of wider *taohpwoh* leaders like Saw Quala. The letter highlighted Saw Quala's concern but, by putting it in *Morning Star*, he made it a concern for *taohpwoh*

members outside of Metta, who were then asked to provide support through the sacred act of prayer, thereby bonding *taohpwoh* members together in an imagined community of prayer. The letter above, along with similar writing, shows the growth of solidarity across *taohpwoh*, which helped Pwakanyaw respond to the insecurity of British colonialism and the violent fall of the Konbaung monarchy. It also served as a reminder in motivating and pushing every *taohpwoh* to rigorously engage in *taohpwoh* expansion, though the increase of members.

The dynamics of expansion of members involves a dichotomy of two categories of personhood: *bah Ywa* (Christian) and *thuko* (non-Christian). *Bah Ywa* are those who baptised and who accepted Christian belief and practices. Pwakanyaw early believers assumed themselves to be on a path of socio-economic and political progress. Progress in both material and spiritual terms are important elements in constructing believers' identity that contrasts with those Pwaknyaw who are defined as non-believers, such as those who are Buddhist. The *taohpwoh* movement has sought to incorporate non-Christians through conversion, and this is not only a narrowly defined religious mission but also perceived as a means to strengthen Pwakanyaw as a nation, and to gain power, security and progress.

Tana and tama

Grounding my research in Pwakanyaw epistemology, ontology and axiology means I need to expand on some key Pwakanyaw language terms. Central to *taohpwoh* subjectivity and sociality are the concepts of *tana* and *tama*. *Tana* denotes a system of belief and value, and *tama* is equivalent to the concepts of action, conduct or practices. *Tana* is derived from the S'gaw verb, *na*, which refers to the process of being conscious that something is real (Sau Kau-Too & J. Wade, 1849, p. 73). *Tama* is derived from the S'gaw verb, *mar*, which means do, work and creation. *Ta* is a prefix common to both terms that refers to all that can be seen and touched

(Sau Kau-Too & J. Wade, 1848, p. 249). *Tana* combines both material and idealistic elements: that which can be seen and that which cannot; while *tama* is grounded in the physical actions of humans. *Tana* describes how the internalised rules and teachings of Ywa and ancestors underpins the everyday ritualised actions of Pwakanyaw. *Tana* and *tama* cannot stand by themselves. They must always have an object, for instance attaching to Ywa or ancestor spirits. *Tana* and *tama* are interrelated. *Tana* is necessary to execute *tama*, action, and *tama* is necessary to give meaning to *tana*. The two concepts are co-dependent and give meaning to the *taohpwoh* paradigm.

Tana is a conceptual basis for rituals and practices, which are acts of *tama*, and for power relations between different agents, both human and non-human, both living organisms and inanimate material objects. *Tana* within Pwakanyaw Christian practice implies that the world is shaped by Ywa and the sayings of ancestors. Ywa is embodied through the practice of *tana* and constituted through *tama*, action. Externally, Ywa is a force that tests one's *tana* through suffering, rewards piety with gifts, and can be influenced through action that materialises *tana*. *Tana* is a symbolic representation of value within *taohpwoh*, and operates as a central source of power that informs the *tama* of *taohpwoh* members and the *taohpwoh* as a collective entity, as they seek meaning and make changes to their society and environment. While *tana* is also linked to economic outcomes, it operates as a moral form of value that encompasses the material. I interpret *tana* as a semiotic representation of *taohpwoh* value that operates as a totalising structural concept. This is informed by the anthropologist Terence Turner's (2008) analysis of Marxian value. For Turner, value relations are not only limited to industrialised society, which was the basis of Marx's analysis, but are a universal phenomenon that can be studied ethnographically, since every society produces their own systems of value. As a "constituent of systems of social production that consists essentially of forms of representation," value therefore needs to be analysed in its cultural context to understand how

it is defined and collectively produced and circulated (Turner, 2008, p. 47). *Taohpwoh* is a specific Pwakanyaw Christian cultural context to analyse multiple forms of value in the form of *tana*. *Tana* production and circulation mediates and sacralises capitalist relations within *taohpwoh*. In this sense, it helps to sustain and reproduce capitalism, which I expand on in Chapter III.

Tana is relational, fluid and constantly shifting according to changing social contexts that are a result of *tama*. Like the concept of Ywa, as flow, *tana* moves from one stage to another in a way that is non-linear and cyclical. It is an infinite resource that can be generated through *tama* as repeated, ritualised actions. For *taohpwoh* members, *tana* fluctuates in degrees between poles: strengthening or weakening, increasing or waning. These forces of *tana* feed each other, and are calibrated through individual and collective *tama*. Increasing and intensifying *tana* is understood to result in good outcomes at points in time, in particular circumstances, such as health, wealth and the expansion of *taohpwoh*. Waning and decreasing *tana* is understood to cause bad experiences, such as illness, poverty and the disintegration of *taohpwoh*, as well negative forms of *tana* that are associated with harmful spirits. Harmful or evil spirits are not outside of the production of *tana* within *taohpwoh*, but are part of it. Dangerous spirits and associated negative *tana* are necessary for *taohpwoh* members to produce positive *tana* that is associated with Ywa and their ancestors. The will to endure and overcome tests of suffering and the constant danger of bad spirits constitutes and multiplies *tana*. The centrality of *tana* as a value generated from suffering within Pwakanyaw Christian practice can in part be seen as an outcome of modernity and *taohpwoh* collective experience of war and conflict, which intensified following the start of British colonisation. Colonisation involved suffering, extreme violence and disorder, and the endurance of this suffering was transformed into a key *taohpwoh* value. Suffering became a resource of power for Pwakanyaw Christians. The fluctuating forces

of positive and negative *tana* constitutes *taohpwoh* sociality, which is manifested and reproduced through the instability of *tana*.

The production of *tana* requires different resources: human *taohpwoh* members, material objects and *tama* that make use of energy and time. *Tana* is a social process, collectively produced within and through *taohpwoh*. Production alone does not sustain *tana*. Distribution of *tana* is also essential. Both productive and distributive *tama* is needed to harness *tana* as a form of power and translate it into material benefit for a *taohpwoh*. Through the embodiment of Ywa and the spirit of ancestors, *taohpwoh* members exchange *tama* and objects infused with *tana* between one another and Ywa in return for rewards that fulfil individual and collective desires and needs. Action (*tama*) to produce and distribute *tana* within and for *taohpwoh* includes spontaneous, rhythmic and poetic prayer and physical labour such as caring, teaching, food production, defence and development work. Through acts of exchange and reciprocity between Ywa and other *taohpwoh* members, *tana* increases, and as a result, motivates more *tama* that furthers the accumulation of *tana*. As *tana* increases, so too does the risk of its depletion by immoral acts, by the neglect of Ywa and ancestral teachings and by the danger of *thoo kòh hpoh* (non-Christians). Acts of exchange within *taohpwoh* are similar to Mauss's (1954, pp. 13-16) theorisation of gift giving and *hau*, as a spirit of the giver that is present in the gift. However, unlike *hau*, *tana* involves the spirit of Ywa, the giver and their ancestors. The gift of *tana* can be both material, through things that contain the quality of *tana*, and the gift of *tama* as ritualised acts.

The coupling of *tana* and *tama* has a transformative effect in empowering *taohpwoh* members and *taohpwoh* as a collective to act on the world. In this sense, it is linked to agency, as individuals embody the teachings and power of Ywa and their ancestors, and use that as a resource for their own individual and collective action for change. Central to the concept of *tana* is therefore the action of individuals and the determination of the *taohpwoh* as a collective

of the object that *tana* is deployed to affect. The embodiment of Ywa within *tana/tama* infuses *taohpwoh* members with agentive power to influence the outcome of their actions. Requests sought may be granted by a supposedly just and fair Ywa, but *tana*, as a diffuse and collective form of power, does not always yield positive results, as I show later in this thesis. Collective *tana* requires rigorous engagement in actions that are perceived to yield positive results, both material and spiritual, which are viewed holistically. This holistic worldview does not make a clear distinction between actions based on “religion” and those involving work for material development. This spiritual and material development is not just situated in a specific *taohpwoh*, but is articulated and passed on to others who are imagined to be part of Ywa’s realm, comprising those who are Pwakanyaw or non-Pwakanyaw, *taohpwoh* or non-*taohpwoh* members, Christian or non-Christian. Pwakanyaw *taohpwoh* members and their desire to spread this holistic growth to fellow Pwakanyaw as well as non-Pwakanyaw people, compares to the role of Western missionaries in the spread Christianity transforming the colonised world. For instance, a *taohpwoh* member named Ba Thaw was involved in missionary work and collaboratively developed a written script for the Lisu community in the Yunnan Province in far west China (Arrington, 2020). This is one of example of Pwakanyaw *taohpwoh* members engaged in acts of *tama* to expand *taohpwoh* in their own terms, and these practices remain alive within contemporary *taohpwoh* communities.

Everyday life within *taohpwoh* is therefore focused on the interwoven concepts of *tana* and *tama*, which provide a means for *taohpwoh* and its members to interpret and give meaning to their particular circumstances. These inter-related concepts provide the possibilities to produce power and gain agency, and this underpins the material production that is essential for members’ survival. *Tana* and *tama* require moral investment, and this investment is articulated through values of empathy, selflessness, love and care, and is materialised in many different

forms. The related concepts of *tana* and *tama* therefore help explain the endurance and growth of *taohpwoh* ethnoreligious communities, which will be further elaborated through this thesis.

***Taohpwoh* and the *tama* of prayer**

In his unfinished dissertation on prayer, Mauss conceptualised prayer as a social phenomenon, and suggested that even private prayer is structured through church (2003, p. 33). Pwakanyaw prayer is structured through *taohpwoh* and, through prayer, *taohpwoh* reproduces itself. Pwakanyaw Christians perform acts (*tama*) of prayer with *tana*, and this creates and reproduces the myriad social ties within *taohpwoh*, and *taohpwoh* sociality as a whole. Prayer brings members of individual *taohpwoh* together as a collective and prayer is a means of connecting all *taohpwoh* together across wide geographic areas. As a ritual act, *tama*, there are different contexts of prayer, different people who pray and various ways of praying. However, the object of prayer is always the same: Ywa. The act of prayer is egalitarian and does not have a rigid structure. However, as it is believed to be an act of sacred interaction with Ywa, it has some formality in the sense that it must be performed with respect and decency, and must loosely follow certain linguistic conventions. Choice of words and tone of communication with Ywa, are expected to be sincere, heartfelt, aesthetic and to demonstrate veneration of the nature of Ywa.

Prayer is done everywhere: at church, at home, at work. Every *taohpwoh* member regardless of status can freely pray. However, an exception is in public prayer, where prayer leaders often have status within the *taohpwoh* and leading prayer is a form of recognition. Praying is an oral communication that can be done with an audience or alone in private. However, even when prayer is individual and private, it is still a collective activity that is discussed and involves

reciprocation, as seen in the common phrases like “I’ll pray for you”, “pray for me” and “pray for us.” Public prayers are communally interpreted and shared by *taohpwoh* members.

Unlike words frozen in print, praying is an active and creative oral form of communication between prayers and listeners, and messages are communicated in tonal and rhythmic ways and are usually accompanied by music and audience reaction, elements that the political scientist James C. Scott (2009, p. 230) has attributed to oral literature. Prayer for Pwakanyaw is a form of oral culture, continuing *hta* rituals, and can be understood as an indigenous way of communicating with an indigenous source of power. The orality and spontaneity of prayer contrasts with the textuality of the bible and moves by *taohpwoh* members to develop a written culture in other spheres. Prayer is a performance that requires repetition and continuation and has ‘inalterable presentness’ (*ibid*). Pwakanyaw prayer as an indigenous practice continues to exist and evolve because of the crucial role it plays in sustaining *taohpwoh*.

Apart from communally organised prayer that takes place at church, there are prayer rituals like *göh bah ywā* or *mā bòo ywā*, in which individual *taohpwoh* members organise prayer with the help of a *taohpwoh* guardian. The aim of *göh bah ywa* is varied but the content of prayer solely depends on the desire of the family that requested it. A common reason for *göh bah ywa* is a birthday, when family members are sick and recovering from illnesses, when achievements have been reached or to gain opportunities. *Göh bah ywa* is sometimes conducted solely between a *taohpwoh* guardian and the family, however most times it is accompanied by other community members who were invited by the family to join the ritual. *Göh bah ywā* or *mā bòo ywā*, according to T. Thanbyah (1904, p. 39), derives from pre-Christian Pwakanyaw societal practices of spirit appeasement, involving praying and feasting.

In the early period of *taohpwoh*, discussion of prayer reflected concern for the future of the *taohpwoh* movement and the extreme insecurity of the Pwakanyaw during the nineteenth

century. Key leaders of the early *taohpwoh* movement regularly requested members to remember each other in prayer, and, in this way, prayer was a key medium in the construction of an “imagined community” of Pwakanyaw Christians. They prayed to increase *taohpwoh* members through Christianisation (Du Mu, 1852, p. 14) and prayed for the protection of those who were suffering as a consequence of conflict that resulted in theft, robbery and killings by royal soldiers and dacoits (Dee Heh, 1852, pp. 186-187).

Prayer also served as a reminder to be good moral hard-working people, loyal to *taohpwoh* and Ywa (Quala, 1852, p. 189). Prayer for the government is also a practice in *taohpwoh* community and was possibly part of a defensive strategy. For instance, a *taohpwoh* member from Rangoon wrote about his experiences under Konbaung rule in 1850, and I translate:

Brothers and sisters in Moulmein and Tavoy, everyone who sees my letter and reads it should pray for us, so that Ywa will alter the heart of officials and they will not stop us from preaching, as is the condition where you are. (Lay, 1851, p. 90)

As a key act of *taohpwoh* everyday life, prayer underpins varied actions and mediates social relations within individual *taohpwoh*.

***Taohpwoh*, persecution and the *tama* of protection**

Taohpwoh from its inception played an important role as a protector and provider for members’ wellbeing and security. *Tana* is linked to safety from existential threats that emerged directly from colonialism and its consequential effects, which were factors that pressed *taohpwoh* members to adopt complex approaches in addressing imminent dangers in their vicinity. *Tama* that *taohpwoh* members engaged in, normally led by *taohpwoh* guardians and elders, out of

necessity involved the provision of security, safeguarding the lives of members from persecution, and defending *taohpwoh* land and property. This security aspect of *taohpwoh* is linked to crises associated with British colonisation, which involved fundamental shifts in the nature of political power and contested sovereignty in Burma.

Taohpwoh members across lower Burma experienced immense insecurity during and after the second Anglo-Burman war in 1852. The war led to forced migration and starvation, the destruction of villages and livelihoods, property theft, disease, and physical violence, including torture and killings.¹¹ Providing security involved participating in violence by attacking dacoits (Thanbyah, 1913, pp. 101-104). Dacoit is a Hindi term for gangs of bandits that proliferated during colonial rule. Dacoits are also represented as anti-colonial fighters in India and Burma, depending on the context and perspective. In Pwakanyaw literature, these attacks on dacoits are framed as a means to protect *taohpwoh*, as *tama*, rather than to protect the British colony. Upon the realisation that British officials could not provide security for vulnerable Pwakanyaw communities, *taohpwoh* leaders took matters into their own hands (*Morning Star*, 1853, p. 80). As a necessary *tama* assigned to them by Ywa, many *taohpwoh* guardians led the movement in defending *taohpwoh*, and this could have been a reason they were targeted for arrest, torture and killing by monarchical loyalists and dacoits. They were often blamed for aiding the British occupation of Burma, and sometimes punished with brutal violence (Shway Nyoh, 1853, p. 141). According to a short news report in *Morning Star* (1853, p. 96) a *taohpwoh* leader in the region of Rangoon led a militia against a group of dacoits who looted *taohpwoh*. Under the pretext of *taohpwoh* defence, the leader killed fifty Bamar and took thirty-two of them as slaves. Killings justified as self-defence therefore became sacred *tama*.

¹¹ This has been discussed extensively in T. Thanbyah, *The Karens and their persecution A.D 1824-1854*, 1904.

After British annexation of Pegu in 1852, the upper Irrawaddy Delta was a frontier zone between the British colony and the Konbaung kingdom. In a personal letter published in *Morning Star* (1853, pp. 108-9), *taohpwoh* leader Saw Leh Nyoh reflected on the situation in Pegu, and I translate:

Some Pwakanyaw village chiefs who were Ywa's followers came to inform big general so that his soldiers would be sent to suppress Bamar soldiers in Pegu who stayed close to residents of the land and robbed belongings, stealing paddy and food. We have lost everything and there was a possibility that we could not work this rainy season because we had to hide from dacoit attacks.

Through the help of missionaries from the United States of America, British military officers which Saw Leh Nyoh referred to as "big general" listened to Pwakanyaw requests and sent a steamship with soldiers up to Pegu but the situation did not improve. In the view of Pwakanyaw Christians, the British soldiers that were sent to Pegu were incompetent and did not even know how to chase down Bamar soldiers. After the British soldiers left, the Bamar soldiers returned to Pegu. As looting intensified, *taohpwoh* leaders went to ask for guns and cartridges from British officials and returned to their village to protect their people. In the same letter, Saw Leh Nyoh also reported fighting between Bamar soldiers and Pwakanyaw from a *taohpwoh* led by a guardian named Saw Nay Tha. About two hundred and fifty Bamar soldiers surrounded the village and Ywa's followers defended themselves from the attack. Sixteen Bamar soldiers died and four Pwakanyaw were injured (*Morning Star*, 1853, pp. 108-9). The persecution of Pwakanyaw across lower Burma was extensively recorded in *Morning Star*. Because of the widespread fighting, many Pwakanyaw in Pegu, Rangoon, Bassien, Henzada and elsewhere were displaced. *Taohpwoh* were attacked, houses were burnt down and *taohpwoh* members ran for their life and hid in the jungle (1853, p. 118). *Taohpwoh* networks documented the attacks. Half of the *taohpwoh* in Bassein were destroyed.

Table 1: 1852 Statistics of Pwakanyaw *taohpwoh* in Bassein

<i>Taohpwoh</i>	50	
<i>Taohpwoh</i> members	5000	
<i>Taohpwoh</i> guardians	55	
Deaths of <i>taohpwoh</i> members	150	
<i>Taohpwoh</i> villages burnt and destroyed	25	
Death of <i>taohpwoh</i> guardians	7	One murdered by Bamar soldiers
New <i>taohpwoh</i> members	43	
Household becoming Christian	28	

Source: (*Morning Star*, 1853, p. 155)

Political allegiances were on both sides of the unrest, with Pwakanyaw being both victims of dacoits and members of dacoit gangs. While Pwakanyaw Christians actively participated in fighting and cracking down on dacoits, Buddhist and animist Pwakanyaw were fighting as dacoits themselves. These tensions are seen in the historical memory and representation of Myat Htun, who came to be considered a national hero for his anti-colonial resistance in the 1850s. Myat Tun's headquarters were in Danuphyu, in the Henzada area, close to one of my field sites. Many Pwakanyaw were opposed to Myat Htun as a threat to *taohpwoh*, while others were part of his gang. Pu Kangale was a Pwakanyaw leader of an armed group who joined Myat Tun with his followers and fought the British. (Independent Karen Historical Research Association, 1997, p. 99). One Pwakanyaw source describes Myat Htun as forcefully taking Pwakanyaw women as wives and being widely feared by *taohpwoh* members (Thanbyah, 1904, p. 64). Another source describes a visit by Pwakanyaw missionaries to villages in the upper Irrawaddy Delta to proselytise to Pwakanyaw Buddhists. The Pwakanyaw missionary wrote that a few village heads refused to consider Christianity, as they were so frightened of retaliation from Myat Htun (*Morning Star*, 1853, pp. 136-137). Myat Htun is now celebrated as a national hero in Burmese history, both by progressive writers (Ban' mo' Tan' 'On', 1972)

and in the grade four state history curriculum (Salem-Gervais & Metro, 2012, p. 36). An important bridge in the Irrawaddy Delta is named after him, as well as other key landmarks. However, for *taohpwoh* members, he symbolises a threat to their existence. This is an enduring problem in Burmese history, as some anti-colonial leaders like Myat Htun are uncritically celebrated within totalising state narratives.

After the fall of the Konbaung monarchy in 1885, there was again widespread unrest, lawlessness and anti-colonial revolt which threatened *taohpwoh* communities. According to the Henzada entry in the *Imperial Gazette* (Hunter, 1885, p. 385):

The whole of the delta was not, however, entirely cleared of Burmese troops, and many marauders remained who only awaited a favourable opportunity for opening a guerrilla war upon the British and their supporters... Bassein and the southern part of Henzada had been in a still more unsettled state.

Taohpwoh members acquired arms from the British with the help of missionaries in order to further defend their *taohpwoh* as Ywa's realm, as sacred acts of *tama*. Pwakanyaw communities in the Irrawaddy Delta again suffered from widespread attacks from dacoits after the third Anglo Burman War, similar to the period after the second Anglo Burman war. A dacoit named Kyar Bo was notorious in the Bassein area, where T. Than Byah is from. Byah wrote about his studies in the mission compound during this time when there was widespread fear and residents were in a state of heightened alert for attacks day and night. Young men, regardless of their age, had to guard the entrances of the compound and carry guns, machetes, spears and sticks. No Bamar were allowed to enter, not even Bamar women or children. British authorities asked Pwakanyaw to help in their suppression of dacoits and had a policy to give a reward of 100 rupees for those who can bring the head of a dacoit. A lot of Pwakanyaw joined in to kill dacoits and exchanged severed heads for money (Thanbyah, 1913, pp. 96-98).

As *tama*, *taohpwoh* elders continued attempts to acquire guns and ammunition for *taohpwoh* defence. The *tama* of defence was sometimes mistrusted by the British, who had different interests. In 1887, a *taohpwoh* guardian in the Maubin area of the Irrawaddy Delta named Shwe Meh was informed by a missionary named Victor to be attentive and be prepared with weapons so that he can protect *taohpwoh* members as there were rumours of a revolt (Thanbyah, 1913, p. 101). With a letter from Wade, Shwe Meh went to the Maubin Deputy Commissioner, Mr. Cook, for permission to buy gunpowder and iron balls. The Deputy Commissioner denied the request and rather accused Shwe Meh of being a liar and said everything was fine in the area. Shwe Meh went to Rangoon to see Wade who procured gunpowder and iron balls for him. On the way back to Maubin, a British regional secretary was in search of Shwe Meh and when he met him, told him about dacoit attacks in the area and requested Shwe Meh to organise Pwakanyaw to help in the suppression of dacoits. Shwe Meh, another *taohpwoh* guardian and about 40 Pwakanyaw people came together and joined the chase in attacking dacoits. Dacoit leaders were killed and some were captured alive. British officials were grateful for this and rewarded Shwe Meh with a pistol.

The successful suppression of the dacoit movement by Pwakanyaw *taohpwoh* leaders was interpreted by some British officials as a sign of loyalty to the colony. Donald Mackenzie Smeaton, a British official, even wrote a book titled *The Loyal Karens of Burma* which advocated for the British to consider a Pwakanyaw nation as a reward for support to the British. Smeaton called Pwakanyaw ‘the staunchest and bravest defenders of British rule (1920, p. 1) and stated that “the Karen people are at heart loyal to us, and they have proved their loyalty by freely shedding their blood in defence of our rule and in the cause of order” (1920, p. 2). However, based on accounts from Pwakanyaw Christians and their experience during colonial conflict, Pwakanyaw took up arms and fought to protect their *taohpwoh* based on *tana* to live in safety and free from the destructive force of outsiders. While outsider accounts in English

and Burmese have perceived Pwakanyaw as fighting for the colony, numerous Pwakanyaw accounts at the time express the necessity of armed defence because of a mistrust of the colonial regime and its failure to provide security. British attempts to seek help from *taohpwoh* leaders and British writing that celebrated Pwakanyaw as loyal subjects even put *taohpwoh* at risk because they were then seen as collaborators. In this context, *taohpwoh* leaders saw the British as a source of weapons and some Pwakanyaw Christians were appealed by bounties. However, most importantly, protection and self-defence were a sacred *tama* performed through and for *taohpwoh*, to protect Ywa's followers and sustain and expand Ywa's realm on earth.

Violence and communal tension are defining factors for what constitutes *taohpwoh*. The formation of *taohpwoh* was a response to violent othering of Pwakanyaw and a creative strategy to ensure safety and accommodate changing political circumstance, which involved widespread suffering. How Pwakanyaw made sense of themselves changed in colonial times and the experience of violence is part of what forged contemporary Pwakanyaw identity, created and recreated through *taohpwoh* and its interlinking *tana* and *tama*.

***Taohpwoh* autonomy and *tama* of self-reliance**

From the start of *taohpwoh* formation, there has been a strong *tana* among *taohpwoh* members to operate independently from the American Baptist Mission and state institutions. Foreign missionaries described this zeal as Pwakanyaw “self-help” and “self-support” (Carpenter, 1883; Titterington, 1891). Some foreign missionaries have tried to take credit for Pwakanyaw forms of self-help in the context of the *taohpwoh* movement, as if the idea of autonomy is a foreign concept for Pwakanyaw. For Pwakanyaw, autonomy is a core indigenous values and there is even a common Pwakanyaw proverb, and I translate, “don't breathe through someone else's nose, because you'll suffocate.” Autonomy and self-reliance within Pwakanyaw

taohpwoh remain central acts of *tama* even under the extreme socio-economic and political pressures that have arisen in post-colonial Burma, including war and dictatorship.

Within the *taohpwoh* movement, autonomy requires active participation of members in enacting *taohpwoh* values, *tana*, and supporting the operation and expansion of the *taohpwoh*. *Taohpwoh* guardians facilitate the growth of *taohpwoh* in both a material and spiritual sense. *Tama* of autonomy entails practical engagements in actions perceived as significant to *taohpwoh* operations, which includes an obligation for members to support the material needs of their respective *taohpwoh* guardians and teachers who lead the *taohpwoh* and are responsible for literacy and education of their children. Members take care of each other, and extra effort is given to caring and nurturing for more disadvantaged and destitute members of the community. *Taohpwoh* autonomy and care also entails the support offered to those who they view as non-Christians. This continued Christianisation was orchestrated through continuous support to *taohpwoh* guardians to preach and work with non-Christian communities, leading to the establishment of more *taohpwoh*. Teachers were sent to non-Christian communities for educational purposes so that progress, at least in the view of *taohpwoh* communities, was mutually realised in the wider Pwakanyaw society (Tha Ree, 1851, p. 46). Autonomy as a value connected to *tana* within *taohpwoh* was therefore sometimes extended beyond the Pwakanyaw community. The table below shows a *taohpwoh* in Bassein financially supporting an American missionary residing among them, although concerns regarding the power relations when Pwakanyaw support foreign missionaries was raised by Carpenter (1883, p. 324) in a book on self-support: “To do the native Christians and the heathen the greatest amount of good, the missionary must be quite independent of native support.”

Table 2: Bassein taohpwoh expenditure in 1856

Fellowship work	849
Money for <i>taohpwoh</i> guardian 1291 <i>bat</i> , 15 <i>bwe</i> , 6 <i>kat</i> Paddy 4126 baskets	2942
For learning	910
For <i>taohpwoh</i> 's ceremonial hall	1222
For poor people and preacher	192
For an American teacher who lost his house in fire	741
Helped buy books for American teacher	586
For food to learn	301
Help for American fellowship	125

Source: (*Morning Star*, 1857, p. 55)

Self-reliance is practiced and promoted both in each *taohpwoh* as well as within the broader *taohpwoh* network. For instance, a *taohpwoh* leader published a motivational letter in *Morning Star* encouraging *taohpwoh* members to support a printing project with the aim to print and make different educational books available for Pwakanyaw. A *taohpwoh* elder, Pah Pu, in an 1857 edition of *Morning Star* wrote that ‘books for Pwakanyaw are like milk and are good for us. There are many Pwakanyaw who wasted money on trivial things, and it will far better to spend money on good causes like printing books’ (pp. 77-78). Within *taohpwoh*, books are valued as a means for social development and progress, and this is part of a *taohpwoh* paradigm of self-reliance shaped through the *tana* of autonomy.

Within the *taohpwoh* movement, self-help is idealised as a key value by early Pwakanyaw *taohpwoh* guardians, and actions towards this goal were taken seriously and widely discussed in a way that involved encouragement as well as public shaming. Saw Du Mu, a Pwakanyaw *taohpwoh* guide and a preacher published a personal letter in *Morning Star* (1852, p. 14) criticising a *taohpwoh* in Tavoy for not taking care of their *taohpwoh* guardian, and I translate:

I have seen your *taohpwoh* guardian is grinding his own paddy and I am so ashamed. News like this is not going to be good when others hear it. How could you serve and be near to Ywa if you cannot even adequately provide for the only *taohpwoh* guardian you have. As you have gained grace from Ywa, suppress your ego at the front of Ywa and look after your *taohpwoh* guardian. My beloved brothers and sisters, I see that you are not providing food to your *taohpwoh* guardian and therefore I would like to make this kind of comment, but I am not insulting you, I am saying this because I do not want you to be insulted by others.

Pwakanyaw's *tana* in self-reliance gave *taohpwoh* autonomy from the interference of foreign missionaries, as well as enabling *taohpwoh* to operate independently of the colonial state. Foreign missionaries cautioned each other in the treatment of self-supported *taohpwoh*, compared to those they were financially supporting. For instance, according to the Proceedings of a Convention of Burman and Karen Missionaries (1853, pp. 42-43), the American Baptist Mission made a distinction between 'native assistants' who were paid by the Mission and those who were appointed and supported by *taohpwoh*. In a report on native assistants submitted to the convention, it is specified that candidates who were supported from mission funds are to be appointed by the mission and that there are guardians 'set apart' who are appointed by their own people. In a discussion on supervision, the report specifies that candidates appointed by the mission are to be supervised by the mission. However, a distinction is made for *taohpwoh* guardians (1853, pp. 42-43):

Nor ought the native pastors, even when they are supported by the churches over which they are severally placed, to be exempt from this supervision, although in their case it should be more strictly advisory, special pains being taken to impress their minds with a sense of accountability to Christ, and also to prevent an impression being made that the missionary is lording it over them.

This may help explain a strong sentiment among Pwakanyaw Christians against accepting funds from foreign missionaries. A similar point is made in the book, *A Star in the East*, which describes Pwakanyaw church organisation, meaning *taohpwoh*: ‘even if the missionary were disposed to interfere in the internal affairs of the churches, he is precluded from doing so by the fact that the churches in most of the missions are not only entirely independent and self-supporting, but they support all their schools and other enterprises besides’ (Harris, 1920, p. 100). This account further suggests that in part, self-help was a strategy that Pwakanyaw used to keep foreign missionaries at an arm’s length, enabling them to operate autonomously in the spirit of *tana* and *tama*. From its origins, ideas of autonomy and self-reliance have been key values of *taohpwoh*, which have helped the *taohpwoh* movement to continue to reproduce itself until today. A key realm where *tama* of self-reliance is practiced is in education.

***Taohpwoh’s* totalising progress, *tama* of learning and seeking knowledge**

As an oral community, seeking knowledge in written literature became an important social project for *taohpwoh*. The *tama* of learning is a communal project that is intrinsic to the creation of *taohpwoh* as a sacred act of *tana*. In a *taohpwoh* context, a key term for knowledge is *Ywa ga lu Ywa ga hta*, which means the ‘sayings or teaching of Ywa’, a concept that shapes Pwakanyaw epistemology and ontology and is shared in the form of oral storytelling and *hta*. This term reflects the privileging of orality in the production and dissemination of knowledge, and the centrality of Ywa as a source of knowledge, which is sacred.

The arrival of missionaries with texts has been represented by some *taohpwoh* guardians as an interaction between equally valuable epistemologies, however the epistemic hierarchy of the colonial system invalidated Pwakanyaw forms of knowledge. San Lu (1953, p. 8) described

early encounters: “Ywa’s sayings that come from the White man was the bible and Ywa’s sayings that exist among Pwakanyaw was in the spoken word and *hta*, but that could not be recognised.” San Lu and other *taohpwoh* guardians saw that written knowledge could fill the gaps in Pwakanyaw oral literature, and vice versa, creating something more complete. From a Pwakanyaw perspective, the encounter between epistemologies can therefore be interpreted as two complementary systems in dialogue and not that orality is inferior to the written text. For early Pwakanyaw, accessing knowledge through texts was an opportunity to enrich the knowledge that they already knew about the world, which they recognised as partial. Some expected foreign missionaries to also learn from them and saw that their oral literature could contribute to the knowledge in texts. However, the hierarchy of knowledge within British colonisation and Christianity did not see value in the medium of orality. While some foreign missionaries did learn and document Pwakanyaw sayings of Ywa, such as Francis Mason, this was used narrowly to support the epistemic domination of the American Baptist Mission, as discussed in the introduction.

The work of early missionaries in partnership with Pwakanyaw involved the creation of a script and the translation and production of texts, and this led to the development of a *taohpwoh* culture of learning. Text-based culture was not foreign to Pwakanyaw, who had operated with Buddhist cultures. Pwakanyaw Buddhists have studied Pali scripture, although the lack of vernacularisation and popular education limited the reach of Buddhist literature. With a script and access to a printing press, early *taohpwoh* invested resources into literacy, the building of schoolhouses and learning centres, in teachers and the acquisition of text. Being literate, acquiring books and reading all became acts of *tama* that strengthen *taohpwoh*. Reading has been portrayed as moral and conversely, the absence of reading can be seen as a threat to *taohpwoh* existence, as seen in this passage, and I translate,

We know with certainty that our books are valuable. Without books, our mission cannot be sustained. Therefore, let's consider this seriously. When we see a *taohpwoh* whose members are illiterate and lack a desire to learn, even if books are available to them, if they don't try to study, that *taohpwoh* is stagnant. The darkness will cloud their minds and individual followers will be ruined, one by one. Rationality will depart them. But, if we look at *taohpwoh* that are literate, have a desire to learn, and make time to read even when they're not free, that *taohpwoh* will surely sustain and its value will remain (*Morning Star*, 1850, p. 61).

The work of education as a sacred act created a culture of learning within *taohpwoh* that conceptualised Ywa's sayings as not limited to the "spiritual" but a totality of knowledge, whether spiritual or scientific, which Pwakanyaw shared to understand the world. Early Pwakanyaw texts covered an array of topics, published in manuscripts and periodicals. This holistic approach to knowledge was observed by the British colonial official Donald Mackenzie Smeaton, who wrote:

Three processes have ever since been simultaneously in operation, Christianity, education, and civilization. The Karens regard these three as indivisible parts of the message which for ages their ancestors had firmly believed Ywa would at some time or other send to them. They cannot see why a lesson in arithmetic should not be given at a Sunday school. They cannot understand a church without a school, or a school without a church, or either of these without material advance in civilization and in the comforts of life; better houses, better food and more money with which to live, enjoy life and do good to their fellows. Each of these ends is looked upon as the necessary accompaniment of the other. Christianity is looked upon as a great end in itself, but equally as a powerful lever for raising the condition of the people.

It has been a core mission of *taohpwoh* to produce and disseminate the sayings of Ywa in a holistic way, that merges written and oral, and spiritual and secular forms of knowledge, which reflects the hybridised paradigm of *taohpwoh*. Forms of education that did not fit this paradigm were resisted. *Taohpwoh* leaders strongly criticised education that was secular and that which emphasised material development as uncoupled from the spiritual, which they saw as dangerous to the *taohpwoh* social order. For instance, the Karen National Association submitted a statement to colonial authorities, in which they described schools as prisons and rejected a separation between the body and soul. They instead proposed a model of education that involved vocational skills, experiential learning in nature and that was infused with the spiritual (Karen National Association, 1930, pp. 425-427). They also described education as necessarily involving ‘heart-to-heart talks’, requiring elders and oral forms of knowledge, which were excluded from colonial education. Similarly, San Lu (1953, p. 12) described the failure of colonial development projects, with road building failing to bring peace, in the absence of the internalisation of the sayings of Ywa. While this culture of learning has had limited success at a pan-*taohpwoh* level, amid the state imposition of national education systems, it still exists in varied forms, both in an informal way in everyday life and in the gaps of national education, such as pre-school, summer school and tertiary education.

As a core technology of *taohpwoh*, literacy was part of a strategy of power and a means to sustain and expand *taohpwoh* social organisation, through the interplay of *tama* and *tana*. Power within *taohpwoh* is connected with knowing the Pwakanyaw script and, through that, the acquisition of Ywa’s sayings in both written and oral forms, through the creation of a culture of learning that remains central to the *taohpwoh* project. Learning, in a holistic way that merges the spiritual and the secular, the oral and the written, leads to the accumulation of *tana*, as a form social progress.

Conclusion

Ko Tha Byu managed to spread the sayings of Ywa as a uniquely Pwakanyaw form of Christianity to thousands, something that foreign missionaries were unable to do. One account of Ko Tha Byu's trips into the hills describes Pwakanyaw villagers showing great enthusiasm at his words (King, 1834, p. 186). It took Pwakanyaw to recreate Christianity as an indigenous religion and as a central component of a new hybridised sociality, *taohpwoh*, for Christianity to spread and for Pwakanyaw to create autonomous spaces centred on Pwakanyaw concepts of *tana* and *tama*. Through *taohpwoh*, Pwakanyaw Christians could survive and find ways to benefit from the social and political change that came with British colonisation. It is the work of Ko Tha Byu, Saw Quala and countless other Pwakanyaw *taohpwoh* guardians and members that enabled *taohpwoh* to emerge and sustain.

Tana in Ywa underpins everyday sacred acts of *tama*, which sustain and reproduce *taohpwoh*. These daily sacred acts include individual and collective prayer, the production of food, the redistribution of wealth and the provision of welfare, health care, the work of physical security over *taohpwoh* territory and its members, and the acts of teaching and sharing knowledge. These communal acts enable *taohpwoh* to operate as self-reliantly as possible, collectively taking responsibility over key domains necessary for survival. These are acts centred on Ywa and produce *tana* as a core value and form of power that shifts and transforms according to the wider situation each *taohpwoh* is located in.

Taohpwoh were created in a period of immense upheaval and insecurity, during the early period of British colonisation, and were a response to earlier forms of domination under Bamar and Mon kingdoms. *Taohpwoh*'s adaptable structure resulted in the expansion of the movement and continued survival today, which can be understood when studies historically and ethnographically. This chapter has provided an overview of how *taohpwoh* emerged

historically and conceptually to establish the foundation for discussion in the following chapters, which elaborate on the concepts of *tana* and *tama* in contemporary times, through ethnography.

Chapter II: Retelling stories to survive: Holding tight onto the root of the paddy.

Stories do not exist by themselves, but people's belief in stories have existed for generations. People act according to their beliefs, like their hearts becoming stories. (*Morning Star*, 1850, p. 11).

The last Sunday of every January marks *taohpwoh* day in Plor Khu. For the Plor Khu *taohpwoh* community, unlike other Sundays of the year, the praying service of the day is to commemorate and honour *taohpwoh* ancestors who laid the foundation for the creation and continuation of Plor Khu *taohpwoh*. In a practical sense, it is a day when Plor Khu *taohpwoh* members get together to sing, to pray, to listen to stories, to laugh and, finally, to enjoy a communal feast. The purpose of the day is for Plor Khu *taohpwoh* members to reminisce, to make sense of present circumstances and to mould their path into the future. Honoured ancestors are positioned as guiding lights, and in some cases, as determined elders who had strenuously sought opportunities for *taohpwoh* progress and safeguarded *taohpwoh* members, lands, livelihood, language and culture at risk from the violence that has erupted multiple times in the Irrawaddy Delta. In addition to stories of threats and acts of violence that *taohpwoh* elders endured in building up their Plor Khu *taohpwoh* community, their legacy and teaching, narratives of addiction, love, lust, humour, rumour, war, peace and revenge are also recalled.

Storytelling is central to *taohpwoh* epistemology and axiology. For Plor Khu, due to its particular location and history in the Irrawaddy Delta, subject to communal and state violence, *taohpwoh* stories are intertwined with stories of violence and insecurity in colonial and post-colonial Burma. These stories speak to endurance, showing the role of the *taohpwoh* in providing security and protection to its members. In Plor Khu *taohpwoh* today, social memories

of violence and survival play out through the retelling of life stories of *taohpwoh* elders, centred on *taohpwoh* notions of Ywa, *tana* and *tama* in gaining security and thereby power and agency.

This chapter will use the example of Plor Khu *taohpwoh* to explore how *tana* has been reproduced and perpetuated through sacred acts of storytelling about violence and security. The *taohpwoh* story is a collective story comprised of the varied life events and experiences of members past and present. These members have different socio-economic statuses, histories and geographic locations. For this chapter, I have drawn on two stories from among the many I have been fortunate to listen to. These stories are of two male *taohpwoh* elders, Boe Shwe Lone and Poe Du who were portrayed by *taohpwoh* members as defenders of Plor Khu *taohpwoh* from the effects of war and social-political upheaval since the time of British colonisation. In choosing these stories, I am not valuing the position and role of male *taohpwoh* leaders over female elders. Rather, I am representing these male elders in the same way that *taohpwoh* members perceive them. These individuals were two of the many important ancestors who contributed to the constitution and continuation of Plor Khu *taohpwoh* community. Their endurance of violence and their actions to insulate members from instability and political repression is remembered as a virtuous act of *tana* and these acts are continuously produced and reproduced through the telling of stories. Telling stories is a sacred act (*tama*) and stories themselves contain the essence of *tana*. Stories of elders elaborated through *tana* and *tama* signify the active role *taohpwoh* members must take to keep *taohpwoh* safe and protected, and to cultivate *taohpwoh* collective sense of perseverance and endurance in overcoming difficulties. The will to endure is constructed as a *taohpwoh* value that is connected to *tana* and *tama*. The use of storytelling as an indigenous approach to knowing and being helps explain the aspiration of *taohpwoh* as a system that constructs communal identity, social meaning and well-being on its own terms.

Stories and *taohpwoh*

Tə teh, stories are pivotal to *taohpwoh* existence. Stories cannot be separated and decontextualised from *taohpwoh*, as they are interrelated. Stories produce *taohpwoh* and *taohpwoh* reproduce stories. Stories tell us who we are, show us our location in this world and guide us to the future, and in this way, stories are the vessel of Pwakanyaw *taohpwoh* epistemology, evoking *taohpwoh* paradigm in a deeper sense. In *taohpwoh* communities, the role of stories is dynamic, as both a source of knowledge and of tools to navigate a diverse and complex world. Stories tell us about Ywa and ancestors in forms of *hta*, myths and folklore. From stories of Ywa and ancestors, *taohpwoh* learn about creation, the laws of the universe and moral precepts. Stories contain individual and collectively-grounded experiences of place, events and relationships, and these are enriched and distributed between persons and across different generations through telling. Stories reveal to us belief systems as well as practical ways to survive and strive. Through *taohpwoh*'s recent adoption of written culture, stories are transferred to a wider audience, though stories in *taohpwoh* largely remain an oral tradition.

Stories and knowledge are intergenerational and alive. Storytelling is a time bound social phenomena that is fluid and interpretive. In the context of indigenous ways of knowing in relation to stories, Margaret Kovach (2002, p. 95) asserts that “the interrelationship between story and knowing cannot be traced back to any specific starting time within tribal societies, for they have been tightly bound since time immemorial as a legitimate form of understanding.” Stories of indigenous communities operate beyond the linearity of time as they are positioned in place (McLeod, 2007). *Taohpwoh* stories also seal themselves to people, to their *tana* (belief) and *tama* (action). Story, for Jo-ann Archibald (2008), is a communal work which educates the heart, the mind, the body and the spirit, with everyone engaging. In a *taohpwoh* community, members, regardless of age and status, play both the role of storyteller and story listener. Storytelling brings listeners closer to the teller, and connects both parties to the values and

themes of the story that is being told and listened to. Intrinsically, stories help construct reciprocal, respectful relationship among members, a quality essential to sustaining *taohpwoh*.

The story of Plor Khu elders, discussed in this chapter, is the story of Plor Khu *taohpwoh*. *Taohpwoh* members own these stories, and these stories reflect their social reality. The Plor Khu elders are not external individuals, they stand for the collective they are part of. Stories of elders in texts that are accessible to those outside the *taohpwoh* are written as a hagiography; that is, an attempt by *taohpwoh* members to manage their external image, which affects their contemporary status within wider *taohpwoh* networks. According to Bourdieu, life stories are problematic because of the tendency to simplify and totalise a life according to the goals and paradigm of the speaker(s). That is the case in the way these *taohpwoh* elder lives have been constructed into stories that stand in for *taohpwoh* history. Bourdieu (1996, p. 258) proposes the study of social trajectories as an alternative to “life history” involving an analysis of “the series of positions successively occupied by the same agent or the same group of agents in successive spaces.” I take into consideration Bourdieu’s critique in analysing storytelling as practiced within the *taohpwoh*, as these narratives continue to shape members’ actions. The complex life stories of these *taohpwoh* elders are not my focus. My focus is rather the culture of telling stories, and what this represents for the *taohpwoh* today. By telling stories, *taohpwoh* members maintain a connection to their history of struggle and find ways to interpret suffering and violence. In this way, they help *taohpwoh* members to continue to endure and survive in contemporary times. While the term hagiography is often used pejoratively, the genre of storytelling is a valuable source for interpretation in anthropology, as it not only reveals the individual subjects but also their societies (Zeitlyn, 2008, pp. 157-158).

The life stories of these two elders narrate local incidents of violence and the *taohpwoh* responses. As Carolyn Nordstrom (1997) has written, the anthropological study of violence should be grounded in the interpretation of those who live amid violence. I found that the telling

of these elder stories was important to *taohpwoh* members and their understanding of violence and sufferings that continue to shape their place. *Taohpwoh* is part of Pwakanyaw oral culture. Through the act of telling stories about ancestors' sayings and their actions, various life circumstances in the present are interpreted and navigated. Stories are told for amusement, for a release of pain and frustration, for a motivation boost or to give guidance to enduring life's difficulties.

To illuminate the practices of storytelling in *taohpwoh*, I will first provide an ethnographic vignette of the celebration of Plor Khu *taohpwoh* Day, followed by the description of its origin. The background history of Plor Khu *taohpwoh* construction will be described to contextualise local *taohpwoh* practices of *tana* and *tama* of protection.

The commemoration of Plor Khu *taohpwoh* day

One early morning on the last week of January, 2019, the church bell of Plor Khu *taohpwoh* rang as a reminder for members to gather and begin their work preparing for an auspicious day of the year. The preparation began at dawn on Monday and continued until late Saturday. Under the supervision of the *taohpwoh* committee, different groups of *taohpwoh* members, comprised of men, women, and children, gathered at the gate of the prayer hall and carried out their assigned tasks. Women and children began a weeklong work project by weeding, pruning, slashing, and burning grass in the garden outside the prayer hall, followed by the dusting and cleaning of wooden benches and tables inside the prayer hall. Clean and ironed curtains were hung, and colourful tablecloths were laid down. The stage of the prayer hall was decorated with the best fresh flowers from the local market. Groups of men peeled off old paint from the church, other buildings and the concrete fence in order to re-paint them. Broken windows, door frames and gates were fixed and painted. To accommodate a communal feast after the

celebration, some members took responsibility to gather cooking utensils and collect firewood outside of the village. In the evening, the church's generator was filled with diesel and turned on to provide light for members to cook and practice choir for the Sunday ceremony. *Taohpwoh* elderly members were busy preparing sermons, speeches and stories which communicate the foundation of Plor Khu community history and identity. These tasks that *taohpwoh* members carried out for the commemoration are sacred forms of *tama*, motivated by *tana* in Ywa and by a desire to give back to Ywa and to strengthen the cohesion of the *taohpwoh*.

On the arrival of the day, *taohpwoh* members returned to Plor Khu, including from Yangon and other parts of the delta to commemorate the day. Guardians from nearby Pwakanyaw *taohpwoh* were also invited. At the time of the formal praying service that happens at noon, the prayer hall was packed with members. *Taohpwoh* guardians and individuals leading the ceremony sat on the stage above the choir. The rest of the members were seated in a line facing the church platform. White roses were symmetrically arranged on the stage floor and their subtle scent filled up the hall thanks to the spinning of electric fans on the ceiling.

The event started with a short opening prayer followed by communal singing. While the crowd were singing, a young girl wearing a Pwakanyaw dress carried a floral wreath and laid it under a white crucifix symbolising the sacrifice of Ywa and of the *taohpwoh* elders. *Taohpwoh* history was read out by a member of the *taohpwoh* committee from a manuscript titled *Chronicle of Plor Khu taohpwoh*. The text is organised around the life stories and teachings of *taohpwoh* guardians. The main sermon of the event by the Plor Khu *taohpwoh* guardian reminded members to have strong *tana* in Ywa, as their *taohpwoh* elders in the past did. Between speeches and exhortations, *taohpwoh* members and children sang songs of remembrance in choir. The main collective prayer prior to the conclusion of the ceremony was led by a senior *taohpwoh* member who praised Ywa for all the blessings on Plor Khu *taohpwoh* and its members, begged Ywa to protect and sustain them as those who have a strong *tana* in

Ywa and committed themselves to the *tama* of Ywa. The event was concluded with a group song of a Christian *hta* accompanied by a Chinese-made keyboard:

Tana of our fathers is alive

Which fire and sword could not destroy

Whenever we look at this *tana*

It genuinely motivates us

Father's *tana*, sacred *tana*

Will be wanting you until we die.

They encounter troubles

But they were not in doubt

As for *tana* fathers had died

Will be wonderful when their children also die

Father's *tana*, sacred *tana*

Will be wanting you until we die.

Father's *tana* is immense love

May fill all our heart,

Through good work and good words

Let love other in the *tana* of fathers

Tana of our fathers! Sacred *tana*

Will be wanting you until we die.¹²

¹² This is from Pwakanyaw language hymn booked published by Karen Baptist Convention in 2006.

Tana as a *taohpwoh* form of power, ignites *tama*, action for Ywa and *taohpwoh*. Like a force, *taohpwoh* members describe how emulating the *tana* of ancestors with heartfelt sincerity – through, as the *hta* above describes, “good works and good words” – enables them to overcome suffering and thrive as their ancestors had done in the past. *Hta* of ancestral *tana* and *tama* in response to suffering provides an unbroken link to the suffering and dislocation of the present.¹³ This is not only necessary for survival but also as a resource for power and agency, through *tana*. Contemporary Plor Khu *taohpwoh* members highlight the role of *tana* in their everyday interactions through conversation and work, as seen in the proverb: to hold on tight to the root of the paddy. Metaphorically, the root of the paddy means a firm *tana* in Ywa. By holding on, tying *tana* tightly to Ywa, Ywa becomes an anchor to *taohpwoh*, a key source of stability amid the social and political turmoil that has surrounded the *taohpwoh* since colonial times. Ywa centres the values that *taohpwoh* members seek to live by and is conceptualised at the intersection of the present (everyday life of the *taohpwoh*) and the past (when the rediscovery of Ywa led to the creation of *taohpwoh*). Holding onto the root of the paddy also denotes the central work of Plor Khu *taohpwoh* members, who, as paddy farmers, precariously hold onto the root of the paddy to produce the rice and basic income they need to survive. Who were these ancestors and how does the social memory of their sacrifice actualise *taohpwoh* in the present?

¹³ During the increasing violence during World War II, possibly the last issue of *Morning Star*, published in January 1942, starts with a note, and I translate, “Amid fear and bombardment for the second time in Rangoon, many Pwakanyaw are losing their lives and, their houses or ending up hospitalised for their injuries. Pwakanyaw in rural areas are sheltering relatives fleeing Rangoon. In this time, our *tana* is tested. If possible, may we pray for those who are suffering and in trouble because of this war.”

The Origin of Plor Khu's ritual of respect and remembrance

On a day after the harvest in *tha lāy* (January) in the early 1950s, after Burma's Independence, Poe Du, a leader of Plor Khu community and a grandson of Boe Shwe Lone, the first ordained pastor of Plor Khu *taohpwoh*, gathered his *taohpwoh* members in a field near the village under a tree for a communal praying session followed by a feast of pork curry. It was a collective ritual to reciprocate Ywa's blessing and to recall the role of their ancestor, who had built up the village and *taohpwoh* (A History of [redacted] 2007, p. 20). Plor Khu is a patriarchal community. Poe Du led this prayer service and made an extensive speech, reminding the Plor Khu community of their history, which began with the establishment of *taohpwoh* and the active role their ancestor had played in the process.

The details of the establishment of Plor Khu as a *taohpwoh* community is unknown, but according to Plor Khu's communally written history, the first building for communal gathering, prayer and learning had existed since 1850. (A History of [redacted] 2007, p. 3). The founder of the village was also unknown but Boe Shwe Lone (paternal grandfather of Poe Du) was believed to be among the earlier people who helped build up Plor Khu *taohpwoh* community. Poe Du's speech emphasised the different characteristics among fathers in the formation and continuity of *taohpwoh*, including unity, collective ownership of *taohpwoh* land and assets, and the preservation of culture through *tana*, and I translate:

Our fathers did not have a great education, but they maintained village security, village assets and cared for village wellness and progress, and nowadays how much have we done? Our fathers had great talents, they established this *taohpwoh* and gave it to us and gave us life principles and showed us to have a strong *tana* in Ywa. We must keep our pride, dignity and hold on to Ywa's truthfulness and purity. Our fathers lacked modern political knowledge, but they had dignity and power through their way of life, and they lived a life with honesty and perseverance... they had a pure heart, so people

respected them and were even afraid of them. They grounded their lives firmly against debt, dishonesty, corruption and therefore could avoid trials, capture, and torture... they glorified and respected Ywa so they did not have wicked plans in their heart. They pitied troubled people, they did not take bribes, and rather gave support to other children of Ywa's kingdom. And they set these life models for us to inherit, both physically and spiritually. Now if we do not know and live like them the 'stick of punishment will be on us' (A History of [redacted] 2007, p. 21)

Poe Du's speech shows the hybridised axiology within *taohpwoh*. The speech positions Pwakanyaw as lacking modern education and knowledge but as nonetheless able to persevere and develop as a result of the moral precepts of their ancestors. The speech involves the Pwakanyaw discursive convention of *èe lāw wāw lāw*, which involves hiding one's strengths and abilities and speaking with humility. So, discourse about Pwakanyaw as ignorant and uneducated, in the context of *èe lāw wāw lāw*, can communicate the opposite: self-respect and pride in Pwakanyaw knowledge and success in education. By using *èe lāw wāw lāw* and centring the life history of paternal ancestors, Poe Du communicated values for *taohpwoh* members to live by, such as *tana*, dignity, honesty, and purity, through a performative act considered as Ywa's work and as an inheritance from ancestors. These are core values that are believed to be able to sustain *taohpwoh* through times of violence and suffering.

This praying service with Poe Du's convincing speech initiated a ritual for Plor Khu *taohpwoh* where members pay tribute to their ancestors annually. This ritual survived the early death of Poe Du, who was murdered by Bamar soldiers during racial tension between Bamar and Pwakanyaw in the Delta after independence. Rituals like this also influence other collective actions that are productive of *taohpwoh*. Among them is the dawn prayer, a daily ritual overwhelmingly led by female *taohpwoh* members seeking safety and protection from Ywa for *taohpwoh* families, their welfare and livelihood. The dawn prayer is a ritual space where

taohpwoh members concentrate to gather both physical and spiritual strength to carry out their daily activities needed for the *taohpwoh* to function, such as agricultural work, leading families and administering tasks.

Stories of Boe Shwe Lone and Poe Du overwhelmingly emphasise their actions in fortifying the *taohpwoh*, preventing its perceived risk of collapse. Narratives explaining the act of *tama* to defend *taohpwoh* need to be contextualised through the history of the establishment of *taohpwoh* in the Irrawaddy Delta. Therefore, in the following section, I locate Plor Khu historically in connection to the *taohpwoh* archipelago it is part of.

Colonisation and the establishment of Plor Khu *taohpwoh*

According to historical accounts from a prominent Mon historian, the Irrawaddy Delta in the precolonial period was a territory of Rāmaññadesa, the name of the Mon kingdom. Rāmaññadesa was divided into three provinces: Bassein, Hanthawaddy and Maubin and each province had 32 towns. Different Mon kings and governors ruled over these provinces (Naing Pan Hla, 2005, p. 3). Rāmaññadesa fell to the Burman kingdom of Pagan in 1057. In 1287, the Mon king Wareru established a kingdom in Maubin and revolted against Pagan. Mon influence continued over lower Burma with intermittent wars with rival kingdoms in the plains (Nai Pan Hla, 2005, p. 3), although this history is contested. According to Michael Adas, the height of the Mon kingdom was in the early-sixteenth century centred in Bago and including the Irrawaddy Delta. It later came under control of the Toungoo kingdom and Mon kingdoms in lower Burma fractured under attack from Konbaung armies in the north and Siamese armies from the east (Adas, 2011). The Konbaung army invaded the Delta in the late-eighteenth

century and the Mon population was decimated (Adas, 2011, p. 16).¹⁴ At the time, there were three main linguistic groups in the Delta region: Mon, Bamar and Pwakanyaw. Historian Michael Aung-Thwin (2005) has challenged the historical basis for a Mon Kingdom in lower Burma that “civilised” Upper Burma as a colonial construction, leading to a myth of Mon as historically “downtrodden” by Bamar. Discourses of the Bamar oppressing the Mon as interpreted by British writers served to justify British colonialism (Adas, 1972). Nevertheless, Mon rule over the Irrawaddy Delta, and their defeat, continues to be an important element in Mon ethnohistory, told in contemporary ethnonational terms, although notions of ethnic identity operated differently in the past (Hall & Aung-Thwin, 2011) and were even as flexible as changing one’s dress (Lieberman, 1978).

According to Adas (2011, p. 19), Pwakanyaw migrated to the Delta from the Salween and Sittang areas. These were upland regions that predominantly practiced *moh lu pa la* (ancestral practices) and that organised their communities through *kaw* (Thanbyah, 1906). Unlike Mon and Bamar who lived along the Irrawaddy, Pwakanyaw migrants to the Delta frontier settled away from the river and in hilly and forested areas, as well as in the more sparsely populated areas of the lower Delta (Adas, 2011, p. 19 & Nay Win Myint, 2012, p. 36). The majority in the Delta before colonisation were subsistence farmers. There were also fishers, salt producers and palm gathering communities (Adas, 2011, p. 19). While debates on pre-colonial wars and royal dynasties remain a feature of ethnic politics in Myanmar, and were also exploited by the British as a justification for colonisation, the ethnicisation of historical accounts has been disputed in critical histories.¹⁵

¹⁴ According to personal communication with a Mon scholar, many Mon in the Delta escaped a massacre due to their cultural assimilation with Pwakanyaw Plone.

¹⁵ For instance, see Adas (1972: 175-192).

The history of Plor Khu *taohpwoh* started with the British colony. Unlike Mon nationalist history, Pwakanyaw have a less pronounced historical claim to the Irrawaddy Delta. There are references that there were Pwakanyaw living in the Delta in the deep past, especially in sites far from the river where there is a higher population as a result of river trade (Thanbyah, 1904). Living in more inaccessible locations allowed Pwakanyaw to evade tax, slavery and conscription. In this sense, the Delta in pre-colonial times fits with James C. Scott's conceptualisation of Zomia,¹⁶ an ungoverned space in Southeast Asia where communities could take refuge from the state. According to the Plor Khu *taohpwoh* chronicle, the land where Plor Khu was founded was unoccupied deep jungle, and the main threat to human settlement was wild animals like tigers and leopards. Adas describes the Irrawaddy Delta before British colonisation in a similar way, as "a sparsely settled wilderness covered with *kanazo* forests, mangrove swamps, and *kaing* grass plains" (2011, p. 17). As the chronicle tells us, Boe Shwe Lone chose a place on the hill so that his family and other Pwakanyaw who came with him would be safe from flash flooding during the rainy season and from the "evil" all around.

As the Plor Khu chronicle recounts:

With Ywa's blessing,
They built a *taohpwoh*,
As Ywa's devotees
They love and support one another.
With a common vision of unity
They built a chapel,
For Ywa's worshippers to get together.
They read Ywa's words

¹⁶ While James C. Scott focuses on upland areas, he discusses Zomia more broadly as "geographically difficult terrain," including marshland and swamp (2009, 6).

Sought meaning through discussion

Wholeheartedly they made offerings

Ywa uniquely blessed them.

And kept evil way from them (A History of [redacted], 2007, p. 6).

After colonisation, the British worked to transform the delta region from a sparse, subsistence frontier to the economic centre of the colonial economy. In order to do that, they created incentives for migration and settlement within a framework to maximise colonial profits. This involved the introduction of a land tenure act that declared all land in Burma as belonging to the state and specified that land ‘can only be subject to rights created by grant or lease of the British Government’ (Baden-Powell, 1892, p. 496). The British also specified that land must be cultivated according to a commercialised system of agriculture through which the government could extract tax revenue. Settlement was incentivised through state grants of land given to settlers to clear and cultivate land on the frontier, thereby opening up new territory for economic exploitation (Baden-Powell, 1892, p. 501). The government exempted tax for newly occupied land to further incentivise settlement of the frontier and its integration into the colonial economy. It also enabled cultivators to expand their landholdings. This type of land deed, called *patta*, was common in British India.

After the second Anglo-Burman War (1852-3), the Delta was a troubled and unruly place for the colonial administration. For the British, settlement of the Delta frontier was a way they could expand sovereignty over the area. As peasants settled and began commercial cultivation of land, incentivised with land grants, the British could extend control of the region. Pwakanyaw Christians were active participants in this project, seeking benefit under the colonial system, which also served colonial interests. Plor Khu’s written history recounts the early *taohpwoh*, with a focus on collectivism and the exclusion of Bamar:

Clearing lands for farming,
For their children to inherit,
Digging wells, and building dams,
Abundant water because of their good care,
Cultivating their lands,
Without reliance on *pēe yāw* (Bamar) labour,
Working in unity, living in peace,
Counting on righteous principles
Decisions by consensus,
Keeping no debts
Looking after one another,
Having a fulfilled life,
Due to the love of worshipping Ywa (A History of [redacted], 2007, p. 6).

The *patta* system transformed the Delta and created a new class of landholders who were themselves peasants in contrast to the aristocratic landowners under the Konbaung feudal system. Konbaung was the last Bamar dynasty, established in 1752 and destroyed by the British in 1885 when they took Mandalay and exiled King Thibaw and his household to Ratnagiri on the west coast of India, overlooking the Arabian Sea. During the Konbaung period, approximately only 662,000 acres of land was cultivated in the Irrawaddy Delta (Adas, 2011, p. 22). By 1930, 8,702,000 acres were being cultivated, mostly for rice. Rice was at the centre of the Delta economy and the key source of income for cultivators who were integrated into the colonial economy. In 1852, 100 baskets of rice were worth 5 rupees on the market. By 1930, 100 baskets of rice were worth 195 rupees within an export-oriented market (Adas, 2011, p. 22).

The *patta* system enabled the consolidation of Plor Khu as a Pwakanyaw *taohpwoh* community following the British annexation of Lower Burma in 1852. This demonstrates a link between colonialism and social change at the village level, as is evident in the growth of *taohpwoh*. According to the Plor Khu *taohpwoh* chronicle, it is Boe Shwe Lone who founded the *taohpwoh* and sought a land deed from the British to formalise Pwakanyaw control of the Plor Khu *taohpwoh* territory. Who was Bo Shwe Lone and what drove him to establish this *taohpwoh*? Why does his story matter?

Boe Shwe Lone in Plor Khu *taohpwoh* history

Boe Shwe Lone was born in 1837 in a village in Tharawaddy. Tharawaddy is also the place American ethnologist Harry Ignatius Marshall did his research on the Karen, and wrote an English book on Karen culture, *The Karen People of Burma*. Boe Shwe Lone was brought up as a Buddhist, educated in a monastery and later became a Buddhist monk. According to a short biographical account written by his relative in *Morning Star*, Boe Shwe Lone moved to Henzada town where he was exposed to Christianity, disrobed and was baptised (Poe Myaing, 1928). He studied Christianity under the supervision of Reverend Thomas, a US missionary posted in the region for a few years, and then went to Rangoon Karen Baptist seminary and studied for about four months. After his religious conversion, Boe Shwe Lone became a ‘native missionary’ proselytising among Pwakanyaw people. He established *taohpwoh* around Henzada, with support from the Karen Home Mission.¹⁷ From the northern areas of Henzada, Boe Shwe Lone slowly moved south and continued to establish *taohpwoh* in Kyaunggon, Wormi, Mwaylonegyi and other locations in the upper Irrawaddy Delta. Boe Shwe Lone’s

¹⁷ The Karen Home Mission Society was formed in 1850, run and directed by Pwakanyaw people with the mission to spread Christianity to every Pwakanyaw family. It was first based in Sandoway (Thandwe) and later moved to Bassein (Titterington, 1891, pp. 75-6)

success in setting up different *taohpwoh* in the region is portrayed by Plor Khu *taohpwoh* members today as a sign of his strong *tana* and *tama* in Ywa.

The *tama* that Boe Shwe Lone committed himself to was not merely about the conversion of Pwakanyaw to Christian subjects but involved efforts to gain official recognition for new *taohpwoh* as villages under British colonial law. British colonisation of the Delta enabled the territorialisation of *taohpwoh* as autonomous Pwakanyaw spaces with formal boundaries that had title within the British colonial system. Boe Shwe Lone is in part recognised because of his skill at navigating the *patta* system for himself and his *taohpwoh* members. According to Poe Thar Oo (n.d., p. 2), a Plor Khu elder, Boe Shwe Lone went to the local government office and talked to a district officer to apply for official settlement rights. He was given a land title which was restricted to those who are proven to be cultivators and who commit to clearing the land, in exchange for title of 15-20 acres. Boe Shwe Lone and his descendants would later expand their holdings over the period of British colonisation, and the family remains by far the largest landholder in the *taohpwoh*, according to land registration papers I viewed during my fieldwork. The appropriation of land and the control of territory was a key component for the British government in exercising power over Burma and making profit. A regulatory framework over land was introduced following British occupation, transforming so-called ‘waste land’ into land for cultivation, and enabling the British to extract revenue through taxation (Ferguson, 2014). In particular, under the Village Act, introduced in 1839, subjects were granted permission to cultivate unoccupied land tax free for a set period and to gain title. Boe Shwe Lone and other *taohpwoh* members benefitted from this system, although it did serious harm to others. The land survey system only recognised married couples who cultivated a given plot of land as the ‘land holder’ at the time of the survey, extinguishing customary systems of ownership (Hagen cited in Ferguson, 2014, p. 298). Through law, the British commercialised agricultural production and transformed land into commodities that could be

exchanged on the market. The colonial system of land ownership undermined the Pwakanyaw *kaw* system of customary land management in which land is used communally and subject to local practices of management. Boe Shwe Lone supported *taohpwoh* members to clear swampland and forest in order to obtain land grants, which expanded the British frontier and opened up land for commercial agriculture and therefore taxation. This created a capitalist system of individual land ownership within the *taohpwoh* that has created an enduring social hierarchy characterised by an unequal division of resources that remains a source of tension. It marked a fundamental change from Pwakanyaw understandings of land and resources within the frame of *kaw*.

Through *patta*, Boe Shwe Lone demarcated land for a chapel, cultivation, animal grazing, roads for bullock carts, residential land and a graveyard. With the permission of the colonial government, Plor Khu as a Pwakanyaw village came into effect. For Pwakanyaw, Plor Khu is more significantly a *taohpwoh* rather than a village. Pwakanyaw who once lived separately in smaller groups around the area were brought together to form the *taohpwoh*. Boe Shwe Lone built up the first praying hall, the key site that centred and embodied the *taohpwoh*. The praying hall served multiple purposes as a space for meetings, governance, praying, healthcare, redistribution of food and learning.

The transition to colonial capitalism created a global market for Burmese rice, that likely did not exist during the Konbaung period (Adas, 1974). Access to markets gave an incentive for cultivators to produce a surplus. Rice cultivation on cleared land generated wealth for the larger landholders in the Delta, like Boe Shwe Lone. Greater income enabled a consumer market for imported manufactured goods, such as bicycles, aluminium roofing and sewing machines, available to farmers with profitable crops, and which were important status symbols (Ikeya, 2011, p. 21). Boe Shwe Lone's granddaughter was very proud to show me the three old bicycles left untouched beside the house.

When I was young, unlike these days, there were no motorbikes, even bicycles like these were rare and we were the only family who could afford to own bicycles in the entire *taohpwoh*. My father and his brothers used to go places with these bicycles.

By the early-twentieth century, unoccupied land became scarce. The rice economy expanded and the Delta population grew, adding to class conflict as there was growing discontent among landless peasants who missed out on land grants and whose labour was exploited within the rural economy as part of the everyday experience of violence. This is a key reason why Pwakanyaw from Plor Khu decided to migrate to the Andaman Islands; they were motivated by the possibility of improved economic circumstances and by expanding the *taohpwoh* movement as a means of strengthening their *tana*.

Boe Shwe Lone supported his *taohpwoh* members to move to the Andaman Islands. He handed the *taohpwoh* guardian role to his son, and left Plor Khu *taohpwoh* community to set up more *taohpwoh* in the Henzada region. He travelled, preached and helped construct *taohpwoh* communities, contributing to the expansion of *taohpwoh* territory and gaining benefits for Pwakanyaw from the British colonial system (Poe Thar Oo, n.d., pp. 4-5). As *taohpwoh* became well-established in lower Burma, and within the buffer zone between the British colony and the Konbaung Kingdom, threats increased. Boe Shwe Lone and other *taohpwoh* members sought to manage the threat themselves, self-sufficiently.

Defending *taohpwoh* from early colonial disorder: Boe Shwe Lone

In its early years, Plor Khu *taohpwoh* was targeted and attacked by dacoits many times. Their first prayer hall was burnt down and destroyed by Shwe Lan Bo, a famous dacoit leader in Henzada region in 1854 (Poe Thar Oo, n.d., p. 4). The role of *taohpwoh* leaders such as Boe

Shwe Lone was not only to build *taohpwoh* but to defend them, although little details are told about how he did this. *Taohpwoh* defence generally aligned with British colonial interests, at a time when the British were struggling to 'pacify' their colonial territory in Burma. The widespread discontent and lawlessness were threats to Pwakanyaw communities and bands of dacoits and Konbaung soldiers attacked and looted *taohpwoh*. A *taohpwoh* strategy in fulfilling the sacred act of security was raising militias. There are colonial records of Pwakanyaw militias being armed as early as 1852. The Commissioner in Prome, Phayre (1852, pp. 168-169) wrote to the Secretary of the Government of India in December: 'Yesterday a considerable number of the Karen tribe came in, accompanied by the American missionaries, Messrs. Kincaid and Vaiton; and offered, if supplied with ammunition, to proceed, with 1000 men of their race, against Myat Htoon [Myat Htun], who is the more powerful of the two leaders. I have full confidence in the fidelity of these Karens, and endeavouring to procure ammunition to supply to them'. In meetings minutes from the Governor-General three days later, it was written that 1000 flint-muskets, 4000 flints and 50,000 rounds of ammunition were dispatched to Rangoon for distribution by Phayre (Dalhousie et al., 1853, p. 169). This was a strategy that Boe Shwe Lone deployed, successfully negotiating and receiving arms from British authorities so as to defend Plor Khu *taohpwoh*.

Taohpwoh were obvious anti-colonial targets because of their conversion to Christianity, the religion associated with the colonial state. Insecurity was heightened by concerted efforts of the British to recruit Pwakanyaw into the colonial army. Mary Callahan (2003, p. 34) estimates that by 1880, three-quarters of the two indigenous companies in the British army in Burma were Karen. She concludes that the reason for greater Karen recruitment is a result of Christian conversion and a growing number of Pwakanyaw Christians who learnt English, making recruitment into positions with the colonial state convenient for the British. However, studies that centre Pwakanyaw agency, with Pwakanyaw explanations for joining the colonial army

and their experience of service, are severely lacking. One motivation for recruitment appears to be economic, as the army provided a regular income and social mobility. Within *taohpwoh* histories and historical memory covered in my research, there is little discussion or pride in having ancestors who served in the British army, although the experience in other *taohpwoh* may differ. However, in private conversations, members expressed pride in family members who have participated in the Karen armed nationalist movement that began after independence, incorporating many Pwakanyaw soldiers who had served in the colonial army.

Boe Shwe Lone died in 1926 at the age of 89, and the threat to *taohpwoh* and everyday experience of violence continued. Social and political disorder was heightened by the establishment of the independence movement and by the Japanese occupation during World War II. The resultant racial and religious-based violence in the Irrawaddy Delta were a fundamental threat to *taohpwoh* existence.¹⁸ *Taohpwoh* communities across lower Burma in particular, therefore, had to respond to complex and demanding political conditions to protect their and other *taohpwoh* members' lives and autonomy. The experience of violence that sustained *taohpwoh* in the mid-twentieth century was a continuation of experiences of violence in the nineteenth century and all these episodes are part of the historical memory of *taohpwoh* members. The experience of violence and the ability to gain security through *taohpwoh* is a key characteristic in how *taohpwoh* members define their Pwakanyaw identity and relate to Others and the state. *Taohpwoh* guardians after Boe Shwe Lone continued to frame the 'work' of *taohpwoh* security as an essential part of *tama*. As the *taohpwoh* continued to survive, *tana* increased, providing a resource to keep members safe. Following Boe Shwe Lone, Poe Du is a notable role model within the *taohpwoh* today.

¹⁸ For more on communal violence preceding independence, see Selth 1986; Thakin Lwin, 1969.

Poe Du in Plor Khu *taohpwoh* history

Civil unrest and racial tension at the end of the British colonial era pushed *taohpwoh* to a breaking point. Poe Du is credited with protecting *taohpwoh* members during this particularly dangerous period during and after World War II, which saw new forms of violence and disorder. The annual commemoration of Plor Khu *taohpwoh* day is one example of how these experiences of violence have been ritualised, remembered and transferred to new generations of *taohpwoh* members. During my fieldwork in Plor Khu, members would often tell stories of how Poe Du led the *taohpwoh* through the grave risks of sectarian violence around independence, which members remember vividly as a collective suffering that remains unresolved.



Figure 1: Poe Du, a grandson of Boe Shwe Lone, provided by a family member

Poe Du is the eldest grandson of Boe Shwe Lone. At an early age, his family sent him to study in Ko Tha Byu high school in Bassein, and after he finished, he enrolled at Karen Baptist Theological Seminary in Rangoon and graduated in 1927. Poe Du is described as an outstanding student who was hardworking and led many mission campaigns to Pwakanyaw villages (A History of [redacted], 2007, p. 19). He was reportedly praised by Harry Ignatius Marshall, the seminary's principal at the time, who believed Poe Du would be an effective preacher (Poe Thar Oo, n.d., p. 19). Poe Du was known as a good shooter, and he won prizes in shooting competitions. As soon as he graduated, Poe Du came back to Plor Khu and joined *taohpwoh* leadership.

By choice, Poe Du was never ordained as a pastor, however he could still hold high status as a *taohpwoh* guardian, which at the time did not require ordination (although ordination is now expected and increases status). This affirms a holistic view of *tama* that is not only limited to conventional religious acts but includes all aspects of everyday life. Being a lay *taohpwoh* guardian could possibly allow for greater freedom, in terms of doing underground work and connecting with the Pwakanyaw resistance. For the material life of members, Poe Du led local development projects, including the introduction of Western scientific methods of agriculture that involved training for a month in Pyinmana, the centre for agricultural science in Burma. Poe Du initiated a number of farming projects around Plor Khu village, where he grew rice with methods gained from Pyinmana and bred farm animals such as cows, pigs and poultry as a means of economic development of the *taohpwoh* (A History of [redacted], 2007, p. 19). Like his grandfather, Poe Du followed the legacy of *taohpwoh* guardians in defending his *taohpwoh* until his violent death. Shortly after independence, Poe Du went to Henzada town by bicycle, carrying donations from the *taohpwoh* for the seminary. He was stopped by Burmese soldiers who suspected that he was supporting the Karen armed resistance. The soldiers tried to seize

the money he was carrying. Poe Du attempted to flee and was shot dead. For *taohpwoh* members, he was murdered while doing *tama*, making him a martyr for Ywa and *taohpwoh*.

Defending *taohpwoh* from late colonial and early post-colonial disorder

Japanese occupation from 1942-1945 and the outbreak of civil war in 1949 disrupted Poe Du's development agenda and created many challenges. It is described in Plor Khu *taohpwoh* history:

This period was the most frightening time for us. Japanese entered the village and elders had to see them and answer their questions. There was so much violence and people were killed, villages were burnt down and many people had to run for their lives. There was no unity and trust among groups, so they worked against one another. [Plor Khu] was nearly burnt down and destroyed. *Tharah* Poe Du told us that we must have a strong grasp on the root of the paddy, referring to Ywa. Ywa is in both our house and our *taohpwoh*. The root of the paddy is a source of Pwakanyaw reliance...the sanctuary is Ywa. (A History of [redacted], 2007, p. 33).

To keep Plor Khu *taohpwoh* off the grid during Japanese occupation and safe from attack, Poe Du cut it off from Kaw Hawkata (Henzada Karen Baptist Association), the formal *taohpwoh* network it falls under. Like many villages in the Delta, Plor Khu was in the frontline of armed conflict and communal violence during Japanese occupation, which nearly destroyed the *taohpwoh*. In one incident, Plor Khu was attacked and partially destroyed by non-Pwakanyaw Buddhists in neighbouring villages who organised themselves as a *Thakin Tat*, which means army of “masters”, where “master” was used as a term of resistance against the British. British

colonisers demanded that they be called *thakin* as a sign of respect, and the Do Bama Asiayone (We Burmese Association) anti-colonial movement co-opted the term. *Thakin tat* is known as the Burma Independence Army in English.¹⁹

A few days before the attack, a Burmese woman nicknamed Bo Ma (meaning female military officer – part of *Thakin Tat*), came to meet Poe Du and introduced herself as a person in authority who had been assigned to collect arms belonging to Pwakanyaw who served in the British army. Poe Du had learnt about the Bo Ma and her group from other Pwakanyaw villages in the area, who had communications networks connecting *taohpwoh* in the area. Using arms collection as a cover, *Thakin tat* were known to have forcefully taken money and property from other Pwakanyaw villagers. Poe Du refused to comply. He offered two old muskets, which he claimed were given to that *taohpwoh* by a government official for use in *taohpwoh* security. The Bo Ma pressed on, asking for arms that belonged to British soldiers, but Poe Du refused. To prepare for an expected attack, Poe Du strengthened *taohpwoh* defences, which involved non-*taohpwoh* members from Plor Khu. Plor Khu is not a culturally homogenous village. It is made up of three main ethnoreligious groups: Pwakanyaw Baptists, Bamar and Pwo Karen Buddhists and Muslims of Indian descent. About ten Pwakanyaw soldiers happened to be in the village. All had served in the British army, enabling them to save their lives from the attack (Poe Thar Oo, n.d., p. 34).

On the morning of April 14, soldiers entered [a neighbouring *taohpwoh*] and destroyed things on their way and killed pigs and chickens. They prepared food and had a feast. At early afternoon, they divided into groups, with one positioned at the east of Plor Khu where the graveyard was, and some near the village monastery. The whole village was enclosed with a bamboo fence. The third group was in the west of the village. *Thakin*

¹⁹ For more, see General Kyo‘ Jo 2012.

carried swords and swayed them against the sun as they approached the village, reflecting the light. Village girls were snuck out for safety in advance. At around 1pm, there was an explosion at the north of Plor Khu village under a big tree near the monastery, and suddenly gun fire broke out everywhere in the village. From the graveyard to the east, Burmese Army officer Bo Chit Shwe led a charge towards the village but *taohpwoh* members resisted, shooting the charging troops from hidden positions inside the *taohpwoh*. Many BIA troops were killed, including Bo Chit Shwe. As they could not enter the village easily, BIA troops set it on fire. A while later the wind started blowing from the west to southwest, rain came and the fire was extinguished. Shooting happened until dark and no Plor Khu members were injured. The sound of gun fire stopped in the evening and villagers gathered under Plor Khu chapel, where Poe Du prayed and gave thanks for Ywa's protection.

According to *taohpwoh* stories, the death of Bo Chit Shwe²⁰ upset BIA, so an ethnically-Bamar barrister named Ba Maw and a *thakin* from Henzada were sent to Plor Khu the next day to try to resolve the conflict. According to the Poe Thar Oo, their conversation went like this:

Ba Maw: Oh *thara* Poe Du, what a huge thing you've done. It's like the war of Singapore. I've been sent by the [BIA] army to collect arms from you. Do you think holding a tiny number of arms and resisting the army would give you victory? Our aim is to chase our enemy the British army out. The army sent me here to make you understand that we are not your enemy. If you resist us, our BIA will turn their attention to you, and you won't be able to handle it. We will have no pride in claiming victory against you. There would be no peace if we claim victory against you and you will hold hatred toward us. There is no point so now give up your arms.

²⁰ Chit Shwe was a famous stunt actor in Burma and like other young Bamar nationalists he joined BIA to suppress Pwakanyaw who were perceived to be aiding the British. (Yebaw Thit Maung, 1990).

Poe Du: What I told you isn't my voice alone, the villagers appointed me as their guardian to provide protection for them. The arms that we have here is not to attack the public. It is only to protect ourselves. You won't give us security, will you?

In the middle of the conversation, people ran into the chapel and told Ba Maw that a huge crowd of people were coming to attack the village from the east. A *Thakin* accompanying Ba Maw said, "these Bamar are so difficult, they were told to stay calm," referring to the BIA troops. They left the village without seizing the *taohpwoh*'s weapons (Poe Thar Oo, n.d., p. 35).

The fighting between Bamar and Plor Khu villagers went on for another week and some Pwakanyaw from other *taohpwoh* offered their help and requested that Poe Du retaliate and burn down the Bamar villages that led the attack. According to *taohpwoh* oral history, Poe Du refused and tried to prevent further violence. As the diary noted, he was teaching people to answer bad deeds with good deeds. This is a common principle of *taohpwoh* to emphasise goodness of *tama* and to use violence defensively, rather than vengefully. This moral principle is ethnicised, as *taohpwoh* members talk about their responses to violence as being different to Bamar. Bamar are positioned as inherently violent, in contrast to "peaceful" Pwakanyaw.

Communal tension between Bamar and Pwakanyaw in the Irrawaddy Delta reached its peak with numerous attacks in Myaung Mya district in 1942 (Thakin Lwin, 1969, pp. 123-130). Up to 1,800 Pwakanyaw were killed when BIA troops destroyed 400 Pwakanyaw villages (Callahan, 2003, p. 76) which included many *taohpwoh*. According to General Kyaw Zaw's²¹ autobiography, a BIA officer under his command attacked Pwakanyaw villages and killed many Pwakanyaw in retaliation for the death of a Japanese military officer who was ambushed

²¹ A member of the Thirty Comrades who got military training in Japan and founded Burma Independent Army (BIA), which later became the Myanmar army. He was also a leader of the Burma Communist Party.

by Pwakanyaw soldiers led by Shwe Htun Kya, a former soldier in the British army who led a revolt against Japanese colonisation. According to General Kyaw Zaw, the attack was ordered by Japanese military intelligence officer Suzuki Keiji, also known as Bo Mogyo, who played a key role in forming the BIA. General Kyaw Zaw was in charge of BIA troops in the Delta, and admitted some responsibility for killings under his command, although he put the main blame on Japanese officer Suzuki. As General Kyaw Zaw recalled, and I translate:

Bo Mogyo directly ordered my troops to seize by force any assumed rebel villages and to kill them if they resist. Sometimes he gave an order through me. The attack went on for about a week and I was not expecting so much killing and when I arrived back in Rangoon, I heard that there were so many civilian casualties. This had happened because of Bo Mogyo's order... the inexperience of my troops made the incident worse...I was a 23-year-old student nationalist and a soldier. As a soldier I prioritised following orders. However, I hold responsibility for this and if I had some political experience that time, the killing of civilians could have been avoided by burning down a few villages for show to make Bo Mogyo happy" (Kyaw Zaw, n.d., p. 2).

These attacks and killings in the Delta left much resentment among *taohpwoh* members toward BIA troops and Bamar, and this resentment continues today. According to U Nu, Burma's first Prime Minister after independence and who was born in the Delta near Plor Khu, the actions of some BIA troops created distrust among Pwakanyaw, who came to see the *Thakin* movement and Bamar more generally as a threat to their existence. U Nu wrote about a mission to reconcile with Karen residents after the communal violence preceding independence:

Karen came to see all *Thakin* as bad. They therefore tried to shield themselves behind long sticks of bamboo, so it was difficult for Bogyoke Aung San and

Thakin Than Tun to implement the Karen-Bamar friendship mission as planned. (U Nu ,1946, p. 246)

The Japanese occupation created major challenges to *taohpwoh* communities and its leaders as they were stereotypically viewed by Bamar and Japanese authorities as British collaborators and treated with suspicion. *Taohpwoh* leaders were targeted and persecuted (Poe Thar Oo, n.d., p. 34). In order to keep the community and himself safe, Poe Du instructed his *taohpwoh* members to hide the existence of their *taohpwoh* and pretend that Plor Khu was an ordinary village. That meant not giving away any information when questioned by Japanese soldiers but to just simply answer that there was no *taohpwoh* and no Christian minister. Communal violence cut across religious and ethnic lines. Incidents between BIA and Pwakanyaw appear to primarily involve *taohpwoh* members, although more research is needed. However, alliances were complex as a number of Pwakanyaw supported the BIA and the anti-colonial movement led by Aung San. Some Buddhist Pwakanyaw monks acted as intermediaries brokering peace between Bamar and *taohpwoh* members. Mahn Ba Khaing, a prominent Pwo Buddhist leader from a village in the Irrawaddy Delta, served in the Anti-Fascist People's Liberation Front government. Pwakanyaw Buddhists had deeper links with the anti-colonial nationalist movement compared to those in eastern Burma. This was likely due to the pluralistic nature of their communities and their proximity to Rangoon, the urban colonial centre of power and resistance, though this causality cannot be guaranteed.

While Plor Khu could endure relatively well in the difficult circumstances of Japanese rule and communal attacks, the neighbouring *taohpwoh* could not escape atrocities. During my fieldwork, I visited my great-grandfather's birthplace a few kilometres from Plor Khu. He established *taohpwoh* in the Andaman Islands. *Taohpwoh* members often told me about their experiences of violence during World War II. One day, I went to visit an aunt who is almost deaf. She lives on land that once belonged to my great-grandfather. She proudly showed me

that one of the teak posts that held up her house was also from my great-grandfather, who had struggled to provide economic security for *taohpwoh* members. She recalled her experiences during Japanese occupation. One memory had a particularly profound effect on her and others I spoke with.

One day, Japanese soldiers wearing shorts came to the village looking for former British soldiers. All the *taohpwoh* members were summoned to the church grounds, including women and children. Everyone was lined up in front of the church, in the sun. They tied up the *taohpwoh* guardian, who was a cousin of Poe Du, and asked him where the former British soldiers were. The *taohpwoh* guardian replied he did not know so they kept beating him with bamboo sticks in front of the *taohpwoh* members, until he lost consciousness. As he was beaten, blood came out of his face. The aunty said she was forced to witness the abuse and was so scared and so thirsty squatting in the sun with her mother and other relatives. The *taohpwoh* guide never fully recovered and carried with him the injuries until he died. This trauma is vividly remembered in this *taohpwoh*.

Defending *taohpwoh* after independence

The post-independence period and the start of the Karen armed struggle from 1949 affected the lives of *taohpwoh* members in many ways. The period after independence solidified an ethno-nationalist movement that was influenced by the *taohpwoh* movement and *taohpwoh* members dominated the leadership. The creation of an independent Burma, centralised and dominated by Bamar, was seen as an existential threat to many *taohpwoh* members. As in earlier times, members did acts of *tama* to defend *taohpwoh*. However, armed struggle after independence was also framed on a meta level as a necessity to establish a Pwakanyaw nation in a more institutionalised way compared to the loose networks of *kaw* and *taohpwoh*. The upsurge in

violence spurred a new stage in how violence was experienced and interpreted within *taohpwoh*. There was mass displacement and severe physical and economic insecurity. Many fled war and took refuge in rural areas such as Plor Khu, as Karen troops took up positions across lower Burma and on the outskirts of Rangoon. My father was a refugee during the ethnic conflict following independence and he fled to Plor Khu with his parents and siblings. The *taohpwoh* offered help those fleeing, providing shelter, food and land to cultivate. Poe Du identified educated people within different professions – like preachers, doctors, and teachers – among the refugees, and assigned these people to contribute to *taohpwoh* work, helping to sustain the community. Poe Du's leadership is credited in the community for keeping both Plor Khu *taohpwoh* members and refugees relatively safe. *Taohpwoh* members are proud of their role in this period and recognition that the *taohpwoh* received. For instance, Saw Simon Tha, a prominent Pwakanyaw surgeon who heads Kwe Ka Baw hospital in northern Yangon, used to be a refugee in Plor Khu. He has since built a village and supports a community health centre in the *taohpwoh* (A History of [redacted], 2007, p. 35).

Plor Khu *taohpwoh* members supported the Karen armed struggle but, due to fear and repression, the *taohpwoh* support for and participation in the Karen revolution is kept quiet. There have been a number of Plor Khu *taohpwoh* members who joined the Karen National Union armed movement. While these *taohpwoh* members are not physically present, they are still counted as members of the *taohpwoh* and subjects of daily prayer in the community. As the armed movement lost territory in the Delta and retreated to the east, Plor Khu community faced increased state repression and new attempts for local control from the centralised state, which greatly increased during military rule that started in 1962. This context pushed the *taohpwoh* to strengthen as an autonomous shadow administration to maintain localised Pwakanyaw control of Pwakanyaw everyday life. Pwakanyaw national consciousness is

infused in *taohpwoh* activities, and these political currents had to be kept secret during military rule.

Under Poe Du's leadership, the Plor Khu *taohpwoh* safeguarded itself from the destruction that resulted from the widespread Bamar-Pwakanyaw communal violence and post-independence armed conflicts. Poe Du played an important role in this fragile period as a model *taohpwoh* guardian with a high level of commitment to *tama*, as can be seen in the stories about his life.

Conclusion

Stories of ancestors are a key component of Plor Khu's annual ritual. Through telling various stories of their ancestors, *taohpwoh* members recall how elders lived their lives and the moral precepts that can be concluded from them. These understandings are brought into the present in an attempt to strengthen the communal identity and values of the *taohpwoh*. Stories of Plor Khu *taohpwoh* elders provide an insight into local *taohpwoh* histories of violence and protection. This complements what is considered important in contemporary social memory and contrasts with Bamar post-colonial nationalist historiography. These stories reveal Plor Khu *taohpwoh* trajectory and *taopwoh* proliferation as the British solidified control of British India and frontiers expanded. The expansion of Plor Khu *taohpwoh* inadvertently aided British colonial interests, opening up land in which they could extract revenue and labour, while Plor Khu *taohpwoh* members could benefit from colonial expansion by gaining land rights and space to create *taohpwoh* communities.

Stories of elders are integral to the existence of Plor Khu *taohpwoh* and its webs of social relations. In formal ceremonies, stories of Boe Shwe Lone and Poe Du were reiterated through the uses of a text collectively produced by *taohpwoh* members, without named authors. In the text, they are heroes, represented in a way that is overwhelmingly positive, in the form of a

hagiography that celebrates their lives, achievements and suffering. When their stories are orally shared, they are individuals who carried their own personal flaws but conscientiously contributed to *taohpwoh* security and wellbeing through the observation of *taohpwoh* core principles shaped by *tana* and *tama*. Storytelling, across public and private spheres, through text and speech, is emblematic of *taohpwoh* social conventions, which involve sacrifice for the greater good and repression of individual interest that may conflict with the collective. These stories centre on persons with social or political significance like these two elders, simplifying their multi-layered and multi-faceted lives to constitute *taohpwoh*. Their stories are important in depicting collective values, produced through *tana* and *tama*.

On one level, stories of guardians suggest that the creation of *taohpwoh* can be seen as a response to the violence of the late monarchical and early colonial period and the growing awareness of Pwakanyaw exclusion from dominant political systems. On another level, mental responses to the experience of violence helps create *tana* as a *taohpwoh* form of power that provided a resource to endure localised waves of violence and state repression that was an existential threat to *taohpwoh*. Plor Khu *taohpwoh* has been resilient, adapting to the changing political context and existential threats to members, including colonisation, dacoity, communal violence, civil war and military dictatorship. Plor Khu *taohpwoh* is both a product of and a reaction to these collective Pwakanyaw experiences of continuing social-political transformation. Under the leadership of *taohpwoh* guardians, like Boe Shwe Lone and his descendants, Plor Khu has maintained self-governance, as a model of idealised and localised Pwakanyaw form of community, remaining resilient and surviving forms of violence through the power of *tana*. Endurance strengthens *tana* and *tana* strengthens the *taohpwoh*. The construction of *tana* to endure suffering and violence is a collective performative act that forms *taohpwoh* as a sociality. Life stories demonstrate to *taohpwoh* members how the endurance of violence and suffering increases power in the form of *tana*, which sustains *taohpwoh* as a

community. The sustenance of the *taohpwoh* paradigm is instantiated through the act of telling stories of *taohpwoh* ancestors.

Boe Shwe Lone and Poe Du's life stories depict a hybridised way of being. This involved pragmatism and ambiguity as a strategy for survival and progress. This can be seen in the interpretation of paddy cultivation as both an act for subsistence and profit and as a key component of interconnected *tana* and *tama*. At times of extreme insecurity and violence, *taohpwoh* guardians reminded members to hold on tight to the root of the paddy, symbolising both Ywa and the paddy as a source of sustenance and as a commodity. Boe Shwe Lone enabled the integration of a capitalist system of land ownership and the commercial cultivation of paddy within the *taohpwoh* that continues to be a source of *taohpwoh* economic activity and socio-economic inequality between members. Through the process of building *taohpwoh*, Boe Shwe Lone, Poe Due and other *taohpwoh* leaders integrated capitalist modes of production and exchange into *taohpwoh*, creating a hybridised cosmology where profits are redistributed between members and Ywa, and agricultural production for surplus is framed as a sacred act. The economic dynamics of *taohpwoh* is elaborated on in the next chapter.

The stories conveyed in this chapter and the acts of their telling involve *tana* and *tama*. The stories show that *taohpwoh* elders could overcome suffering by having a strong *tana* in Ywa, and *tama* in co-offering mutual care, security, safeguarding spiritual wisdom and cultural knowledge. Strategies of *taohpwoh* elders who deployed *tana* and *tama* to overcome different waves of repression and violence provides a model for *taohpwoh* members attempting to overcome violence in the present. This further sustains *taohpwoh* into the future. Beyond providing a window into the past, storytelling itself is a domain where *taohpwoh* members build respect and trust with each other, and where they grapple with their economic and social conditions, in a constant struggle to overcome suffering and harness *tana*.

Taohpwoh stories are not only local but linked to the national and international *taohpwoh* networks and to state politics. When commemorating Plor Khu *taohpwoh* day, members make a link between their localised stories and the stories of continuing Pwakanyaw experiences of violence and resistance across Myanmar. The local life stories of *taohpwoh* elders that highlight violence and suffering, and how that is managed, is a resource for *taohpwoh* members to collectively endure the continued insecurity of the present. The stories told at Plor Khu *taohpwoh* day was not only for Plor Khu members but guests from other *taohpwoh*, solidifying intra-*taohpwoh* ties. This supports the active attempts of *taohpwoh* members to come up with their own strategies and to gain power from their suffering, which is particularly important as Myanmar's civil war has widened and intensified following the February 2021 military coup.

Unlike Pwakanyaw *taohpwoh* communities who have long resided at the epicentre of ongoing war in eastern Myanmar, most Plor Khu *taohpwoh* members had not had recent direct experience with war at the time of my fieldwork, although that has changed since the 2021 military coup. By remembering and reliving their violent past through stories of their elders, *taohpwoh* members gain resources that are productive of *taohpwoh* as a transnational sociality, which helps them make sense of and endure the hardships of the present.

Chapter III: Exchanging gifts with Ywa: value within *taohpwoh*

Meanings and practices of value shift according to cultural and economic contexts. *Taohpwoh*, as ethnoreligious and agrarian communities, construct and practice value on their own terms. *Taohpwoh* emerged as the British colonial regime was establishing a capitalist system in Burma and provided a means to insulate Pwakanyaw from the ravages of capitalism, while also seeking benefit from the new opportunities that came with capitalism. From the beginning, *taohpwoh* have been ambivalent towards the values of the capitalist society within which they operate, and have weaved a capitalist system of value with forms of value associated with Ywa. The *taohpwoh* value system posits ethical value over economic value, and gift over commodity, however the distinctions are blurred in everyday practice. *Taohpwoh* social systems are not constructed as an alternative to dominant capitalist society, but rather mediate and translate capitalist relations into *taohpwoh* sociality.

Through *tama*, social relations that prioritise *tana* are established and maintained, both between *taohpwoh* members and Ywa, and between *taohpwoh* members themselves. Capitalist relations of commodity exchange are subsumed in *tama* for Ywa (and the community as a whole) through ritualised practices of collective production. *Tama* for Ywa and the *taohpwoh* is therefore not limited to activities that would typically be considered as religious. Rather, it is a broad category of actions that includes livelihoods and work – categorised as *naw koh*; the physical and tangible part of humans – as well as prayer and other ritualised activities that involve the engagement of non-human beings like Ywa – categorised as *naw thä*; the mental, invisible part of humans. Within the *taohpwoh* system of value, members exchange both *naw koh* gifts, such as produce, and *naw thä* gifts, such as prayer.

This chapter examines the *taohpwoh* value system, exploring how value is conceptualised and practiced in *taohpwoh* communities through the *tama* of gift exchange. I privilege Pwakanyaw concepts of value, both through oral and textual accounts. Within *taohpwoh*, material or incorporeal gifts must be made sacred; either through the place and process in which they were produced, or through ritual purification. Through the act of gift exchange, localised ideas of status and purity and of the *taohpwoh* as a social unit, are formulated and maintained.

This chapter is based on ethnographic fieldwork in Plor Khu *taohpwoh* and an examination of historical texts. I begin by discussing *taohpwoh* ideas of value and the ambivalence towards capitalism which appears in historical material. This helps contextualise how *taohpwoh* operate within capitalism. I will then give an ethnographic case study related to a *taohpwoh* family whose everyday life and interaction with other *taohpwoh* members elaborates how value is perceived and practiced within *taohpwoh* sociality, furthering *taohpwoh* as an autonomous space. This leads into a discussion of the idea of purity within *taohpwoh* in relation to exchange of both ritual acts and material objects. The idea of purity in connection with value structures the division between what is considered internal to *taohpwoh*, and therefore pure, and what is considered external, and therefore mediates exchange across the two realms. While a particular construction of value has sustained *taohpwoh*, it has also reproduced internal inequality that is explained through notions of purity and exchange with Ywa.

Ywa's work and *taohpwoh* values

Taohpwoh value is constructed through the interrelated notions of *tama* and *tana*. *Tama* as a concept for everyday action aims to strengthen the collective *tana* of Ywa and *taohpohoh*, mediated through the exchange of ritualised acts and commodities. *Tama* underpins the survival and sustenance of *taohpwoh* and its members and is perceived as the cause of

development and progress. Through acts of exchange, *tama* generates value that is both commensurable and incommensurable. The word ‘value’ in Pwakanyaw, according to the Kayin Studies Centre dictionary (2020, p. 2746) is “*pa lu pa pwāy*”, which it defines in relation to *tana* regarding what is right and wrong, and what is important in one’s life. The word *pa lu pa pwāy* is a compound of two verb words: *pa lu* and *pa pwāy*. These two words are linguistically inseparable, and each word cannot be used alone. The word *pa lu* denotes commitment to uphold and maintain culture, beliefs, religion and *hta*. The word *lu* relates to ritual. *Pa pwāy* is a verb for the commercial exchange of commodities. The word *pwāy* means “to buy”. When combined, the compound word denotes the maintenance of value in both the domain of non-material ritual and of material production and exchange. The elements of the compound term *pa lu pa pwāy* form a hierarchy, where *lu*, ritual and belief, comes before *pwāy*, material exchange, though both *lu* and *pwāy* are sacred, reflecting the holism of *taohpwoh*. According to the anthropologist Michael Lambek (2013, p. 142), “value is both substance and relation, absolute and relative.” He argues that ‘ethical value is to action (doing something) as material value is to production (making something)’. When applied to *taohpwoh*, ethical and material value are intertwined, as *tama* entails both doing and producing and concurrently bringing together and intersecting non-material value and material value. Material objects produced outside of the *taohpwoh*, including money, are considered impure when outside of *taohpwoh*, and therefore do not conform to the *taohpwoh* value system. However, things outside of *taohpwoh* can be transformed through ritual purification after which material objects from outside *taohpwoh* can be commensurate with sacred objects produced within the *taohpwoh*.

Tama is a category for transactional performative actions that shape the system of *taohpwoh* value and exchange. This operates in two ways: transactions between *taohpwoh* members and Ywa; and between *taohpwoh* members (though, as *taohpwoh* members are Ywa’s subjects,

Ywa is also part of exchanges between them, rendering them sacred and pure). Purity similarly operates at two levels: within the *taohpwoh* community, where gifts and commodities need to be produced within *taohpwoh* or sacralised through ritual; and within the individual, namely the purity of their motivation for action in both *naw koh* and *naw thä*. If action falls within *tama* that is perceived to be for Ywa, and for the benefit of *taohpwoh*, then it is sacred and has value, whether it is material or non-material. Reaching purity is a goal for *taohpwoh* members: purity in mental and physical action, and in gifts and commodities.

Value that yields transactions to both Ywa and fellow humans involves a wide range of performative actions comprised of ritualised acts – such as praying, purifying, healing, fasting, preaching, caring – and material production, such as farming, animal husbandry, gardening and weaving. Material production within *taohpwoh* is seen as a gift from Ywa, and is therefore sacred until it is traded out from the *taohpwoh* and enters external market relations as a commodity.

The repeated conduct of *tama* is believed to be reciprocated by Ywa and fellow *taohpwoh* members in the form of power that is associated with *tana*, a key element of power in *taohpwoh* value chains, thereby creating an ‘abundance of riches’ (Mauss, 1954, p. 19). As *tana* gets stronger, the intensity of *tama* must also increase to sustain the exchange. *Tana* is linked to concepts of one’s honour, status, authority and wealth, which can be both hereditary and gained through persistent effort of *tama*, as a gift from Ywa. For example, when a *taohpwoh* guardian is selected, they are awarded honour and authority, as well as the fulfilment of their material needs. To sustain honour and authority, the *taohpwoh* guardian has to reciprocate the gift of honour and authority in accordance with the assumed expectations of Ywa and fellow *taohpwoh* members. On the other hand, *taohpwoh* members generate honour and authority through providing services and gifts, both to Ywa and to each other. Withholding or not giving gifts is a threat to one’s *tana* – to one’s status, authority and wealth.

When exchange involves the use of commodities, they are simultaneously inscribed with both commensurable and incommensurable value: commodities have a calculable value within market forms of exchange but when produced within *taohpwoh*, they also contain incalculable value through the interplay of *tana* and *tama* in their production and exchange within *taohpwoh*. For instance, one form of calculation is a portion of yield and/or income, commonly 10%, that is provided back to the *taohpwoh*. Through the *tama* of farming and gardening, Ywa gives crops, which are reciprocated through a portion of yield, and Ywa gives wages in exchange for labour, which are reciprocated through a portion of wages. What is given to Ywa must be reciprocated, but humans can only ever give less in commensurable value than what Ywa provides. Gifts of material objects made to other *taohpwoh* members, or sometimes non-*taohpwoh* members, are an essential part of *tama* and therefore generate value. These often involve things with commodity value, such as food given to those in need. For instance, when a basket of rice is given with prayer as an act of *tama*, infused with *tana*, then it simultaneously has incommensurable value, while also having a commodity value.

Exchange works at a collective level within *taohpwoh*. If a member is honest and truthful in an exchange, the other party is expected to reciprocate through honesty and truthfulness. If an individual cannot reciprocate, their family members must do so. The value of these acts cannot be calculated but are rather based on mutual understanding within *taohpwoh*. Things exchanged operating within a commensurable system of value, involving calculations such as time spent labouring, clothes, food, money, medicine, is also always infused with incommensurable value through prayer, which infuses Ywa into the things or acts that are given. The value of commodities alone may be calculable but when rituals are performed on them before giving, or when commodities are believed to be in close contact with Ywa's power, they are seen to be more valuable and have a more powerful effect on the receiver. Between *taohpwoh* members, there is an expectation that the receiver needs to reciprocate to an equal or greater

amount. When material gifts cannot be reciprocated, respect and loyalty are expected to be returned, solidifying social ties while maintaining inequality and allowing for the redistribution of surplus. This is similar to Pentecostal practices of value in the Zambian Copperbelt, where economic inequality is a means to further social ties and relations of exchange between those with different socio-economic status (Haynes, 2012).

Another level of *tama* is work that is associated with the natural environment such as soil, rivers, swamps, mountains and forest, which are believed to contain the power of *ywa*, and are where *Ywa* resides. It is through land that life is formed, and life is associated with *Ywa*. In that sense, working with land is one of the basic forms of doing *tama*. All things produced from the natural environment within the *taohpwoh* contain an essence of *Ywa*, and this imbues them with a sacred power similar to *hau* as described by Mauss (1954). While the *hau* of the gift denotes the spirit of the giver, the exchange of produce from *taohpwoh* involves the exchange of *Ywa* and therefore, the intention of the parties to the exchange need to be aligned with the essence associated with *Ywa*. That is, they must be pure, sacred and not motivated by personal gain. When produce is exchanged as a commodity, it still carries traces of *Ywa* into the market, although that is not considered within the market value. However, the same material produced outside of *taohpwoh* is considered impure when it enters the domain of *taohpwoh*, and therefore requires purification through the ritual of prayer to infuse it with *Ywa*. *Ywa* is seen as a life force which *taohpwoh* members ingest through the food they produce, or purchase and purify, and which is perceived to sustain them.

The meaning and practices of *taohpwoh* values are strategically constructed through the incorporation of connected realities that are ideologically meant to belong to different realms: the sacred world of *taohpwoh* and the contaminated world of capitalism. To demonstrate how this knowledge system has materialised in the everyday lives of the Pwakanyaw *taohpwoh*

community, the next section examines understandings of value within the response of Pwakanyaw Christians to colonial capitalism and its effects.

Historical ambivalence to capitalism

Taohpwoh were established in response to the political complexities of the late monarchical system in Burma and early British colonisation. To create social space within the colonial system, it was necessary to translate between colonial capitalist forms of sociality and *taohpwoh*. This has similarities to Anna Tsing's (2013, p. 39) conceptualisation of the translation between non-capitalist social systems and capitalism as constitutive of capitalism. Pwakanyaw Christian attempts to insulate themselves from the perceived dangers of capitalism through *taohpwoh* meant decentring capitalism, that is, constructing it as subservient to the sacred. To activate the meaning of the sacred within *taohpwoh*, commodity exchange is still practiced but with caution and limitations. *Taohpwoh* value connected to the sacred exists in the form of ancestral practices, but these are hybridised in incorporation with the exchange of money and commodities to make forms of sociality that meet ideals of progress, with aspirations for recognition of Pwakanyaw as a nation, and not as "savages".

Since the beginning of Pwakanyaw Christianity, a dominant strategy has been to collaborate with the colonial system and seek power within the colonial apparatus, rather than to overtly resist it. Accepting colonial relations was identified as a threat to Pwakanyaw existence through the dangers of ethical pollution, assimilation or further subjugation. It was therefore necessary to mediate between *taohpwoh* and dominant capitalist forms of sociality. Exchange of commodities based on profit was seen as highly dangerous (*Dawkalu*, 1890, p. 66). One of the earliest records of the words of a Pwakanyaw Christian is from the first convert, Ko Tha Byu, who was speaking to Pwakanyaw in the hills of Tennaserim. It is printed in the memoir of the

missionary George Dana Boardman, who described it as a “specimen of native Karen preaching” (King, 1834, p. 268):

A worldly man is never satisfied with what he possesses. Let me have more houses, more lands, more buffaloes, more slaves, more clothes, more wives, more children and grandchildren, more gold and silver, more paddy and rice, more boats and vessels; let me be a rich man. This is his language. He thinks of nothing so much as of amassing worldly goods. Of God and religion he is quite unmindful. But watch that man. On a sudden his breath departs, and he finds himself deprived of all he possessed and valued so much. He looks around and sees none of his former possessions. Astonished, he exclaims, ‘Where are my slaves? Where are my buffaloes? I cannot find one of them. Where are my houses and my chests of money? What has become of all my rice and paddy that I laid up in store? Where are all the fine clothes, that cost me so much? I can find none of them. Who has taken them? And where are my wives and my children? Ah, they are all missing. I can find none of them. I am lonely and poor, indeed. I have nothing! But what is this?... Oh, what a fool have I been! I neglected God, the only Saviour, and sought only worldly goods while on earth, and now I am undone.

This passage demonstrates a view from early *taohpwoh* against seeking material wealth for personal enrichment. Ko Tha Byu was showing that seeking material gain, within colonial capitalism, is impermanent and immoral. Ko Tha Byu presented a hierarchy that privileges the transcendent realm over the material “worldly” realm of commodities, the latter which he classified negatively. This connection between material accumulation and morality has been put more starkly in Pwakanyaw print media, seen in an essay published in *Dawkalu* (1891, p. 111) that warns *taohpwoh* members against the pursuit of money. The text describes the desire for money as almost a religion, and as something that can harm *taohpwoh*. The author even

warns *taohpwoh* members to avoid eating with people who are obsessed with the accumulation of money. Another article in *Dawkalu* (1890, p. 18) made a similar point against money:

Money is a celebrity. When a poor man is on trial with a rich man, the poor man ends up losing the case. In the crowd, the poor man goes unnoticed, but the rich man is in the spotlight. If money embarks on a journey, the path is clear. When money is placed in front of a judge, he may reverse justice into injustice. Ywa is the only truthful judge, and he will truthfully judge our trial in heaven. You must have faith in this, Ywa believers, so your foundation cannot be shaken.

As with *Ko Tha Byu*, money is represented here as inherently immoral. The *Dawkalu* article elaborates on money as a key factor in the corruption and class stratification of colonial Burma. The writer(s) ridicule the status and value of money, which they see as damaging to values of truth. The concept of high value is based on honour. Mary Douglas (2002, p. xi) has written on the theorisation of gift exchange, “gift is part of a system of reciprocity in which the honour of giver and recipient are engaged.” The example of the corrupt judge, above, shows how the gift of money within the context of colonial capitalism is a form of dishonour, one which undermines the gift economy of *taohpwoh*. As the British consolidated their rule, there was evidence that Rangoon developed into a hotbed of “vice:, with widespread opium use, gambling and sex work (Charney, 2009, pp. 92-99), a further effect of the dangers of the developing capitalist economy. This context deepened the perceived negative value of money in contrast with *taohpwoh* values articulated through gift and ritual.

Taohpwoh views of money are ambivalent, but money cannot be excluded from *taohpwoh* social relations as the *taohpwoh* system incorporates the gift economy and capitalism. Money is seen in *taohpwoh* as causative of both progress and regression. Within the colonial economy, early *taohpwoh* leaders saw money as a dangerous and corrupting force and were determined

to insulate *taohpwoh* society from unchecked capitalism. These messages caution *taohpwoh* in how to use and value money in a way that does not hinder the value system of *taohpwoh*, which privileges incommensurable acts of production and exchange that centre on the transcendent. During my fieldwork, I repeatedly encountered ambivalence towards money which was partly addressed through ritual acts. Views towards capitalism in early *taohpwoh* writing help to explain the enduring suspicions in the present and creative attempts to incorporate capitalist relations within a wider *taohpwoh* value system.

The gift of asparagus

One Sunday evening after a weekly Christian education service dedicated to young people in the community, Magyi asked if I would join her for dinner. Magyi is a middle-aged, dedicated member of Plor Khu *taohpwoh*. I agreed to join her, and we walked toward her house from the chapel. While we were walking back to her house at a slightly faster pace than usual, she asked me, “isn’t the service this afternoon good? I don’t like the sermon, but I loved the music.” When we arrived at her gate, she glanced at her house and said she was very late, and was worried her children would be hungry. Magyi has three children, but all were away from the village for work and education. The “children” she was worried about were her domestic animals. Pigs were loudly squealing in the backyard. She retrieved a black bucket from under her kitchen sink and went towards the corner of the house where she stored her rice. With her bare hands, Magyi scooped out some of the rice into the bucket and put it on the stove. Then she took some older, cooked rice and added it the bucket. She topped it up with water and mixed through some vegetables. After a quick mix using her hands, she picked the bucket up by its handle and ran toward the pigs. Within a few seconds, the squealing pigs were quiet.

Within Plor Khu *taohpwoh*, Magyi's family has a high social status because of their dedication to *tama*, which grants them strong *tana*. Magyi's husband, Saw Tha Wah, is a key member of the Plor Khu *taohpwoh* committee, and their son is a leader of the *taohpwoh* youth wing. Their two daughters are active in various *taohpwoh* activities like teaching at Sunday School and organising youth activities. Magyi herself is a member of the women's branch of Plor Khu *taohpwoh*. The engagement of Magyi and her family in Plor Khu *taohpwoh* is understood by other *taohpwoh* members as a sign of their dedication to Ywa. Dedication to Ywa is demonstrated through actions performed solely for Ywa and must not be driven by a desire to accumulate material wealth for individual profit. Magyi is proud of her social position and tries to meet the *taohpwoh* expectations of her and her family.

Magyi lives with her family – her husband and three children – in a relatively big two-storey wooden house that she does not own. The house belongs to an aunt of her husband. Magyi and her family are allowed to stay in the house in exchange for minding it and working seasonally in the paddy farms that also belong to the aunt. Like the majority of Plor Khu *taohpwoh* members, Magyi and her husband are farmers. Between them they work a ten-acre plot of land which belongs to her parents-in-law. On the land, they mainly grow paddy and different kinds of legumes, and raise domestic animals such as pigs, geese, ducks and other poultry. They also keep a vegetable garden where they grow their own food. In Magyi's garden there are a variety of trees, some of which are edible. There are fruit trees such as mango, marian, and jackfruit which she or her parents-in-law have grown. She proudly showed me a neem tree that has been growing in the garden for more than half a century. Magyi told me she would never cut it unless it was first ruined from natural causes as it was planted by her mother-in-law. There are a few dozen young teak in the front yard which Magyi said she had grown for her children. Among these various trees and the seasonal vegetation that Magyi keeps in her garden are two patches of asparagus that she especially values. According to Magyi, the asparagus is a gift from her

mother who brought the seed from Magyi's birth *taohpwoh*. Magyi makes sure that the asparagus regrows every year in summer. The work is moderately intensive as she need to clear the old and overgrown asparagus bushes and burn them. She then lays the burnt bush on top of the soil where the old roots are and waters them regularly for weeks as they sprout and grow again. The value of the asparagus is in the root, which connects Magyi to her mother, her ancestral *taohpwoh*, and Ywa who resides in the soil. Like Ywa, the asparagus flows in a cyclical way through life's stages; the old nourishing the young just as life and knowledge are passed down through the generations.

Magyi moved to Plor Khu *taohpwoh* community when she married her husband and was accepted by Plor Khu *taohpwoh* as an associate member. Being an associate member of Plor Khu *taohpwoh* means Magyi is recognised as a Christian and is not required to be re-baptised. In Plor Khu she is allowed to freely participate in *taohpwoh* meetings and prayer services, and to equally contribute to spiritual and material aspects of the *taohpwoh*. However, as determined by Plor Khu *taohpwoh*'s constitution, Magyi "cannot direct the *taohpwoh*'s path, whether turning left or right" ([Name withheld], 1958).

While waiting for Magyi, I suddenly heard her cry, "What happened to my geese?" Her husband replied, "dogs attacked them and snapped their necks." I got off my chair and went to the back of the house to check on them. Magyi stood about a hundred meters away from her husband, looking shocked. Her husband stood holding dead geese in his hands. Behind him was Shwe Htoo who had helped carry the geese. I later learned that three of Shwe Htoo's dogs had killed Magyi's geese.

Magyi burst into tears as her husband laid the geese on the ground. "What are we going to do now?" she asked, her voice cracking. Shwe Htoo was upset and apologised to Magyi and her husband for the death of their geese. He requested to take all the dead geese and compensate

Magyi and her husband. “Do not worry *ama* [older sister], just weigh them and I will pay you for all it costs.” Magyi did not say anything. Her gaze was on her dead geese. Magyi’s husband broke the silence by agreeing to Shwe Htoo’s offer and quickly went into the house to get the scales. Without saying anything, Magyi picked up the largest gander and went inside the house. I followed her. She went straight into the kitchen, placed the goose near the sink and sat on the edge of a bench next to her long dining table. I grabbed a plastic stool and sat near her. She looked at me and said,

I like these geese so much. Since they were born, I took care of them and made sure that none of them died. I took them to the river so that they could swim and play in the water. I would stay with them to make sure that they were safe, and when they finished, I would guide them home by myself. I built a secure coop for them and fed them on time. The whole *taohpwoh* know how much time and energy I devoted to these geese. They were getting bigger and in the next couple of months, each of them would have weighed at least a pound or a pound and a half. I intended to sell them when the price goes up a bit and with the money, I would organise a prayer service with a feast I wanted to enjoy with the *taohpwoh*. Now they’re all gone.

A moment later, Magyi’s husband came inside and told Magyi that Shwe Htoo took all the geese, which weighed under 10 pounds. Shwe Htoo offered to pay the market price of 7000 kyat per pound. Magyi looked at her husband and said it can’t be helped. “We must take the payment,” Magyi said, justifying the transaction. Shwe Htoo’s financial situation made it difficult for him to pay his debt, but he raised money by selling the goose meat.

The next day I left the *taohpwoh*, returning a week later. Magyi invited me to come along with her to a small dam in the middle of Plor Khu village to pick morning glory for the dinner she

was preparing for her family. This dam was filled with water in rainy season, which evaporated in summer. Although there was no sign of water when I went there, the bed of the dam was moist, perfect for wild vegetation to grow. Morning glory grown in this dam is consumed by both humans and animals residing in the *taohpwoh*, and therefore it is common to see people as well as cows, pigs, goats and ducks inside the dam. This was the case when we went: a few women were picking vegetables, while their cows were feeding on vegetation. Magyi went ahead of me and led me to an area of the dam away from other people and animals and started to pick young and freshly sprouting morning glory. While we were concentrating on picking the best morning glory, a young woman carrying a bamboo basket against her waist yelled out to Magyi and asked if Magyi had asparagus to sell. Magyi paused, straightened her back, looked toward this woman and replied, “no, I don’t have it now, but I will keep some for you when I harvest them next time”. “My husband and children really liked the bunch you gave us the other day”, the woman said, smiling at Magyi as she spoke, then she wandered further into the dam.

I asked Magyi about that woman and Magyi told me that it is Shwe Htoo’s wife, Thayu. “Right, so what is the story with giving them asparagus?”, I asked. I was curious witnessing this very friendly interaction between Magyi and Thayu a few days after there was a dispute between the two families. I was surprised that both acted like nothing had happened. Magyi looked around, grabbed the sides of her sarong and folded them together to sit on a patch of dry earth near me.

I know, you saw me when I was very upset about losing all my geese and angry at Shwe Htoo for not properly training his dogs. His dogs are known in the community for killing and eating smaller animals that belong to people and he is aware of that. I think it is so reckless for him to let his dogs roam

around the *taohpwoh* and hurt other animals. I wanted to teach him a lesson by letting him pay for all the geese killed by his dogs. I thought it was fair.

She went quiet after that and as I assumed she was upset, I stayed quiet and kept picking morning glory.

This conversation continued that evening while preparing the vegetables to be fried as a main dish for a dinner of rice and fish paste. She told me that she could not sleep the night when the incident happened and had lain awake feeling anxious. She worried Shwe Htoo could hold a grudge towards her and spread rumours to other *taohpwoh* members. She wondered if the community would side with Shwe Htoo and stop mingling with her. In addition to this anxiety, she felt guilty for asking Shwe Htoo to be responsible for all the cost, given her awareness of Shwe Htoo's difficult financial situation. Shwe Htoo could not work due to his poor health conditions associated with type 2 diabetes. His wife does not have income as she has to take care of Shwe Htoo and their children. Magyi said she prayed many times that night. She asked Ywa for forgiveness and also asked Ywa to heal Shwe Htoo and be the deliverance to all the problems Shwe Htoo's family is experiencing. Magyi said she asked Ywa to guide Shwe Htoo so that he does not feel bitter with her and her family.

Magyi said she knows Ywa forgives her but what she had done to Shwe Htoo and his family could not be resolved by prayers alone. She said she was clear about what she had to do so that Shwe Htoo and his family would forgive her. She woke up earlier than usual and harvested about a pound of asparagus from her garden, went to Shwe Htoo's house and delivered it. According to Magyi, Shwe Htoo was grateful for the offer and that gave Magyi a sense of relief. "Asparagus is rare and expensive, and it is known to be good at controlling sugar levels in the human body, so I think Shwe Htoo was happy when I gave this to him and I believe he does not hold a grudge against me," said Magyi.

The value of asparagus

The exchanges that resulted from the death of Magyi's geese illuminate the hybridised system of value within *taohpwoh*. *Taohpwoh* operate within capitalist society and capitalist systems of value and commodity exchange are part of *taohpwoh*. However, this is intertwined with and mediated through a *taohpwoh* system of gift-giving that is centred on Ywa and ritualised performative acts such as prayer.

Immediately after the death of Magyi's geese, the value of the loss was calculated according to the market value of goose meat. Yet, within the *taohpwoh* context, this exchange was seen as incomplete as it did not account for the value of *tana* in mutual responsibilities and reciprocity, and so the *tama* of gift and exchange had to continue in order to incorporate this.

After reflecting on the exchange, Magyi felt increasingly uneasy. To remedy this uneasiness, Magyi needed to reciprocate the gift. Magyi initially did this with a number of prayers, but this felt inadequate since the original transaction was located in the calculation of value within the market system. Therefore, Magyi felt obliged to reciprocate with a gift that also had market value, reflecting the culture of the market within *taohpwoh*.

Asparagus was an ideal gift in this case because it both is a commodity – a valuable vegetable when sold in the market – and has tangible use value in ways that prayers do not. The asparagus was a communally ascribed commodity that contains the incommensurable sacred value as Magyi herself had grown the crop in *taohpwoh* land with elements of Ywa, and it contained Magyi's history as the plant comes from her birth *taohpwoh*. The asparagus Magyi returned to Shwe Htoo was therefore not seen only as a commodity, but also as a gift that is part of herself, her family, her *taohpwoh* and Ywa. As such, it had greater value than the gift of money Magyi received for her geese.

As Mauss theorised, reciprocating with something of greater value is a way to maintain and increase honour and prestige. Honour and prestige are key to the *taohpwoh* value system, and central to *taohpwoh* growth and sustenance. As Mauss (1954, p. 48) wrote, “Men had learnt how to pledge their honour and their name long before they knew how to sign the latter.” This is the reality for both Magyi and Shwe Htoo, subjects operating within the *taohpwoh* value system, engaged in exchange that serves their assumed respective honour. For Shwe Htoo, his material deprivation as a result of landlessness and joblessness did not stop him from compensating Magyi. The cash payment proved himself to be an honest, responsible *taohpwoh* member. In this case, he was not only taking responsibility for his own actions, he was also taking responsibility for the damage his dog did to Magyi’s geese. However, Shwe Htoo had less to lose because of his comparatively weak *tana* in Ywa in the eyes of the community, which some *taohpwoh* members saw as the cause of his low economic status. For Magyi, her honour and status are attached to the wider recognition of her family as being committed to Ywa, which to some *taohpwoh* members, and Magyi herself, explained their relatively high economic status within the *taohpwoh*. When Shwe Htoo compensated Magyi with money for the loss of geese, Magyi’s acceptance of the money demonstrated the influence of the market, which later made her feel uneasy. If Magyi had only considered the incommensurable value of the geese, then Shwe Htoo could not compensate with money and the exchange might have instead involved sacred acts such as prayer to pardon Shwe Htoo and to ask Ywa for new geese. This would have maintained or even strengthened Magyi’s *tana*. But, by taking money, Magyi’s *tana* was threatened. Being dedicated to *tama* for Ywa and *taohpwoh* means Magyi’s actions should not be seen as influenced by a desire to accumulate material wealth. Accepting money from Shwe Htoo sent a message that she favoured money over *taohpwoh* values. Therefore, a remedy was needed, which Magyi found in asparagus.

Honour and status are socially constructed through a process that depends on recognition from others. Magyi gives time, care and donations as part of her *tama* for Ywa and the community, which is translated into status when the wider *taohpwoh* recognises her efforts. The exchange of asparagus as an object with healing properties also added to collective recognition of status in connection with ideals of care. Honour equates to authority over others who are less highly regarded in the *taohpwoh*. Honour works at the family level, extending to immediate ancestors. Those whose ancestors were *taohpwoh* guardians, or who have family members playing a key role in *taohpwoh*, such as Magyi's husband, benefit from the social distribution of honour. It is also a burden, as an individual transgression can threaten honour not just for oneself but for one's family and ancestors. For Magyi, it was crucial that in the incident, she could sustain the honour she gained through hereditary privilege in connection to the authority figures of the *taohpwoh*, and through her own *tama* for Ywa and the community that is recognised by other *taohpwoh* members.

At a higher level, *taohpwoh* as a collective whole is an actor in exchanges, within the *taohpwoh* value system, so the decisions of members can harm or benefit the group *tana* of the *taohpwoh*. For Magyi, if the exchange led to a loss of her honour (but resulted in her financial gain), it could therefore have weakened the *tana* of the whole *taohpwoh*, as seen by other *taohpwoh* members. Conversely, by resolving the issue through asparagus, in a way that fits expectations of exchange within the *taohpwoh* value system, Magyi maintained and possibly increased the *tana* of the *taohpwoh* as a whole, while also continuing to create and sustain *taohpwoh* practices of exchange.

Value and purity

Through *tama*, value in *taohpwoh* is interwoven with the idea of purity, which is closely connected to the idea of Ywa as sacred. *Tama* as an act committed for Ywa and *taohpwoh* is considered pure by its given nature, stage of production or through a ritualised purification process. The idea of the sacred within *taohpwoh* is communally defined through the duality of interior and exterior, of *taohpwoh* production verses non-*taohpwoh* production. Any form of production by *taohpwoh* members within *taohpwoh* territory is considered pure and therefore possesses the highest value. In contrast, objects produced from untraceable and unknown sources that are outside of *taohpwoh* are considered impure and of lower value. The ideal of purity as an abstract value has also been applied to purity in relation to agricultural production and chemical inputs. For instance, the production of rice through methods learnt from ancestors, which does not involve chemical pesticides or fertilizers, gives an assurance of purity in terms of having high nutritional and medicinal value when compared to rice bought in the market where the producer and method of production is unknown, and therefore purity cannot be guaranteed. *Taohpwoh* members also see organic agriculture as sustaining their sacred land and reducing their reliance on the market.

Giving and reciprocating on the basis of purity is in line with *tama* for Ywa and the *taohpwoh*. The distribution of purity in forms of sacralised goods and materials are therefore encouraged and voluntarily practiced within *taohpwoh*, which supports the interpersonal connections and strengthened communalism fundamental to *taohpwoh* value. Through the exchange of sacralised objects, *taohpwoh* members produce mutual trust, interdependency, social security and protection as against the realm of the market, which is seen as dangerous and impure due to the orientation to profit and its perceived exteriority to the *taohpwoh*. Acts of giving and reciprocity are therefore not only a means to strengthen interpersonal relationships. As Ardeth

Maung Thawngmung (2019, p. 4) has observed, giving and reciprocity is a way many in Myanmar attempt to manage their economic risks.

Returning Ywa's gifts in the form of time, energy and offerings of food and money are important activities as part of *tama* that *taohpwoh* members engage in on a daily basis. I observed these activities repeatedly during my fieldwork, with the level of intensity differing between families. A key act that Magyi does is cooking at home. The rice she cooks is interpreted as a gift from Ywa and it nourishes her family. In hierarchies of purity, defined by an object's proximity to Ywa, paddy grown in the *taohpwoh* are highly pure. To reciprocate the gift of rice from Ywa, Magyi keeps aside a handful of rice which she interprets as keeping for Ywa and *taohpwoh*. Through the small act of taking one handful in the morning and one in the afternoon, she is able to collect a significant amount throughout the year. She gives the collected rice to those who she thinks are most in need or brings it to the *taohpwoh* prayer hall for the *taohpwoh* committee to redistribute. This form of *tama* is considered pure in all aspects, both the performative act of keeping aside rice, and the produce, which is the rice itself.

Gifts reciprocated to Ywa and *taohpwoh*, which are defined as pure can be in the form of strength and energy. In addition to individualised time spent praying to Ywa for oneself and others, *taohpwoh* members carry out labour intensive work that is part of *taohpwoh* everyday activities. Road maintenance is a common collective act for *taohpwoh*, especially in rainy season. Because of the monsoon rains, a dirt road not paved in concrete becomes uneven, with potholes, puddles and mud. This makes it particularly difficult for children who need to navigate the roads on their way to school. It is therefore the responsibility of the *taohpwoh* to organise and carry out road maintenance whenever needed, after the monsoon rains and when potholes emerge. This work takes place in the absence of the state, which had promised to build a road for the *taohpwoh* and other rural communities in the area as part of rural development, but it did not materialise before the coup.

Magyi's husband, Tha Wah, is a key organiser in the *taohpwoh* road maintenance activities, bringing together other *taohpwoh* members when work is needed. I observed this once when Tha Wah grabbed a spade and swung it up toward his shoulder and walked out of his garden toward the main road with a few young men. There were a number of big potholes that they were fixing that day. As soon as they arrived Tha Wah checked the issue and assigned tasks. With his spade he manually levelled the uneven surface of the road while other fetched stones from the dam to set on top of the potholes. Carrying pebbles and rocks out of the dam is strenuous work and requires considerable strength as the dam is about fifteen metres deep and is slippery. As there were a number of potholes to fill, those who participated were required to make numerous trips carrying rocks up and down the dam. Sharing the work, Tha Wah did some of the carrying himself although other younger men in the group told him not to due to his age and assumed physical limitations. He went down to the dam and walked back up slowly and steadily with a bag of stones on his shoulder. He lay the bag down near where the potholes are and with a gentle laugh he said to others, "this is heavy, my knees are now wobbly."

Road maintenance as an act is pure because it is done by *taohpwoh* members, using raw materials available in *taohpwoh* territory. It is a form of *tama* that has value because of the physical effort exerted, without any financial incentive. The intensity and volume of the work one gives out is equally important as the willingness and perseverance and these are recognised and viewed as pure, selfless gifts to Ywa and *taohpwoh*. The value increases if one sacrifices for Ywa and the *taohpwoh* despite physical limitations. Purity of actions and objects are productive, explaining the accumulation of food, good health and the strengthened presence of Ywa. Acts and objects can carry equivalent values when they are pure.

Another form of reciprocation to Ywa that *taohpwoh* members engage in is the gift of money. Money is considered impure in *taohpwoh*, as it is not produced by Ywa and is a dangerous resource from outside the *taohpwoh*. Unlike gifts given to Ywa in the forms of crops produced

in *taohpwoh* land and with *taohpwoh* labour, money is only considered an appropriate and complete gift to Ywa after it has undergone ritualised purification. Sacrificial prayer is key to this purification. When money is brought to church as an act of reciprocity to Ywa, *taohpwoh* guardians or assigned *taohpwoh* members conduct prayer of purification. The prayer is not written so it changes according to the person praying and the circumstances. One prayer I recorded is as follows (and I translate):

Heavenly father Ywa, we thank you for everything you have done for us. For our survival, you bless us and give us money. Today, we have brought donations with us so please accept them and purify us and our gifts returned to you. Bless every giver, so that they are well and regain wealth, are free of enemies, advance their work, safeguard them from trouble and grant them with best of health. Bless us and accept our gift of body and soul. In the name of Jesus Christ, we beg you our scared father Ywa.

Money that is purified and given to *taohpwoh* as a gift to Ywa largely comes from agriculture, such as the sale of crops, as well as cash from those who do business or wage labour. As an agrarian society, *taohpwoh* members in my field sites mainly receive money from selling surplus crops on a seasonal basis, one to two times per year. Money earned from selling crops is expected to be returned to Ywa and *taohpwoh* roughly sets the tithing at a rate of 10%. This is also done on a voluntary basis, based on trust and each member has agency to decide what to do with that 10%. They could give it to the *taohpwoh* committee, the authority to manage and spend it. Or they can use it according to their own preferences, as long as it fits the concept of *tama* for Ywa and the community. For instance, Ma Gyi sends some of her funds to her ancestral *taohpwoh* which fits the understanding of reciprocity to Ywa, even though it does not help the *taohpwoh* where she resides. The idea of this portion is a minimum, and some *taohpwoh* members may give more than that, especially during drives for particular projects such as building roads or bridges or for school building maintenance or construction. The *tama*

of giving is theoretically not based on the figure and the amount, but the motivation to do an act for Ywa with pure intention. Since this is a driving principle, even if one gives less, if they are motivated by *tama* for Ywa, it counts. It cannot be forced or policed, as then it would no longer be *tama* for Ywa and the community.

While *tama* of giving is generally voluntary, for projects with the aim to objectify the work of *tama*, *taohpwoh* members with guidance from *taohpwoh* committees calculate and assign set amounts of donations based on one's property and land size. One instance I observed occurred when Plor Khu *taohpwoh* was trying to expand an early childhood learning centre. A list of *taohpwoh* members' name and sizes of their land was produced along with the set amounts of money they each must contribute. By making wealth and donations transparent, members have social pressure to give the suggested amount or more, which leads to status and recognition for their *tama*, and they may feel shame if they give less. Value associated with giving within *taohpwoh* sometimes requires the use of social pressure but the productivity of the gift is solely dependent on the giver, and gifts are only perceived to yield good outcomes and seem as pure if given with a genuine intention focusing on Ywa.

Purity in the act of giving that resulted in quantified returns works beyond its abstract meaning. It works in practice and instigates material effects. When wealthier *taohpwoh* members give donations, they gain back more than what they have given in forms of respect, influence and power, which are vital sources enabling them to multiply their material wealth. For instance, a *taohpwoh* member who is a major landowner within the *taohpwoh* is respected for the significant donations she and her family makes. As a result, she can easily find labour to help cultivate her lands. At the time of my fieldwork, access to cheap farm laborers was a major hindrance to bigger *taohpwoh* cultivators. This was not the case for one particular paddy cultivator because those who worked on her lands were mostly her subordinate *taohpwoh* members who she had a relationship with through giving that began not only with her but

generations before her: with her parents and great-grandparents. Through the continuous practice of giving, she could secure her social and economic circumstances.

Exchange as an act of purity can therefore indirectly feed and sustain *taohpwoh* class stratification. While there are push and pull factors that both divide and unify *taohpwoh* members, the overall motive to keep *taohpwoh* intact as a solid community is more apparent and important, given socio-economic and political instability in Myanmar and also a much broader *taohpwoh* culture of exchange. The example below is an excerpt from a short essay that discusses material value and gift exchange involving *Ywa*, published in *Dawkalu* in 1891 (p. 228) and I translate:

Why does *Ywa* divide the boundaries of his blessing for people as based on what the person deserves? On this earth, whether people receive less or more, are rich or poor is based on the grace of *Ywa*. If this the case, we would then ask, are the gifts of *Ywa* unequal and with different sizes? Surely not. The idea of big or small is shaped by our own mistakes. Why mistakes? Because if this evil had never taken place in our hearts, we would all feel equally fulfilled.

The unequal distribution of power and wealth within *taohpwoh* is represented here as a consequence directed by *Ywa* and outside of *taohpwoh* control. Individual exchange with *Ywa* is what determines one's socio-economic status rather than the socially constructed domain of *taohpwoh*. Since early on, *taohpwoh* as an institution is embedded in capitalist relations, which causes global inequality. Rather than addressing structural forms of inequality within the *taohpwoh*, blame is shifted to the individual and their relationship to *Ywa*, within the realm of the sacred. In doing that, *taohpwoh* as an institution is able to reproduce while avoiding radical change.

Conclusion

Taohpwoh is not an “archaic” society that operates outside of capitalism but is rather a connected unit within global capitalist relations of production and exchange. These connections are sometimes easily seen and sometimes blur with economic relations of the sacred. Examining these connections gives an insight into the complexity of systems of value that have evolved creatively as Pwakanyaw have sought to benefit from colonial and postcolonial capitalism, while maintaining an ambivalence towards commodities by intentionally placing an alternative value system alongside it.

Taohpwoh value incorporates performative acts with the act of production and exchange, the act of giving and reciprocating. Exchange within *taohpwoh* that generates value is not completely objectified within the standards set by the market, yet still operates within it. This reflects the hybridity of the *taohpwoh* cultural paradigm, which mediates production and exchange through a sacred economy. The object of asparagus, used as an example in this chapter, has an incommensurable value in part because the act of exchange and the material contains enduring history and ancestral teachings, rooted in the ethical values of *taohpwoh*, while the cash value of asparagus informs the exchange. Inclusive performative acts within *taohpwoh* involve a field of cultural understandings and practices around village development, agricultural production, commodities and surplus. *Taohpwoh* mundane activities such as fixing potholes on the village road, ploughing, growing, watering, nurturing, feeding, rearing, harvesting, trading as well as gift giving and donation are grounded in the idea of *tama*, as sacred over not sacred, pure over impure. This is an extension of *taohpwoh tana*, the idealisation of Ywa as subject of the sacred and pure, which extends to *tama* that is not only focussed on the ‘spiritual’ but also to many activities by *taohpwoh* members within *taohpwoh*. This also applies to the outcome of what is produced from these above-mentioned practices. Farming and growing on the soil created by Ywa that produces paddy and fruits and vegetable

has the highest stage of purity, and is therefore considered the most suitable resource to be distributed through giving and be used in implementing progress and development within and beyond *taohpwoh*. In contrast, money is understood to be by its nature contaminated as it is created and handled by morally corrupted humans, and requires ritual purification to be transformed into a gift which can then be redistributed through the *taohpwoh*. Gift giving and exchange within *taohpwoh* is an act that generates social status and honour, in addition to material redistribution. This helps reproduce *taohpwoh* as an institution, while sustaining the status quo, with its inequalities.

Since Burma's independence, the state has pursued capitalist development as a project of modernisation, but like everywhere, it is not fully marketised. *Taohpwoh* as a social entity at the fringes experience the effect of the market in different ways. *Taohpwoh* and its members seek to gain from the promise the market could give, while also maintaining an ambivalent distance and sometimes resisting. *Taohpwoh* value is shaped through the process of purification, an attempt that alienates capitalist value from sacred values such as giving, care and protection. The object used within *taohpwoh* in defining value de-privileges money as impure, yet it is still the means of exchange that *taohpwoh* members use when selling their commodities in the market. Examining the *taohpwoh* system of value illuminates how Pwakanyaw construct and practice particular constructions of power in relation to value that enables them to maintain autonomous spaces within the states of Myanmar.

Chapter IV: *Taohpwoh* agency: Fulfilling Ywa's mission in the land of dark water

After many days of intensive labour and camping in a mosquito-infested forest in the Andaman Islands, Grace began to feel the depletion of both her physical and mental strength. Along with several other Pwakanyaw migrants, she had volunteered to cut down trees and clear bushes in preparation for the construction of a road connecting the local port to the site of a new Pwakanyaw settlement, the first *taohpwoh* in the Andaman Islands. Exhausted, she started to question Ywa and their plan for herself, her family and the other Pwakanyaw who had migrated to the islands to establish a *taohpwoh*, a task considered sacred because it expands Ywa's territory. She lacked access to comforts, and she missed music and the family house she left behind in Burma. In her unpublished diary, which was reproduced by hand in the *taohpwoh*, Grace wrote:

Father Ywa, why have you sent me here to suffer? I am longing for the sound of music with *tanar*²², and I am missing a spacious house. Why did you send me to a land without music and let me live in a shabby hut?' Suddenly I heard music playing on top of the hill. I could hear it so clearly and my heart lit up. I quickly ran down to the hut where we camped. I went inside and immediately felt the hut was expanding and everything looked and felt big and spacious. To my deep sense of remorse, I kneeled and begged for forgiveness for doubting Ywa with my sinful mind.

This event occurred in the jungle of Middle Andaman Island soon after Pwakanyaw arrived on the island as part of the early-twentieth century British settler colonialism. Grace's experience motivated her to continue working to build the *taohpwoh* and its associated infrastructure. The

²² *Tanar* is a Pwakanyaw traditional harp played along with the recitation of *hta*.

road she was building when she had her vision was completed and is today a key artery connecting the *taohpwoh* to the administrative and commercial centre of Mayabunder, a district in Middle Andaman Island. Grace's experience says more than her frustration caused by physical exhaustion from manual road construction and the challenging living conditions she experienced. Her *tana* in Ywa and *taohpwoh* was in the making. She had volunteered to carry out this project, conceptualised as sacred labour for Ywa and *taohpwoh*, and she was being tested. Setting up any *taohpwoh* community requires capacity and long-term commitment. Grace's words demonstrate the profound challenges of doing *taohpwoh* labour in an area isolated from wider *taohpwoh* networks in Burma.

This chapter will explore the questions of why *taohpwoh* members migrated to the Andaman Islands to establish *taohpwoh*, and of what this says about the agency of *taohpwoh* actors. The chapter begins with an analysis of extracts from Grace's diary and letters and articles from *taohpwoh* guardians – including Grace's father, Ahboe – published in *Morning Star*. These texts illuminate how Pwakanyaw framed *taohpwoh* frontier making and intentional sacred acts in their own terms. Analysis of these texts is further contextualised by historical material from the American missionary Harry Ignatius Marshall, who acted as an intermediary between *taohpwoh* members and the colonial state to facilitate Pwakanyaw settlement on the Andaman Islands. This chapter also considers *taohpwoh* expansion and questions of agency in relation to the British settler colonial project that has decimated the island's indigenous population.

***Taohpwoh* and agency**

Agency has been a key topic in social science, but the concept remains “frustratingly elusive to pin down” (Campbell, 2009, p. 407). This has resulted in varied definitions which align to different disciplinary, theoretical and social contexts and positions. Agency is rooted in the

study of power. As power is diffuse (Foucault, 1977), agency as a concept has been linked to all domains of society, whether individual or collective, human or non-human. Amid its highly fluid tendencies that allow researchers to draw the concept in different directions, agency remains closely connected with the idea of action (Campbell, 2009; Marshall, 1994; Van Der Veer, 2008). For Giddens (1984), agency is “transformative action”. In a review article, Laura M. Ahearn (2001, p. 112) defined agency as “the socioculturally mediated capacity to act...all action is socioculturally mediated both in its production and in its interpretation.” Action is intrinsically connected to change and transformation, and therefore agency can be defined as “what makes change, it is the ability to make things happen” (Cassaniti, 2012, p. 303). When analysing action in relation to agency, one view is to distinguish between “actor” and “agent” (Karp, 1986, p. 137). Actor refers to an individual whose action is constrained by rules, whereas an agent has the ability to make change and to “re(constitute) the world.” Karp suggests conceptualising actor and agent as parts of the same person. Human action at both the individual and collective level is shaped by social structure, which constrains agency and limits creativity. There has been tension regarding how agency is theorised between secular and religious contexts. In a review essay on religion and agency, Peter Van Der Veer (2008) sees agency within secular theory as essential to modern state institutions. He describes agency in this sense as “related to the concepts of freedom and empowerment, as well as responsibility” (Van Der Veer, 2008, p. 810). Within state institutions, whether education, the judiciary or the welfare system, agency entails both the possibility to act, as well as constraints on action. This secular idea of agency is based on Western universality which is centred on the individual, and which has been critiqued as essentialist, colonial and reproductive of binary oppositions such as resistance versus oppression (Asad, 2003; Mahmood, 2005). The study of agency should therefore involve stepping out of universal assumption and instead grounding theorisation in a

particular social, cultural and historical context that mediates action, conceptualised in relation to practice.

Understanding agency in a Pwakanyaw context requires consideration of the Pwakanyaw concept of *tana*. As mentioned, *tana* can be defined as both ‘belief’ and a conscious will. The operation of *tana* within *taohpwoh*, at an individual and a collective level mediates action and capacity to act. All agents, including Ywa, are involved in this process. *Taohpwoh* as a sociality maintains continuity with elements of ancestral practice, including kinship and localised spirit belief, as well as influences from Buddhist cosmology. *Taohpwoh* are structured as a family in which Ywa is considered both a deity and a parental figure located within the *taohpwoh* social fabric. Ywa is not an external force that human *taohpwoh* members rely on, thereby diminishing their agency and creative capacity, but rather one key agent, among many. To trace how a *taohpwoh* has transformed over time, it is necessary to look at the actions of each agent, how they operate as a collective and distribute their capacity to reach their goals.

My conceptualisation of agency in *taohpwoh* contrasts with a study of Pwakanyaw Christian agency in northern Thailand by the anthropologist Julia Cassaniti (2012). Cassaniti characterises belief as the reliance on the agentic power of an external god, suggesting an opposition to Buddhists who have agentic power within themselves. This involves a dichotomy between internal and external objects of belief and implies that the changes that have taken place in the Pwakanyaw Christian world are determined by an external agent, and that individuals therefore lack the power and creativity to affect change. Cassaniti’s study uses the Thai concept of *khwaam chuea*, belief or faith, and does not consider Pwakanyaw language concepts, such as *tana*. This is problematic as Thai is the structural language of power in Thailand. As Ngugi wa Thiong’o (1986, p. 4) argues, the language of the powerful perpetuates social and political domination, which he describes as a tool of “spiritual subjugation.” This is seen in the Burmanisation of Pwakanyaw in Myanmar and the Thaification of Pwakanyaw in

Thailand. Language is central to Pwakanyaw's definition of themselves in relation to their natural and cultural environments. Choosing to centre Thai language concepts for the study of Pwakanyaw belief in connection to power can reinforce the powerful position of Thai language and can misrepresent Pwakanyaw experience, which is grounded in Pwakanyaw language. *Khwan chuea*, according to Cassaniti, is a feeling of certainty in something outside oneself, without proof, centred on the individual. This contrasts with my observation of *tana* within *taohpwoh*. While in a *taohpwoh* context, *tana* can also be centred on the individual: it is fundamentally a communal process that circulates within the *taohpwoh* with objects both within and outside oneself.

Tana in Ywa and the *taohpwoh* which an individual is part of are deeply linked to time and space. This provides a grounding, based on experiences of individuals and the community, within a particular *taohpwoh* territory over time. The concept of *tana* may, in theory, separate the divine realm from the material world, however, in a practical sense, Ywa's realm is located in the world and meaningful only with human involvement. Therefore, Ywa and humans are in a single realm, and this reflects the syncretism of Pwakanyaw Christians. *Tana* is a necessity of *taohpwoh* members to place their trust in Ywa, in order to make the divine power part of the *Taohpwoh*. *Tana* is relational and involves multiple parties, both human and the divine.

Tana can be understood as a hybridised form of agentive power, that blends the internal and external, individual and collective as it circulates through the *taohpwoh* archipelago. An individual's *tana* in Ywa and the community is produced through actions, and actions are further constituted through *tana*, in a recursive loop. Through action, *tana* works as a resource, gathered from the improvised and shared experiences of the community in transforming the circumstance of the *taohpwoh* as a whole. In this sense, *tana* is fundamental to understanding the concept of agency within the *taohpwoh* social structure. Action mediated through *tana* involves mutual dependence between the individual members, the *taohpwoh* collective of

individuals and the embedded multi-directional relationality with Ywa. The meaning of agency links to Pwakanyaw concepts of *tana*, a form of power that is incomplete without an attempt to closely form links between idea and practice. *Taohpwoh* give meaning and perceived power through constant engagement with actions, ranging from routinised acts like praying to challenging acts like settling a frontier space such as the Andaman Islands. The following narratives help clarify how processes of migration to the Andaman Islands in the early-twentieth century show Pwakanyaw as subjects with agency, available to them through *tana*.

Constructing Plor Ner Moo taohpwoh in A New Pwakanyaw

Country

Pwakanyaw migration to the Andaman Islands, in the perspective of *taohpwoh* members, is sourced from their *tana* in Ywa which is materialised through intentional, sacred labour such as the efforts of Grace. Pwakanyaw perceptions of migration to the Andaman Islands differ with the motivations of the colonial state and foreign missionaries that facilitated the move. The colonial project of settling Pwakanyaw on the Andaman Islands was initiated to serve British interests to expand and control territory and extract natural resources, especially timber. British colonial authorities had already been engaged in lucrative timber businesses but needed labour. Pwakanyaw have been associated with forestry work since early colonial times and were known for the ability to domesticate wild elephants for use in logging ('On' Khyin', 2003, pp. 61-62). British authorities faced difficulties controlling the territory and subjugating indigenous islanders, and they used an array of ideological and physical tactics of control (Sen, 2010). They were also mistrustful of ex-prisoners who stayed on the islands after release. The British resettlement of Christian Pwakanyaw from Burma was a solution to these challenges of the colonial state, providing a perceived moral form of labour and a reliable means to expand

the frontier. The imbalance of power between colonial authorities and Pwakanyaw has resulted in a devaluing of Pwakanyaw viewpoints, even though Pwakanyaw were implicated in the colonisation of upper Middle Andaman Island. The devaluing of Pwakanyaw narratives of Andaman settlement are part of a broader colonial narrative that Pwakanyaw lacked agency and were loyal colonial subjects who uncritically served the British. Pwakanyaw had their own differing rationality of why they migrated to the Andaman Islands, which helps illuminate the *taohpwoh* beliefs and practices associated with expansion. It is first important to set out the key events that led to the migration across the Andaman Sea.

By the early-twentieth century, land had become increasingly scarce in the Irrawaddy Delta as the British developed the area into an intensive agricultural zone. There was a growing population of landless peasants who had missed out on earlier grants that the British had used to incentivise migration. *Taohpwoh* in the region were directly affected by scarcity of land which inhibited growth and deepened social stratification and class tension. As *taohpwoh* is established as a relatively flat, semi-autonomous social structure that redistributes wealth, *taohpwoh* worked to find solutions to the socioeconomic problem of landlessness. *Taohpwoh* leaders were especially attuned to news about the opening up of new land in the Irrawaddy Delta in order to claim more lands for Pwakanyaw. Competition was steep and available land could not meet the demand. Amid this growing socio-economic tension, a series of letters was published in *Morning Star* from June 1924, titled ‘A New Pwakanyaw Country’, by the American missionary and ethnologist Harry Ignatius Marshall. These letters outlined a possibility of Pwakanyaw migration to the Andaman Islands and were specifically targeting *taohpwoh* members. The letters were published after a short visit Marshall made to the Andaman Islands with his wife to avoid Rangoon's heat in late 1924. With enticing Pwakanyaw language, Marshall wrote (and I translate):

I am going to describe this island as a new *kaw*. It is good for Pwakanyaw Christians to take this island and make it their new *kaw*. Officials from forestry want people to cultivate paddy on some flat lands and they also want people to work in the forest. Officials want to give this land to Pwakanyaw. They will be given land and will be paid for family expenses, and, after the land is cleared, Pwakanyaw can set up their village and live here. If necessary, government will help them with rations for a few months. This [location] is far from prisoners and nobody will be allowed to disturb you. Officials want villages to be settled permanently and will hire people every day to cut down trees, build roads, gather logs and do other necessary work. This land is empty, and no one is there, it is waiting just to be taken by someone... This place is not far from Rangoon, the distance is like travelling from Rangoon to Tavoy. I am going to talk about this in the next issue. (*Morning Star*, 1924, p. 43).

Marshall was complicit in the settler colonial project, serving British interests, while also appealing to Pwakanyaw needs at the time. As seen in the extract above, Marshall invokes *terra nullius*, calling the land ‘empty’ and dehumanising the indigenous inhabitants who would be replaced under the scheme. Marshall’s letter, which may be a translation from English, makes use of the key Pwakanyaw concept of *kaw*, and responds to the problem of land scarcity inhibiting *taohpwoh* expansion in the Irrawaddy Delta. His personal account of the motive in helping Pwakanyaw *taohpwoh* communities to settle on the Andaman Islands cannot be found, but Lt. Col. Michael Lloyd Ferrar, who was the chief administrator for the islands, was supposedly a cousin of Marshall (Maiti, 2012, p. 139). The following month, July 1924, Marshall wrote about the Andaman Islands and detailed the arrangements of the settlement, and I translate:

We, Mr. and Mrs. Marshall, arrived and visited friends on the Andaman Islands... When we arrived and talked with officials about the forest, it was like Ywa led us there. It was

like we were spies who came to look for a country for Pwakanyaw people. Officials told us that they want Pwakanyaw to come with their household members and bring their belongings and build up a village or two on this island and live here... The officials told us they would ask Indians to vacate the land and turn it over into the hands of Pwakanyaw so that they can live and work with their families. As Joshua says, in the past 'we found a *kaw* and it is good so let's say we go and take it'. This is a good time for Pwakanyaw to go and take it. All the land is new. The forest is full of old trees and untouched by humans. The Forest Department hired Coolies from India, but they don't like them, so they therefore now want to give it to Pwakanyaw to go and live there. If Pwakanyaw go, the land will permanently belong to them (*Morning Star*, 1924, p. 50).

While enticing Pwakanyaw to consider settlement, Marshall continues to dehumanise indigenous islands and also invokes racist tropes against Indians that would have also appealed to Pwakanyaw in the Irrawaddy Delta in that period, given tension between Chettyar money lenders, Indian migrants more generally and Bamar and Pwakanyaw peasants (Bowser, 2020; Saha, 2022). Marshall emphasised the opportunity of becoming a landowner with permanent title over cultivating and grazing lands. This again revealed how Marshall manipulated the widespread socio-economic pressures of the time in the Irrawaddy Delta in talking Pwakanyaw into this settler colonial project. He then detailed the kind of support the colonial government would provide to settling Pwakanyaw people (and I translate):

Government will give Pwakanyaw and their families animals such as bulls and cows, ploughing tools and all expenses for everyone who comes to the Andaman Islands. For five years, they would be exempt from paying tax. The government will lend them money for cultivating their paddy, fruit and vegetables. The government also has buffalos to lend them. The government will hire them for forestry work in cutting down trees and other necessary works and they will be given 1 *bah* every day. People must

agree to work for forestry for about two months in a year before they are cultivating the land. The land and soil are good for cultivation and coconut trees grow so well. Good for bananas and other fruits trees. The government will provide all the seeds they could buy for cultivation. A sack of paddy is 5 *bah* or 6 *bah*. There are plenty of fish. A pound of fish is 50 *pya*. There are plenty of fish in the river and ocean. There are tortoises and many kinds of birds. Jungle pigs are smaller in numbers and you do not need to be afraid of wild animals. (*Morning Star*, 1924, pp. 50-51).

The proposed lands and resources that local officials offered to Pwakanyaw people are native to a number of indigenous islanders, such as Great Andamanese and Jarawa. There were an estimated 5,000 to 8,000 Great Andamanese living in the islands at the time of British colonisation, including in the area around where *taohpwoh* are centred (Arora, 2018, p. 18). As of 2002, the population of the Great Andamanese had fallen to 41 (Kumar, 2018, p. 61). Marshall propagated a social Darwinist discourse in support of settlement, arguing that native islanders are primitive, child-like and will die out. The comparison of native islanders with children further denies them agency, suggesting they are not capable of rational thought and that they need to be under the guardianship of adults, and I translate:

Native people of the Andaman Island are small in numbers, poor and do not hurt anyone. They are not big in size and just like a small child. They don't wear clothes and only a small number are left. They would die out very soon. There is another group that are trapped on an island. They are vicious and wild. They are on an island, and no one dares to cross it to other islands. They are far from villages so there is no need to be afraid of them. (*Morning Star*, 1924, p. 51).

Lacking any Pwakanyaw response to his proposal, in October 1924, Marshall wrote again in *Morning Star* under the same title of 'A New Pwakanyaw Country'. His letter this time had

more specific plans and information from officials on the island. His letter emphasised the aim of the plan, largely to aid resource extraction for the British, and discouraged those whose intention was to only do cultivation from joining, and I translate:

I have received a reply from the chief officer of the Forestry Department in Port Blair, who said he wants to settle Pwakanyaw in two places, Bomlungta and Base Camp. And that will be the two places where people will go and settle there from now. During my visit I saw these two places with my own eyes. The government will confirm the number of people that they want. What does the government want people to do? May you read this carefully and if Pwakanyaw only plan to go there for paddy cultivation, may they change their mind right now. If they are not determined to work hard, then do not go. There are some fields to work on and others are coco plantation. Initially the government wants people for the forest. Work in the forest includes cutting down trees, pulling the logs and preparing them into a raft. It will be good for Pwakanyaw to send out 7 representatives to go and check the area. I will ask at the Pwakanyaw conference to select 7 representatives and among them at least two of them need to understand English. They will go and check the land for Pwakanyaw people. (*Morning Star*, 1924, pp. 75-76).

In February 1925, a group of Pwakanyaw volunteers travelled to the Andaman Islands, led by *taohpwoh* leaders San Ba from the Insein Bible College and his friend Ahboe from Henzada, Grace's father. Upon return, San Ba published a letter in *Morning Star* explaining the suitability of Pwakanyaw settlement on the islands. With an enticing tone, he described the territory, and I translate:

The lands are desirable for living. There are several flat lands that people can work on. There are good water sources and there is no malaria. There are fish, frogs and wild

boars up towards 13 pounds and there are plenty of birds like doves. Land is good and the authorities also wants to help Pwakanyaw people. In addition to their invitation, if Pwakanyaw go and settle there they promise to provide food until they gain their yield. Therefore, if possible, I will leave for the island with 20 households, plus some clerks and tradespeople. If the plan is successful, we will build a village and probably even a town. (San Ba, 1925, p. 34)

As planned, in April 1925 San Ba and Ahboe organised to bring thirteen households who were members of Plor Khu and surrounding *taohpwoh* to the Andaman Islands. San Ba and Ahboe made the decision to accept the offer from the British, conveyed through Marshall, after careful consideration and due diligence. San Ba and Ahboe were responsible for the welfare of the migrants. Marshall's role was to convey the British proposal, connect Pwakanyaw with the Andaman Islands administration and help facilitate migration. He did not play a role in the development of Pwakanyaw communities after they arrived in the Andaman Islands or play any ongoing role in the settlement. For San Ba and Ahboe, as *taohpwoh* leaders, migration to the Andaman Islands was a solution to the problem of land scarcity in lower Burma and fulfilling their obligations as heads of *taohpwoh* to help seek opportunities that serve the interest of *taohpwoh* members. During my fieldwork, a *taohpwoh* leader in the upper Irrawaddy Delta told me that prior to the plan of the Andaman Island settlement, Ahboe had engaged in seeking opportunities for landless Pwakanyaw people. He witnessed and disliked ill-treatment carried out by landowners toward landless people and tuned himself into official announcements of the opening of lands. Ahboe once heard news about some marshland in Bassein opened to the public and he went down quickly to check but came back empty handed as the land was already taken. Striving for welfare and growth enacts *taohpwoh* ideals of protection, progress and expansion of Ywa's realm, even if it involves moving to a distant and unfamiliar territory. The migration instantiated the agentive power within *taohpwoh* through

the ability of members to enact change and create and sustain *taohpwoh* autonomous space, guided by leaders like San Ba and Ahboe.

While Ahboe and San Ba originally planned to jointly lead new Andaman *taohpwoh*, San Ba soon decided to return to Burma and continue his mission work there. Ahboe stayed in the Andaman Islands leading the first settlers. Five months after arriving, Ahboe wrote a letter about the new land, which was published in *Morning Star* and was an attempt to entice more Pwakanyaw migrants to the islands (and I translate):

Just recently the Chief Commissioner came to visit Pwakanyaw who came to live on the Island. They came to check our village and our settlement. They inspected beetle trees beside our house, and vegetables like eggplants, cucumber, melons, pumpkin, ladyfingers, ridged gourd and everything that we grow here. The chief officer was happy when he saw our cucumber and other vegetables. He then asked if other Pwakanyaw would like to come. I answered that people want to come but I will write and ask our *thara* Marshall. Chief Commissioner said there is no need to write and ask him. People can come as many as they want. Now I have inspected and demarcated land for farming and cultivation for 100 households to come later. Chief Commissioner lifted his walking stick and pointed to the east and said this place has a good soil so those who come over will get good land to work on. People went to check out the land recently and it was a two-day trip and they brought back news that there are three areas which are flat and good for paddy farming. They brought with them six wild pigs. I came to live here, and I built up a house which is small, but I enjoy it and I am happy because my people have come to live here. Chief Commissioner who came to check our settlement praised us so much. (*Morning Star*, 1925, p. 71).

Ahboe could not convince his immediate family to join him, so he decided to abandon the fledgling settlement and return to Burma. However, on the day of his scheduled departure, Ahboe met Chief Forestry Commissioner Wilson who begged him to stay on the islands and told Ahboe that the plan would be successful if Ahboe continued. Ahboe then received a revelation from Ywa through Wilson that it was his sacred mission to persevere and continue to develop *taohpwoh*. The relations between Ahboe and Wilson reveal complex power dynamics that align with *taohpwoh* constructions of power and co-optation. Ahboe co-opted the power of Ywa through human messengers, who in this case, was a British official. While the British official appears motivated by material interests, the need for forestry labour, Ahboe's apparent interest was to serve Ywa and *taohpwoh* members. According to Grace's diary, Ahboe came to believe it was Ywa's plan to expand his kingdom and he was chosen to implement Ywa's plan. So determined, Ahboe could then convince his family to join him, as well as more Pwakanyaw settlers from other districts of the Irrawaddy Delta.

On 12 of February 1926, under the leadership of Ahboe, 257 Pwakanyaw adults, including Grace, boarded a passenger ship called Maharajah and departed for the Andaman Islands. The real number was greater, but children were not counted as they were not part of the free ration list. Along with nine elephants on the boat, Pwakanyaw carried with them rice, different kinds of seeds, cooking utensils, sewing machines and domesticated animals such as dogs, chickens and ducks. The main sea route was through Rangoon. Rangoon to Port Blair was a two-day journey. Port Blair to Bonington, now known as Mayabunder, was another full day trip by boat. The passengers were health checked and quarantined for seven days on Kalolo Island. They were then sent to the area of settlement. Grace describes early settlement in her diary, and I translate:

The area of settlement was a forest with no houses. People built up huts under giant trees and in thick jungle. We stayed that way for over a week and an officer named H.

P. Smith came to show us the place where we would live and work so everyone moved to the area. People cut down trees and bamboo to build houses and cleared land for gardens and paddy plantations. That same year evil managed to chase us down. It was a hot summer and water sources where we lived had dried out. People lacked health knowledge and every time they handled meat they caught from the wild, they washed them down into the water and used the same water to drink, wash and clean themselves. We taught them but they didn't listen. They consumed contaminated water so almost everyone in the group fell ill. H. P Smith sent a boat to check and treat villagers and those who were severely ill were sent to hospital right away. The officer came to visit us all the time and he cared about sick and poor people. A wish of Tharah Ahboe is for every Pwakanyaw to be healthy and able to work for the development of the island free from poverty so based on his request, the officer sent a boat to be used for carrying sick people to hospital. The officer's wife also helped in providing food and offered to help anyway she can. Ahboe's family also helped sick people in ways they could but some died from sickness. Tharah Ahboe had to take the blame and even some unwell people with their families threatened to kill him. Some went back to Burma.

This shows the high risk and personal struggle of Ahboe and Pwakanyaw settlers as they tried to develop the remote *taohpwoh*. News of people returning to Burma disappointed Marshall and other *taohpwoh* leaders involved in the plan. The frustration was expressed in this short statement published in *Morning Star* (1926, p. 66), author unknown, and I translate.

We heard that some of our brothers and sisters who went to live in the Andaman Islands came back because they are suffering from malaria and headaches. However, we hope that Tharah Ahboe and his friends will be determined to settle there and live there. Pwakanyaw often give up easily when they do things and therefore their work is not

normally successful. Hope that people who have gone there won't become 'Mr. Despair' in the journey of Christianity.

As with all *taohpwoh* work, the ultimate goal of action is to serve Ywa. The letter suggests that a failure of the Andaman Islands settlement would be a failure of the *taohpwoh* project. *Taohpwoh* success depends on expansion and if the implementation of expansion fails, then it threatens core values that *taohpwoh* members adhere to and practice. It also shows an approach to suffering, in which perseverance and sacrifice accumulates *tana*, increasing power of *taohpwoh*. In this case, the project had tragic consequences. Some *taohpwoh* members died from cholera, and others abandoned the settlement to return to Burma. Following the incidents, Ahboe wrote letters encouraging those who returned to Burma to try again and come back to the Andaman Islands. In one of his letters, Ahboe wrote that more "vacant" land was found and there were different kinds of fruit and medicinal plants, such as marian, both white and red sandalwood and teak on the island. In the letters he also mentioned a recent visit of colonial officials who told him of their plan to open a flat vast land for Pwakanyaw people to farm and settle. Ahboe described the Andamans as the inheritance of Pwakanyaw people. In this way, Ahboe's efforts supported the settler colonial project, deploying settler colonial tropes to coax more Pwakanyaw to settle the frontier.

While the British colonial administration with the support of Marshall had facilitated and incentivised settlement, it was Ywa that Pwakanyaw saw as commanding migration and granting Pwakanyaw rights to the land. That is what made Andamans a sacred place that could be integrated into the network of *taohpwoh* in lower Burma, as an extension of Pwakanyaw practices of sovereignty. Ahboe wrote in *hta* form in *Morning Star* (1928, p. 76) to communicate to the heart of Pwakanyaw who left behind their settlement and returned to Burma, and I translate:

The earth is wearing a horn,
In discussion with the star,
I do not want to talk about it, said the star,
If there is no faith, then invite yourself in.,
I am still longing for you my white swallow,
Amid the splash of crystal water, I ran back to you.
A dove is cooing behind the hill,
Coo back if you still love,
Birds are feeding on yam flowers ,
Beautifully chirping,
The hill's peak covered with wild bananas,
The smell of boars is magnificent.
Hungry dogs are hunting,
Sniffing and signalling to one another,
Children chase boars with elephant spears,
Fruit here smells incredible,
A boar with two big tusks,
Speared by children,
Plenty to be carried back,
Some left behind in the wilderness,

turquoise water, lush green land,

Come and see it,

Branching heads of trees and bamboo,

If in doubt, just come to the green-wrapped island,

Return to check your inheritance.

Eventually, Ahboe succeeded in establishing the first *taohpwoh* on the Andaman Islands, building a church as a centre for the community, as well as other features to sustain *taophoh*. He named the first *taohpwoh* Plor Ner Moo, meaning secluded town, hidden from evil. The meaning implies that only Pwakanyaw can find it, and that provides safety. But this name obscures the fact that the *taohpwoh* was built on land that belonged to indigenous islanders who were further displaced by Pwakanyaw settlement. The rest of this chapter considers this particular expression of Pwakanyaw agency in relation to its dispossession of others.

Sustaining *taohpwoh* after the death of Ahboe

In September 1928, Ahboe died in Plor Ner Moo a few days after he was discharged from the government hospital in Port Blair, due to a leg injury becoming infected. Ahboe's sudden death impacted his plan of making Plor Ner Moo a town and put a halt to new Pwakanyaw settlements. Maintaining Plor Ner Moo *taohpwoh* fell to Grace, as she was the oldest child and was deeply involved in her father's project prior to his death. She assumed hereditary obligations as the child of a *taohpwoh* guardian, as Ahboe's son was still a child. She was in her twenties and unmarried. Grace's engagement with *taohpwoh* was accepted but a formal position as the head of *taohpwoh* could not be given to her within the patriarchal rules of the Baptist church at the time. Despite this, Grace was recognised as capable, especially her skill

navigating bureaucracy for the benefit of the *taohpwoh* as a liaison with the British administration. Grace's status as a de facto leader was actively negotiated, reflecting agency as a localised process that forms through changing social and cultural circumstances.

Grace was a young adult in 1926 when she accompanied her father, Ahboe, to the Andaman Islands to expand the first *taohpwoh*, which was formed there in 1925. Grace was educated in a mission school and literate in Pwakanyaw, Burmese and English. Knowing English made her father's job a lot easier in the settlement project, as she could represent Pwakanyaw in dealings with British colonial authorities on the islands, who were working to expand settlements, displacing indigenous people who they had not been able to transform into their desired colonial subjects. Grace's active participation and engagement helped sustain Plor Ner Moo *taohpwoh*, with up to a thousand members, a third of the Pwakanyaw population on the entire Andaman Islands today. There are now more than a dozen villages where Pwakanyaw live, co-existing with non-Pwakanyaw settlers, different ethnic groups from mainland India.

The stretch of road Grace and other Pwakanyaw had built is approximately 11 kilometres long. Grace explained that the labour was voluntary. She first asked members to join and wrote that nobody showed interest as *taohpwoh* members seemed to consider it as a British project. Grace convinced a small group of people it was of the benefit to their community. This suggests that the labour was for the *taohpwoh* and Ywa, as *tama*, not to serve British interests, even though the road aligned with colonial objectives.

I came back and I did announce the plan to villagers and encouraged them to help Mr. Smith with his plan but villagers showed no interest in helping. If we think carefully, Mr. Smith had done so much for Pwakanyaw people so for this project to happen, I organised a group of eight women, two adult men and three young men and we started the job. Among people in the group, I was the leader as I could speak reasonable English

so every time the chief forestry officer and DFO [District Forestry Officer] came, I would have to see them and talk to them. I want all the officials to know that Pwakanyaw women are also working. We present ourselves and show our work and it made them smile. We are doing this for all Pwakanyaw people now and those in the future, therefore we have no irritation and annoyance. We rather stayed happy while we finished all the work.

In addition to working for the benefit of *taohpwoh*, Grace thus also shows the importance of women's labour being recognised, showing that women are not confined to domestic labour but are capable of doing public, manual work. Grace also engaged in other *taohpwoh* work. She farmed, she taught in a local Pwakanyaw school, organised *taohpwoh* activities and helped manage the needs of her *taohpwoh* members. She conceptualised her responsibilities to *taohpwoh* community with supports from colonial administrators as sacred acts she return to Ywa:

I thank Ywa so much. While many people plan to destroy us as the chosen people of this island, this is truly not Ywa's desire, as he gave us people who are going to help us in order to live and we praise his grace on this island.

Other practical ways Grace served her *taohpwoh* community included bringing down the tax rate of local government, in exchange for bringing more Pwakanyaw to the island. This demonstrated the ways in which *taohpwoh* would negotiate with the colonial state and exercise agency and authority for their benefit. While bringing more Pwakanyaw to the islands was an objective of *taohpwoh*, they would still use it in negotiations with the British for their advantage.

Later, Grace played a major role in keeping her community isolated during WWII, when Japanese forces occupied the islands. Grace's achievements in supporting settlement can be

partly explained by her relations with colonial authorities. She negotiated the supply of timber in exchange for a pledge of support for the supply of essential goods as needed.

At the beginning of the war, the forest officer came to me and said that he would move all the logs to Rangat. I told him to do as he needed so that they have more money for the war. While forestry was no longer in the area, I asked him to promise to sustain the village in whatever ways he could. He looked at me with a smile on his face and said, "I promise I will sustain your village and also look after and help you. When you are in trouble just send a letter to me with my name on the envelope. I will get the letter and I will help you. In September 1941, some villagers came to me and told me that they no longer had food so I wrote to DFO Foster and he kept his promise and sent rice to us with a navy ship. Villagers got rice and none of them died from hunger.

Apart from Grace's diary, I did not find any other written sources of personal accounts of Grace when I was doing fieldwork on the Andaman Island from December 2017 until May 2018. I was told that Grace married a non-Pwakanyaw from mainland India and she left the Andaman Islands after her mother died in the 1960s. She had one daughter, but she had died before I commenced this research.

***Taohpwoh* proliferation in the land of dark water**

Since Ahboe's death, there have been four more Pwakanyaw Baptist *taohpwoh* created in the Andaman Islands. Plor Ner Moo *taohpwoh* members were comprised of Pwakanyaw largely from Henzeda and Bassien, which have separate *taohpwoh* administrations. As a *taohpwoh* leader from Henzeda, Ahboe's establishment of Plor Ner Moo *taohpwoh* community was part of the Henzeda *taohpwoh* organisation, known in Pwakanyaw as Kaw Hawkata (Henzeda Karen Baptist Association) under the Karen Baptist Convention (KBC). The setting up of Plor

Ner Moo *taohpwoh* for Henzada Karen Baptist Association meant the expansion of their administration. As part of their original mission, Ahboe and pastors after him had been successful in converting some Burmese convicts in the Andaman Islands to Christianity. Today, a number of members are descendants of convicts who were not Pwakanyaw but have assimilated and now speak Pwakanyaw as their mother tongue and identify themselves as Christian Pwakanyaw.

At the time of my fieldwork, Plor Ner Moo *taohophoh* was led by a grandson of Ahboe. His leadership of Plor Ner Moo *taohpwoh* community is closely supported by his family and various *taohpwoh* committees for *taohpwoh* management, women and youth affairs, health and welfare and Christian education. His wife is a descendent of a Shan convict who was incarcerated for murder, and she plays a key role in *taohpwoh* administration.

Grace was a strong opponent of co-existence between Pwakanyaw and *gāw lā thoo*. *Gāw lā thoo* is a Pwakanyaw S'gaw term referring to people of mainland Indian appearance and the term emphasises dark skin. The meaning is broad and shifting. This seems to have been the desire shared by many Pwakanyaw, attempting to seclude themselves and live separately from non-Pwakanyaw people. In her writing on a local government plan to settle down people in an area near Plor Ner Moo, regardless of their ethnicity, she writes how she told a local officer in conversation, 'I don't want *gāw lā thoo* and Pwakanyaw to live in the same place because this could end up in tension and argument and I truly do not wish to see Pwakanyaw land and property one day become the assets of *gāw lā thoo* people.' According to Grace, a colonial official agreed with her request to keep the area around Plor Ner Moo ethnically Pwakanyaw. This shows internalised racism that emerged during the colonial period, as well as widespread tension in Burma between Indian migrants and local populations over access to land and resources. It appeared that for a while, Grace used her authority to further racist policies of settlement.

Almost a century later, the *taohpwoh* which Grace helped build and sustain now has gāw lā thoo as their members who have assimilated, and they are regarded as Pwakanyaw Christians. Some gāw lā thoo members might not speak Pwakanyaw language but they have met key conditions such as accepting Ywa. This social dynamics within Plor Ner Moo *taohpwoh* may have changed and blurred the original idea of the *taohpwoh* on the Andaman Islands. But practices of *taohpwoh* community shift and evolve and it is seen as a positive outcome that there is social integration of gāw lā thoo. These assumed successes in multiplying their population beyond Pwakanyaw can demonstrated local dynamics of *taohpwoh* authority to make changes to their circumstances within diverse socio-political conditions.

Proselytising to indigenous communities was part of the original Andaman *taohpwoh* mission too. However, resistance from indigenous people and a social Darwinist perception among Pwakanyaw that these tribes will die out kept this “civilising mission” at bay. When there are opportunities, Pwakanyaw still try to missionise to indigenous tribes, which is illegal under Indian law. A recent example is a group of Pwakanyaw who helped an American missionary journey to Sentinel Island to proselytise in breach of Indian law which forbids all contact. He was speared to death and his body could not be recovered, because it would cause further damage and disruption to the Sentinalese (Basu, 2018). *Taohpwoh* members perceive their actions as part of the sacred Pwakanyaw mission of expanding *taohpwoh* community work in the Andamans and they do this according to agency linked to their relations of gift exchange with Ywa, which is prioritised over their obligations as Indian citizens.

Conclusion

Pwakanyaw migration to the Andaman Islands is implicated in settler colonialism and involved collusion in an inhumane colonialist plan to eradicate indigenous people through permanent

settlement. Injustice caused to native people due to this arrangement remains a topic of community conversation, but a vignette often told and retold among *taohpwoh* community at large justifies settlement as a sacred act for Ywa and the expansion of *taohpwoh*. As time passes, this narrative continues, and the logic of settler colonialism is perpetuated. For instance, at an Easter Sunday church service in 2018, Ahboe's grandson, the current pastor of Plor Ner Moo *taohpwoh*, gave a sermon and reminded his *taohpwoh* members that Ywa had chosen their elders and sent them here with a big mission:

As you've already known, another name for Andaman is *kalapani* [blackwater in Hindi], so as its name suggests, darkness is everywhere. The island was full of convicts and those who haven't received Ywa in their lives. So, don't ever think that our presence here is purposeless, we are here to serve Ywa and light up this island of darkness.

The connection between the mission to serve Ywa through territorial expansion and the project of British settler colonialism provides insight into Pwakanyaw agency and their capacity to make socio-political transformation. Marshall, the American missionary who facilitated the migration, appears to have had a desire to aid the British colonial project in the Andaman Islands by sourcing Pwakanyaw labour to extract resources from the forest. Marshall and the British likely saw the settlement of Pwakanyaw Christians as desirable because, as well as labour, they are considered more 'moral' than both the natives they were replacing, and the descendants of convicts who had been incarcerated in the circular jail. However, despite the stark power differentials against Pwakanyaw, the migration shows how Pwakanyaw maintained a strong negotiating position with colonial authorities in need of settlers. Pwakanyaw needed land and resources, but they also had to be repeatedly incentivised to participate in the settlement plan, and they did so partially on their own terms, which they saw as serving Ywa and the *taohpwoh* movement, not the colonial state. British authorities and

Marshall put energy into gaining consent for the migration and consent for Pwakanyaw to work in forestry and on infrastructure. The British offered land, money and some essential goods and services. Marshall warned Pwakanyaw to be active participants in the colonial project, and to not merely go there to farm, showing his anxiety that Pwakanyaw could not be controlled, which could result in failure of the settlement plan and his personal embarrassment. In contrast, Pwakanyaw sources emphasise settlement as an autonomous project that was voluntarily embarked on as a sacred act. The sacred activities were to establish *taohpwoh*, demarcate land, farm and build infrastructure that benefits those *taohpwoh*, enabling Pwakanyaw to live self-reliantly. Although Pwakanyaw did do logging, it is unknown to what extent they fulfilled the British need for forestry labour. The initial settlement nearly collapsed and, in Pwakanyaw accounts, the British desperately tried to convince Ahboe to continue through further incentives. However, for Pwakanyaw, Ahboe only persevered because of his relationship with Ywa and is not represented as taking any obligation to the colonial state into account. The settlement on the Andaman Islands was an exercise of Pwakanyaw agency, as was their dispossession of indigenous people and participation in the ‘civilising mission’, which continues despite the criminalisation of contact with indigenous islanders under the Indian state. This shows the complex dynamics of authority and power that is understood and practiced in *taohpwoh* communities.

Grace was not part of the decision in bringing Pwakanyaw people to the Andaman Islands. However, she was one of the key people that made it permanent. The crucial part she played in building up this new Pwakanyaw *taohpwoh* involved a number of factors. She seems to have had a strong sense of duty to the *taohpwoh* cause, which kept her going in making the plan of settlement successful. Unlike her other siblings who returned to Burma for education and other purposes, Grace never did. In one way, she can be seen as conforming to social expectations of being a moral and compliant daughter of a *taohpwoh* leader and a *taohpwoh* member who

prioritised family and community. Later in her life, she did leave the *taohpwoh* to live in mainland India, showing that she did have agency to make individual choices and did not need to be forever confined to the *taohpwoh*. *Taohpwoh* members do not seem to blame her for leaving as well, as power and agency in *taohpwoh* is diffuse, and not centralised in the leader at any one time.

Agency, as one's capacity to transform and change one's circumstances, needs to be culturally contextualised. The sacred act of settlement in the Andaman Islands, led by Ahboe, Grace and other *taohpwoh* members, reflects their agency in trying to improve their material circumstances at a time when land in the Irrawaddy Delta was scarce. By continuing the work her father started, Grace's status was transformed, into a leader of a *taohpwoh* who led a community and helped turn landless peasants into landowners. This needs to be interpreted within overlapping constraints of the *taohpwoh* and the colonial state. Grace and other *taohpwoh* leaders framed their acts within an ideology constructed and meaningful in a *taohpwoh* context, and sought to pragmatically benefit from the colonial system, rather than directly challenge or transform it, at the expense of indigenous people who were dispossessed under a logic of eradication.

Chapter V: Prayer is the bloodstream of *taohpwoh*:

Collective growth through healing

By the time I reached Plor Ner Moo *taohpwoh* on the first day to conduct my research on the Andaman Islands, it was already dark, and I went straight to one of my cousin's houses. It had been a two-hour flight from Kolkata to Port-Blair, followed by a 10-hour drive from Port-Blair to the *taohpwoh*. As I relaxed on a wooden bed, my cousin entered the room and passed me her Oppo phone, whispering to me that it is *Ah mà*. *Ah mà* is the wife of my father's first cousin *Ah t̃e*, who is the current Plor Ner Moo *taohpwoh* guardian. Through the phone, *Ah mà* made a determined order: "Child! Come to my house right now. We are going to have a prayer service and have dinner together afterward." *Ah mà* sent her children to pick me up and I went with them.

Ah mà and *Ah t̃e* – plus about 20 *taohpwoh* members comprising adults, youth and children – were waiting to commence the evening prayer meeting known in the community as 'Dorcus and Paul'. Named after Biblical figures, Dorcus and Paul are considered role models who served Ywa wholeheartedly by helping poor and needy people. Soon after I arrived, the service began with a short opening prayer by *Ah mà*, followed by her reading of scripture from the Bible, and a hymn the participants sung together. Based on my experiences of other prayer services that I have joined in other *taohpwoh* communities, I was expecting *Ah t̃e* to preach with reference to the Bible that evening. But instead of him preaching, the service was open to all participants to share and talk about anything they wished. To my surprise almost all adults in the group talked about different ailments and issues they were experiencing.

One participant shared his frustration of having a severe, prolonged toothache but could not find a solution because the dentist from the local government hospital was on indefinite leave. Another participant talked about the financial constraints he had from the kinship duty to

support his teenaged sister on top of his own family because his unemployed alcoholic father failed to care and provide for his sister. Hser Paw – who is the key person in this chapter – sat in the corner of the room and explained her unknown medical condition which she experienced in various ways such as feeling lethargic and not being able to sleep at night. The final part of the service was a collective prayer ritual where those carrying sickness and encountering difficulties came forward and kneeled in the centre of the group. Ah tee touched their heads and prayed for them. The rest of the group stood where they were, eyes closed, palms together and quietly recited their own prayers.

The Dorcus and Paul prayer group is like a weekly group therapy where participants seek ways to overcome the day-to-day challenges within themselves, their families and their community, all within the context of an expansionist, liberal Indian state. The ritual act of prayer helps members deal with physical, social and political challenges. The issues raised by different Dorcus and Paul participants were diverse, based on their social and economic circumstances, but a common desire was to hear each other's difficulties and to pray for each other as a means of healing. In this way, the group is a core enactment of *taohpwoh* values of care, support and communalism. Within the *taohpwoh* paradigm of holism, the meaning of healing for Plor Ner Moo *taohpwoh* community members is to find remedy for all ailments, including physical, mental and spiritual. Being healed therefore means *taohpwoh* members can thrive and prosper, can seek meaning at times of crisis, can cultivate hope and a positive outlook and can build cohesion. In this way, prayer is a key domain through which *taohpwoh* members strengthen their sense of community, allowing *taohpwoh* to develop and expand.

Prayer enacts the *taohpwoh* operating principles of *tana* and *tama*. *Tana* in *taohpwoh* proliferation is produced through the *tama* of prayer and related rituals, which in this case focusses on attempts to minimise suffering and heal. This chapter centres on an in-depth ethnographic description of Hser Paw's illness and her attempts to seek treatment through

prayer. Hser Paw's story illustrates how *taohpwoh* reconstitute themselves through individual and collective ritual acts, which in turn shape and reshape the lives of individual members. The alleviation of one another's suffering is a *taohpwoh* value and key to the ideals of progress and expansion. This involves utilising local constructions of power and creative spatial practices that extend *taohpwoh* beyond its immediate borders to encompass indigenous Karbi Baptists in the north-eastern periphery of India. This chapter argues that prayer is a key currency within and across *taohpwoh*, and that is the basis for the operation of *tana* as a key, local form of power that is capable of transforming both the individual and the social body of the *taohpwoh* as a whole.

The *taohpwoh* hybridised interpretation of illness and suffering involves the depiction of Ywa as a source of salvation and cure, through prayer and praying, while evil spirits are a cause of illness and suffering. The latter is informed by Pwakanyaw polytheistic ancestral belief and practices, and the former is influenced by Protestant Christianity. By mixing these different epistemologies, *taohpwoh* communities intentionally create and maintain space to operate on their own terms, constructing themselves as independent subjects with their own forms of power.

Prayer and social healing

Prayer is an important aspect of everyday life for many Christians, but has until recently been neglected in anthropological studies.²³ This in part reflects the power dynamics rooted in anthropology, in which Christian scholars from the West studied the exotic Other, and prayer had been largely limited to the disciplines of theology and philosophy, as Mauss (2003, p. 6)

²³ For instance, see Anidjar, 2009; Cannel, 2006; Engelke & Tomlinson, 2006; Hovland, 2016; and Robbins, 2015.

has noted. The anthropology of prayer also faces methodological challenges. By its nature, prayer is often private communication between an individual or a family, and their deity. Locations of prayer include the domestic realm, such as bedrooms or eating places within the home. Sometimes prayer is whispered and sometimes not articulated at all. These methodological challenges can be partly overcome through trust, respect and closeness to participants. Communal forms of prayer, such as in church or prayer groups are more accessible. A key aim of public prayer is to be heard by a crowd of participants and it is therefore verbalised and performed through words and expressions. In this chapter, I study prayer ethnographically, based on my participation in group and family prayer rituals and my conversations with *taohpwoh* members about their prayers. I consider both public forms of prayer in church and prayer groups, and private prayer in the home.

Prayer is a social phenomenon (Mauss, 2003, p. 32), mutually constituting the realm of both individual and society. Prayer therefore gives an insight into the sentiment, way of life and moral codes of individuals and the society they are part of. Within *taohpwoh*, prayer is collectively composed and performed, as social acts of creativity that make use of *hta* ritual Pwakanyaw speech. *Taohpwoh* members possess the freedom to experiment with the wording of prayer, choose the content, subjects and objects of prayer, and decide where and when to pray, though the structure of prayer remains embedded in and shaped by *taohpwoh* conventions. Prayer is a window into the language conventions and ideology of a religious community, as Yeon-ju Bae (2014) has argued in a study of Korean protestants. The social production of prayer, linked to *hta*, reveals the structure of *taohpwoh* that governs members' everyday lives. When *taohpwoh* members pray, they address their prayer to the spirit of Ywa, in deference and abandonment. This deference to the realm of the spirit of Ywa does not only mean the deity but also the spirit of *taohpwoh*, which is always conjured in prayer, regardless of whether the word '*taohpwoh*' is uttered. Praying is the foundational action of *taohpwoh*, a

core performative act that is integral to *taohpwoh* functioning and existence, and is therefore a shared responsibility of all members to Ywa and *taohpwoh*. A similar shared responsibility through prayer has been observed in the context of the Russian Orthodox Christianity. Kormina and Luehrmann (2018) argue that for Russian Orthodox Christians, prayer is less about the individual relationship with God than the deepening of social ties among fellow Christians through social practices of prayer.

The centrality of prayer as a sacred act within *taohpwoh* is generated from calamities and suffering within Pwakanyaw Christian practice that can in part be seen as an outcome of modernity and *taohpwoh* collective experience of war and conflict, which intensified following the start of colonialism. *Taohpwoh* religiosity is intrinsically linked to ‘modern’ processes and manages to give equal weight to both belief and practice. Assad (1993) has noted that the standardisation of religion as a modern process involves a change from “power and practices to belief.” In this sense belief becomes the central aspect of ‘modern’ religion. Pwakanyaw Christianity has its root in the ideology of the Protestant Reformation, which emphasised “implicit individualism” more than pluralism, and interior (belief) rather than exterior (practice) (Keane, 2007, p. 213). However, Pwakanyaw ontological understandings of religion and practice do not privilege belief over practice, reflecting the hybridised form of Christianity that has responded to and mediated colonial modernity, while maintaining a degree of ontological continuity with prior belief systems of spirit worship and Buddhism. Colonialism involved suffering, extreme violence and disorder, and the endurance of this suffering was transformed into a key *taohpwoh* power channelled through and remembered in prayer. In this way, prayer is a tool for *taohpwoh* members to ‘co-create vernacular histories’, as anthropologist David Henig (2017, p. 52) has argued in the context of prayer for Bosnian Muslims.

Prayer in *taohpwoh* is central to a ritual repertoire and is part of the mundane and ascetic acts of gift giving, caring, protecting, fasting, and restraining oneself from “immoral” conduct. Prayer is common as a localised strategy in managing harmful destructive forms of power, both human and non-human, that cause suffering to individuals as well as to the *taohpwoh* as a whole. A rare study of Pwakanyaw prayer, focussed on refugees who resettled in the USA, found that prayer was used to cope with war, displacement, suffering and trauma (Muruthi et al., 2020). The study found that religious practices such as prayer were a primary means in which participants overcame difficulties, created community and maintained links to their past. Power to overcome various forms of ailment and suffering and to thereby grow and expand the community is the optimal goal of Pwakanyaw *taohpwoh*. One strategy to do this is through collective prayer that place equal footing on both thinking and speaking. The Dorcus and Paul prayer group, which I will further elaborate on, provides departure point from which to understand how the culture of healing and the project to alleviate suffering through prayer in Plor Ner Moo *taohpwoh* operates in relation to power, as seen in the ethnographic case study of this chapter.

A local project of healing through prayer

The Dorcus and Paul prayer group is one of the key groups in Plor Ner Moo *taohpwoh* that generates the social value of *tana* in *taohpwoh* maintenance. One fundamental activity of the Dorcus and Paul prayer group is a weekly visit to sick and unwell *taohpwoh* members, in order to deepen social ties within the community through praying and heart-to-heart talks. These religious practices give space to *taohpwoh* members to embrace the care of the community and to accept and overcome suffering associated with illnesses and poverty communally. They cultivate trust among *taohpwoh* members and foster confidence in *taohpwoh* as a collective

entity. Other activities of the group include collecting and redistributing material resources to community members and households in need.

Reiterating the issues raised during an earlier prayer meeting, Ah mà claimed that Plor Ner Moo *taohpwoh*'s continued existence was currently at stake. Members were suffering from different forms of illness, the weakening of *tana* in Ywa, and were experiencing various forms of physical and psychological illnesses and pressure. These dangers posed an existential risk to the *taohpwoh*. Only a community program like Dorcus and Paul, run by members committed to increasing *taohpwoh* collectiveness, gave her hope again she said. The group was created and led by the guidance of Ywa, Amha told me.

Dorcus and Paul mission was formed in 2015. It is a collaborative initiative between the *taohpwoh* guardian, his wife and other *taohpwoh* members seeking localised solutions to the effects of widespread socio-economic issues that *taohpwoh* members were encountering. The group was formed following a rare visit by some senior *taohpwoh* guardians and members from the Karen Baptist Convention (KBC) in Myanmar. For Plor Ner Moo *taohpwoh*, the visit was considered as an auspicious and unique opportunity to symbolically reconnect with the much larger Pwakanyaw *taohpwoh* networks in Myanmar. Plor Ner Moo had been isolated for many years due to the dictatorship in Myanmar, and the Indian government's ongoing policy barring Myanmar citizens from setting foot in the upper Andaman Islands, apparently under the pretext of national security.

The leaders from Myanmar had arrived following a lengthy and complex process to seek permission for travel from the Delhi government. The leaders' visit influenced Plor Ner Moo *taohpwoh* in many different ways. After a long separation, this moment of reconnection provided recognition of Plor Ner Moo *taohpwoh* and the suffering of separation and isolation they had endured. After the trip, writing was published by KBC leaders praising Plor Ner Moo

taohpwoh for their strong *tana* and perseverance in upholding and maintaining Pwakanyaw *taohpwoh* identity and value under a prolonged disconnection and the growing influence of encroaching Indian cultures and society.

As recalled by Ah mà, this visit and interaction also re-strengthened their understanding of illness, embedded in human and non-human relations:

I took *thara* to a house of our Plor Ner Moo *taohpwoh* members, whose entire family experienced sickness in various forms. The husband is a fisher and consumes alcohol on daily basis. The wife is a staff at the forestry department and is required to take time off from work due to sickness. And all their children experience some form of illnesses. The middle daughter in particular often experiences fits, falling and losing consciousness. We prayed with the family and after that *thara* went to the garden to check the surroundings. Upon his return, he said the household was in trouble because their surroundings were infested with evil spirits. The solution for the problem is for both the family and the community to engage in extensive praying and fasting. A strong *tana* could cure them.

These comments were a key motivator of Ah mà to mobilise the Plor Ner Moo *taohpwoh* guardian and other members, to establish Dorcus and Paul with a focus on accumulating a sense of community through the performative acts of praying and fasting as a remedy for illness and calamities.

Dorcus and Paul and the structural context of illness

The *taohpwoh*'s attempt to alleviate issues triggering suffering connects to the structural problem of poverty in India that harms the psycho-social health of communities. According to the World Health Organisation, India has the highest suicide rate in the region (WHO, 2019,

p. 30). A recent study found that within India, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands have the second highest suicide rate after Pondicherry. Illness is the second highest cause of suicide, noting the stress when individuals suffer from diseases like cancer and diabetes that require costly and protracted treatment (Swain et al., 2021). Prior to my research, there were suicides within Pwakanyaw *taohpwoh* communities. The causes of these incidents were not openly discussed due to shame and taboo.²⁴ Some elders in the community linked these incidents to mental illness and joblessness.

Lack of employment opportunities is a major stress in the *taohpwoh*. The key provider of jobs to *taohpwoh* communities in Andaman and Nicobar Islands is the Indian government. Job security from the government is perceived to be the most reliable source of income. This creates a more positive view of the state, although only a minority manage to gain state employment as government jobs are very competitive. Some older *taohpwoh* members claim that access to employment is growing increasingly difficult as a result of migration from the mainland, causing socio-economic pressures on younger families to survive and sustain themselves. There is a widespread view that the governance system applied by the central government toward the Andaman and Nicobar Islands disadvantages local communities. *Taohpwoh* members would complain to me that the state lets them fall through the cracks. A common claim I heard from the *taohpwoh* is that posts available within government service sectors are now filled with more qualified professionals from mainland India, a practice widely resented by local communities including Plor Ner Moo *taohpwoh*. The hiring processes and timeframes are also getting more complicated and protracted. Plor Ner Moo *taohpwoh* members would tell me that they it could take years to even get low skilled positions, such as day labouring, causing profound anxiety. One person applied for a job with the forestry department, who kept telling him for the last ten years to wait but could give no guarantee that he would ever be employed.

²⁴ A local belief is that suicide is contagious, and discussion can lead to imitation.

The limited sources of income have pushed *taohpwoh* members to rely on familiar communal work like logging, fishing and hunting which are highly regulated, placing people in constant physical and psychological risks if they do not follow the law. Economic stress and insecurity are everyday experiences and contribute to illness and suffering. In the absence of effective state interventions, *taohpwoh* fills the gap.

Dorcus and Paul is made up of volunteers who themselves suffer a wide range of illnesses and socioeconomic problems. The main activities of the group are largely centred on providing remedies for ailments. With unstructured guidance from the *taohpwoh* guardian and his wife, the group engage in visits to *taohpwoh* households with known sick members. A key function of a visit is for group prayer with families, followed by physical healing practices involving use of a thermometer, blood pressure monitor and light massage, as well as prescribing holy water and oil. Water and oil are imbued with healing potency when they are prayed for by *taohpwoh* guardians. Unlike costly biomedicine that is only available in hospitals and pharmacies, holy water and oil are abundant and easily accessible for every *taohpwoh* member. In addition to household-based caring activities, the group also organise healing prayer rituals in the chapel with larger numbers of *taohpwoh* members. This wider group ranges from 30 to 100 people and is led by the *taohpwoh* leader and his wife, as well as the other members of Dorcus and Paul. The wider group follows prescribed rules that include fasting and then praying in a circle. The *taohpwoh* guardian leads the prayer and the other individuals also pray for themselves and those who are the subject of healing. During the prayers, *taohpwoh* members name those who are sick and in need of healing, as well as their ailments, which can range from cancer to skin disease. Sometimes the sick are among the participants, but if they are too sick to attend, they can join by phone from their bed in the intermittent times that there is signal.

Dorcus and Paul are not only focused on healing through prayers. They also do welfare work such as fundraising by selling food and garden produce or collecting donations, which they redistribute to *taohpwoh* members in need. This takes the form of either cash, food or medicine. Funds they collect are also used to support Pwakanyaw local healers, whose treatment is based on indigenous knowledge. This involves the procurement of traditional healing materials not available in India, such as particular roots and herbs from Myanmar, and grinding stones. They also fund a prayer centre in Karbi Anglong, Assam which gives *taohpwoh* members access to prayer healing. *Taohpwoh* members are listed in a notebook in Assam with their ailments, and they are prayed for on a daily basis. Prayer as a performative act cannot be quantified, but by listing names of individuals who need treatment, the labour of prayer has a material basis.

Plor Ner Moo *taohpwoh* is physically isolated from the Karen Baptist Convention which has its own health system including a Pwakanyaw hospital in the Insein township of Yangon and an informal network of clinics throughout Pwakanyaw areas of Myanmar. Without access to this *taohpwoh* health system in Myanmar, and limitations and mistrust in the Indian system, *taohpwoh* members rely on their own healing practices, and their networks with Karbi Baptists in Assam, who operate within a paradigm that is more compatible to a Pwakanyaw worldview. As is seen in the experience of Hser Paw, treatment from Karbi prayer healers is a fallback option when locally available, scientific medical interventions fail.

Hser Paw's illness

Hser Paw is a *taohpwoh* member in Plor Ner Moo. Under Pwakanyaw kinship practices within *taohpwoh*, Hser Paw and I are relatives. She is married to a son of my *Mä mä* (older sister), so within kinship practices, she is my niece. As an aunt, my obligation to her is to make myself available by spending time with her and listening to her, providing nurture and support. I spent

extensive time with Hser Paw in her house, where we talked about many different things. Her illnesses were a key topic. By being present and listening to her stories, Hser Paw told me that I helped her process her difficulties and, in this way, I was fulfilling my kin obligation. Kinship obligation is a two-way process. While on the one hand I must listen to Hser Paw, I am also responsible to tell her my own stories and experiences directly and indirectly on the topics that we talked about, in a manner of openness, sincerity and reciprocity. Through this back-and-forth interaction, trust is strengthened and the kin relation between us has solidified. As an indigenous researcher linked to research participants through kin, I have multi-layered obligations in addition to the requirements I have to meet doing fieldwork within the discipline of anthropology. This is discussed more in Chapter VI.

Hser Paw is in her mid-thirties. She is the youngest of four children of a Pwakanyaw Christian mother and Malayalam Hindu father. Hser Paw was baptised and formally joined the *taohpwoh* prior to her marriage to a Christian. This is a common practice among Pwakanyaw *taohpwoh* communities to strictly forbid the marriage between people of different religions, which extends to different Christian or even other Protestant denominations unless they adopt Baptist Christianity. Even though Hser Paw is the product of a bi-religious relationship, she was welcomed in the *taohpwoh* as she is baptised and able to demonstrate her piety to Ywa. Hser Paw describes herself as patient and persevering in dealing with daily challenges, with a dedication to prayer. Through regular praying she gains power to go through her days.

Hser Paw's formal engagement with *taohpwoh* has been relatively short but she is known to be a dedicated *taohpwoh* member who volunteers as a Sunday school teacher and actively involves herself in youth and women's activities that are part of the Plor Ner Moo *taohpwoh*. She is an active member of the Dorcus and Paul Mission. Though she herself is devoted to the *taohpwoh*, as her Pwakanayaw mother chose to marry a Hindu and two of her three brothers are not Christian, her *tana* is considered weak by other *taohpwoh* members. This is a result of the

collective structure of *tana*, which is understood on a kinship and *taohpwoh* level, as well as on an individual level. Hser Paw's poor health is considered by the community including the *taohpwoh* guardian and his wife as a result of weak *tana*. Since Hser Paw's father was not a Ywa follower and two of her brothers are also not Ywa followers, she therefore suffers the consequences of this resulting reduction of *tana* through sickness. Hser Paw therefore has had to assume responsibility to make her brothers and their families Ywa followers as a remedy to her weak *tana*. An individual member with weak *tana* is perceived as weakening the collective *tana* of the *taohpwoh* as a whole. The stakes are high as *tana* is the basis of *taohpwoh* security and prosperity. Weaknesses in *tana* that surface in the form of illness are tackled through a strong commitment to the act of praying. Through praying, Hser Paw and Plor Ner Moo *taohpwoh* members anticipate the conversion of her brothers to Christianity.

Hser Paw keeps close contact with her older brother, who she calls her father. This is especially important when her symptoms of illnesses intensify and she goes to spend time with him to feel cared for and protected. This produces a form of *tana*, as a gesture of obeisance to an elder. However, her emotional need to be near her non-Christian kin at times of hardship goes against *taohpwoh* practices since finding emotional sustenance in her non-Christian brother's care operates outside of the *taohpwoh* and outside of Ywa. Her closeness to her non-Christian brother is interpreted by her husband and father-in-law, active subjects who accumulate *tana* for the *taohpwoh*, as a threat. This creates tension between two systems of value that produce *tana*: one based on the production of *tana* through performative acts for Ywa and Ywa followers, and the other on the *tana* of reciprocal social relations within kinship. Hser Paw tries to juggle her emotional needs for her immediate kin with the obligations to her *taohpwoh* kin by prioritising the attempt to persuade her non-Christian family members to become Ywa followers, which reinforces the strength of her *tana* that she believes will eventually cure her illness and ailments. Openly talking to other *taohpwoh* members and her persistent request for

prayers to bring her family to Christianity are also important to maintain her status as a dedicated member of the *taohpwoh*, while it also reflects her desire that her brothers would one day be in the *taohpwoh* with her. As can be seen in Hser Paw's navigation of her obligations in kinship and *taohpwoh*, individual production of *tana* through acts like prayer, is grounded in the shifting context of individual *taohpwoh* members.

Neither Hser Paw nor her husband have jobs that bring them regular income. Her husband is a milkman and she bakes cakes for income. Hser Paw had been trying to have a second child for over a decade and *taohpwoh* members interpreted her failure to conceive as a sign of weak *tana*. To become fertile again is something Hser Paw is actively seeking a cure for. Hser Paw and her husband have a teenage son and share a house that belongs to Hser Paw's parents-in-law. Hser Paw said she is well supported by her family and the community but the fact that she sometimes needs to financially rely on her father-in-law, a retiree from a local government school, makes her feel ashamed.

Hser Paw had been feeling unwell for a few months when we met. Her illness is neither pain nor ache, but rather a dull feeling inside her heart. She described the feeling as something blocking the top of her heart making it difficult for her to breathe. Sometimes she felt like someone was pulling the heart away from her body and at that particular moment it would feel like she was approaching death. In addition to the issue with her heart, she feels numbness in her brain and sometime dizziness and a headache that makes her feel like her head is going to burst.

A medical anthropological study of female Pwakanyaw refugees in Australia looked at experiences giving birth. The study found that 'physical sensations associated with feeling of anxiety for some became symptoms of illnesses, in particular heart disease' (Niner et al., 2014, p. 376). The study documented a cultural schema of embodied emotions, that has been similarly

found across other Southeast Asian languages, including Burmese and Thai (Matisoff, 1986). Common Pwakanyaw phrases that merge emotion with physical ailments include “bad heart”, “disturbed heart”, “poor heart”, “damaged heart”, “hurt heart”, “heavy heart” and “unstable heart”, much like Hser Paw’s “pulled heart”. As with Hser Paw, the women in the study found Western medicine alienating and unable to cure their illnesses. They needed to look elsewhere for a remedy. In the case of Hser Paw, that remedy came from the *tana* that she collectively produced with her kin and fellow *taohpwoh* members through praying and associated acts like fasting, avoiding particular foods and drinks and consuming holy water.

In addition to their committed acts of prayer, Hser Paw and her husband sought help from doctors at a local government hospital to get a diagnosis for her condition. With the financial support of her *taohpwoh*, she even went to a private hospital in Port Blair and Chennai that involved extensive bus and plane travel. Different specimens such as blood, stool and urine were collected and tested, but nothing abnormal was found. From time to time, she came back home without any medicine or treatment. The illness continued.

Biomedicine, which cost her time, energy and money was unable to fix her ailment, and this led her to fall back on her family, *taohpwoh* and healing practices that were easily accessible and cost effective, a survival strategy that has also been noted in Myanmar (Thawngmung, 2019). There are different local healers in the community with various cultural backgrounds. Some work openly, like Plor Ner Moo *taohpwoh* healers operating within the system of *tana*, who are supported by the Dorcus and Paul Mission and do not charge money. There are also expensive healers who work discreetly. Pwakanyaw *taohpwoh* healers claim their knowledge comes from Ywa through prayer and dreams. Hser Paw went to a number of healers and one among them gave her a diagnosis. She was told that her illness is caused by a Pwakanyaw friend who created a spell with the help of a Ranchi Hindu to physically harm her as a form of a revenge. This negative *tana* that affected Hser Paw through a spell was perceived by Hser

Paw and *taohpwoh* elders as a necessary test from Ywa to strengthen the positive *tana* of Hser Paw and the *taohpwoh*.

Hser Paw believed the spell was motivated by a quarrel with her neighbour regarding a lost Samsung smartphone. The elder son of the neighbour was a friend of Hser Paw's son. They spent a lot of time together. Hser Paw's son got a smartphone from his uncle as a birthday present and he shared that phone with his friend to play games. The phone disappeared and with her son, Hser Paw went to see her neighbour and asked the son if he saw it, positioning him as an object of suspicion. The boy was ashamed and secretly left the village. The mother of the boy was furious and blamed Hser Paw. They did not talk to each other for some time but as people from a small community, they cannot fully avoid each other. They would meet and talk on some occasions, but their relationship has never returned to normal. Hser Paw believes she became sick after she had eaten *mithai*, a popular Indian sweet that her neighbour brought as a gift.

One antidote for the spell was a homemade liquid medicine Hser Paw tried to consume. The liquid was made with *tana* and consumed with *tana*, so *tana* was a key element of its healing properties. The night after she had visited a healer, and after she drank all the liquid, Hser Paw vomited a large amount of black goo that made her feel better the next morning. Within *taohpwoh* practices of healing in the Andaman Islands, cures often involves vomiting, expelling something harmful or alien from one's body. The *taohpwoh* view of vomiting as remedy contrasts with biomedicine, where vomiting is often seen as a symptom in diagnosis and as a negative side effect of treatment (Zhong et al., 2021). Vomiting out negative *tana* restores the positive *tana*, making one healthy until one's *tana* is tested again in the infinite cycle through which *taohpwoh* value is produced.

Hser Paw carried on with her life without complaining about her symptoms for a few weeks and that made her and her family very happy. This contentment was short lived as Hser Paw's experience of being pulled at her heart relapsed and her *tana* was again tested. The symptoms she felt got worse, making her feel afraid to fall asleep at night. She tried hard to act normal and look strong for her family, as part of her obligation to be a strong mother, a good wife and dutiful daughter-in-law. One evening when I went to visit her, she handed me a cup of chai and asked if I could join her on a trip to Karbi Anglong, Assam to get treated. I agreed to her request, and she seemed relieved. The reason that she asked me to come with her is that, like many young women in the community, Hser Paw does not travel without accompaniment. Leaving her family and going to an unfamiliar place for treatment was a nerve wrecking experience but the desire to be healed motivated her to take the risk, and she was encouraged by Plor Ner Moo *taohpwoh* guardian and his wife as well as by members of the Dorcus and Paul mission.

For Pwakanyaw in India, the isolation from *taohpwoh* institutions of healing in Myanmar necessitates alternatives, and guardians fulfil the responsibility for healing members. Since there is no formal institution Indian *taohpwoh* can rely on, *taohpwoh* guardians have created networks with Karbi churches under the Karbi Baptist Convention as an alternative. Unlike the Karen Baptist Convention in Myanmar, this is disconnected from biomedical treatment, which is available from the Indian state and is not trusted. However, the link with Karbi does partly fill the void created by the closed border with Myanmar. *Taohpwoh* guardians continue to seek and build alliances with other Baptists across Northeast India, including those in Meghalaya, Nagaland and Mizoram. *Taohpwoh* as a localised community can be independent and try to operate autonomously but the necessity of security and wellbeing requires wider networks that are compatible with the value system of *tana*.

The connection between Pwakanyaw and Karbi people started through a marriage. A Plor Ner Moo *taohpwoh* member who graduated from a seminary in Assam married an ethnic Karbi pastor. With the support of Plor Ner Moo and Karbi communities, this Karbi pastor and his Pwakanyaw wife administer a local Karbi church, which is largely made up of Karbi converts. The Karbi pastor's wife has been formally adopted into Karbi society and forms an important bridge to the *taohpwoh*. She is recognised as both Karbi and a Pwakanyaw Plor Ner Moo *taohpwoh* member. Since her work in Karbi expands the geography of the Plor Ner Moo *taohpwoh*, it is conceptualised as part of progress, not as a loss. This repeats the migration and expansion of Plor Ner Moo *taohpwoh* from the upper Irrawaddy Delta during British colonial times.

In addition to organising church activities, the Karbi-Pwakanyaw couple are active supporters of a prayer centre run by one of their congregants. Prayer centres, also known as healing centres, are widespread across the hills of Karbi Anglong. At the time of this research, there were eight pray centres under the supervision of the Karbi Baptist Convention. Among these, four centres were particularly popular among Karbi people and those who led the centres were recent Christian converts who are perceived to have exceptionally strong *tana*. Prayer centres which carry out healing missions have been formally recognised by local Karbi authorities since 2001. Most prayer centres are run by community-recognised prayer leaders, who have received revelations from Ywa. They are believed to be chosen by Ywa and specially blessed with the power of *tana* to successfully treat numerous health conditions. The prayer leaders are popular among local people, and the illnesses they treat are linked to the possession of evil spirits, a negative form of *tana*. As the centres gain recognition in healing local people, their popularity has extended. For instance, businesspeople and politicians have approached prayer leaders, paying for support in successful business deals or to win elections. The popularity of these prayer centres has placed leaders and the movement under the radar of the Hindu right-

wing nationalist organisation Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). According to a Karbi man who works closely with a prayer centre, the RSS are closely monitoring their activities in the community, and the security of their prayer leaders are at risk. For safety, female prayer leaders are not allowed to work outside of their own village for fear they could be abducted or killed. Not all pray centres get local acceptance, and some are considered to be profit motivated.

After almost two days travelling from Plor Ner Moo to Assam, Hser Paw, her husband and I arrived in the Karbi autonomous region. At around 5pm the day we arrived, a group of Karbi led by a healer came to meet us. The prayer leader only spoke Karbi, so the pastor acted as a Hindi – Karbi interpreter. Basic information about Hser Paw comprising of her age, her family background, her job and her health were noted by the healer. She then asked Hser Paw and her husband to sit on their knees in front of her. While she covered her head with a white cloth, she placed the bible on Hser Paw's head and began to pray. The pastor, his wife and other people who came along also prayed for Hser Paw. After this communal prayer, Hser Paw was given a light massage with coconut oil on her head and body. After the massage, Hser Paw quickly got up and grabbed a bowl of water to offer to the healer to wash off her hands, a common practice among Pwakanyaw and Karbi as an act of reciprocity. Healers use their hands to handle sickness and in return the receiver helps by cleaning the hands of the healer to avoid spreading disease and illness. This reflects the exchange of acts that accumulate the value of *tana* between Hser Paw and the healer.

Through the Karbi pastor, a diagnosis was given to Hser Paw that evening. The prayer leader saw that someone with a dark complexion lit a fire inside Hser Paw. The fire is no longer there but the smoke remains, and a negative form of *tana* is suffocating her soul. That's why Hser Paw is restless and often cold. Hser Paw affirmed the feeling of constant restlessness. Hser Paw's soul is in trouble and therefore her physical body is suffering, the prayer leader explained. The best way to restrengthen her *tana* is through praying, fasting, drinking holy

water and avoiding black curled feathered chicken, and fruit like apples, oranges and pineapple believed to be used in the spell that harmed Hser Paw.

Hser Paw did everything as instructed, and the prayer healer was also fasting and praying for Hser Paw. Hser Paw was very chatty and happy in the daytime but became quiet and reserved as night fell. The symptoms of her heavy heart worsened at night. This dilemma was answered in a dream of the prayer healer. In the dream, Hser Paw's soul was caught and kept in a deep dark place. Hser Paw was in danger because the power of the spell had been recently increased. She also explained the reason that Hser Paw feels worse in the evening is because the person who targeted her lit lamps and rang a bell. The smoke from the lamp was suffocating her and the sound of the bell was unsettling her soul. Hser Paw was upset hearing that news and told the prayer leader her dream. In her dream, the same person who she believes was causing her harm came to her naked and said it is no use for Hser Paw getting treatment in Assam because she would never be healed and she recently added more power to the medicine to make Hser Paw sicker. The prayer healer assured Hser Paw not to worry and think about her dream as Ywa loves her and *tana* would heal her. Within healing, the formula of *tana* production as remedy shifts according to a context of illness and the subject's bodily response. The continued suffering and experience of illness is often seen as necessary to obtain long-lasting *tana*.

Healing through collective prayer

During her trip to Assam, the prayer healer and other Karbi people came to visit Hser Paw and prayed with her on a daily basis. The visits usually ended with a lengthy discussion after prayer. These discussions involved participants sharing each other's physical experience and dreams, visual signs that people have while praying and personal experiences of illness and recovery, accompanied by rituals of fasting and drinking holy water. For *taohpwoh* members, working

with Karbi healers was beneficial because of a similar ontology in which illness can be caused by evil spirits, possession or taboo breaking and healing, centred on Ywa. For *taohpwoh* members and their Karbi associates, healing is a participatory process involving the whole community, in contrast to biomedicine where the doctor is the expert and decides on the diagnosis of the patient, who has an inferior position within a clear hierarchy. In *taohpwoh*, everybody who engages in prayer can be a healer and, while the Karbi healer is revered, processes of diagnosis do not rely on that healer alone but involve all who are willing to give an opinion that is experientially grounded in illness and recovery through prayer. All insight grounded in prayer and life experience is believed to have been gained from Ywa, reflecting a person's *tana*. Healing is fundamentally a communal process for the *taohpwoh*. When the opinion of a participant is connected to successful recovery, that person is believed to have strong *tana*, which corresponds to a high status as a chosen healer by Ywa. The strength of a person's *tana* is not only reflected in their physical experience but also in their dreams.

One time a Karbi man told Hser Paw about his dreams. He saw Hser Paw and her family bound three times with a big black rope. This binding is the cause of her sickness, and it is not Pwakanyaw targeting them, as Hser Paw had come to believe, but *gāw lā thoo*; mainland Indians. The man said that Hser Paw's father-in-law is a successful businessperson, and this caused envy. Hser Paw has a weak *tana* and therefore she suffers more than other family members. The man suggested a synchronised prayer with Karbi in Assam and Pwakanyaw in Andaman Islands praying at the same time in order to untie the rope. Hser Paw's house must also be sprayed with holy salt and holy water. If the house is still bound after prayer and ritual, a prayer healer from Karbi should go there to untie it.

We stayed in Karbi Anglong for about a week and after a number of prayer services and care from the pastor's family, Hser Paw expressed feeling lighter in her body. Hser Paw still found it hard to fall asleep at night but had more energy. She believed this was from prayer and

fasting. News about Hser Paw's improvement spread through *taohpwoh* members in the Andaman Islands. Almost every day, people from Plor Ner Moo *taohpwoh* called to request prayer. A *taohpwoh* member called to request prayer for her husband who suffered from a brain tumour. A grandmother called to get a special prayer for her Hindu son-in-law to become a *taohpwoh* member. As the desire to be healed by Karbi prayer healers grew, the Dorcus and Paul mission committee formulated a plan to bring Karbi pray healers to the Andaman Islands to treat people.

Hser Paw told me she felt much happier and healthier as the time to return home grew closer. However, she was determined to see one of the most potent and auspicious prayer healers in the Karbi hills who can help women get pregnant. This prayer leader lives three hours' drive away from the village where we stayed. With close supervision from the pastor, two days before Hser Paw left Karbi Anglong, we went to see the prayer healer (addressed by Hser Paw as *Ah moh jee*, Pwakanyaw language for grandmother). The pastor introduced us to Ah moh jee who waited for us at the gate of her prayer centre. One of her helpers showed us to a hall where we could sit and rest. A young girl came in with a tray of hot chai and snacks and placed them in front of us. The pastor helped pass these refreshments around and also talked to Ah moh jee in Karbi language. Ah moh jee then asked everyone to kneel and she placed her hands on Hser Paw and her husband and started praying. After the prayer, she said that Hser Paw's soul was captured by the Hindu goddess of destruction, Kali. Kali meant to kill Hser Paw, but Ywa keeps her alive. So Hser Paw can return home with peace of mind as Ywa has healed her and she can become pregnant. Hser Paw was asked to fast once a week and pray every day. Ah moh jee also encouraged Hser Paw to visit her neighbour to ask for forgiveness.

Ah moh jee is in her early sixties, has a strong body and hardly smiles. Before she received her revelation, she practised polytheistic spirit worship and survived on the sale of vegetables she foraged for in the nearby forest. Her story of getting a revelation went like this: one evening

on her way back from collecting herbs and vegetables from the field, she saw Lord Shiva who had a snake on his neck and she was afraid. Suddenly a light came down from the sky and warned her not to be afraid. The voice asked her to look at her hands and legs, which were glowing. She did not understand but the voice told her, 'I will reveal my glory through you, and you will serve me.' She came home without paying attention and there was non-stop rain in the area around her village. She remembered the voice and prayed to stop the rain. She then heard a voice which told her to change her clothes. She did and suddenly the rain stopped and the sun came out. The voice also told her that it had listened to her prayer, and it would act through her if she kept praying. Since she converted to Christianity in 2001, she prayed for thousands of sick people. According to the pastor, Ah moh jee has the power to see someone's troubles from a glance. Her younger sister also experienced a revelation and is serving in another prayer centre in Karbi Anglong.

Two weeks after Hser Paw returned to the Andaman Islands, a Karbi prayer group comprising of Ah moh jee, the pastor and the pastor's sister-in-law came to the Andaman Islands. The visit was received with mixed feelings from the community. While some welcomed them with hope and appreciation, others held suspicion. Those who did not like the presence of Ah moh jee called her a witch from Assam. The reason for this accusation was because Ah moh jee acts differently to *taohpwoh* leaders they have met. She does not close her eyes when she prays, which many Pwakanyaw see as an act of disrespect to Ywa. A *taohpwoh* senior member sitting next to me even expressed her disagreement and sarcasm about the activity: "Do think about it, sister. Isn't it true that Ywa is everywhere and listens to every prayer. Not only people from Assam can pray and heal people, but people here can do that too." The tension was not discussed openly but the visit had stirred up the power dynamics between *taohpwoh* leaders and some of the members.

Amid some disagreement, the Dorcus and Paul mission held healing prayer sessions with Ah moh jee and her group from Assam in Plor Ner Mu church. Up to 100 Pwakanyaw and non-Pwakanyaw would join each session. The issues people came to seek help for were varied: diabetes, arthritis, other ailments. Some were young women who could not conceive. Some people came with complex issues such as a hole in their heart, chronic pain in parts of their bodies and even a baby with cerebral palsy. The service normally started with reading scripture and singing, followed by Ah moh jee's sermons, largely based on her life experiences before and after her revelation. After her speech, she would ask participants who were sick to come to the stage and sit. While praying, she went around the stage and touched everyone on their head. She then gave space for people to talk about how they felt after her prayer. A Pwakanyaw woman who had been suffering from diabetes with serious symptoms of sore feet, picked up a microphone and said, "I could barely stand on my feet before I came but now I feel like the pain has reduced." For those too sick to come to church, Ah moh jee visited them in their homes and prayed for them there. Hser Paw, as her wish, hosted the group in her house. As she was busy, we did not see each other much until her guests went back to Assam.

Late one afternoon, Hser Paw rang me and asked me to come and visit her. She told me that the *taohpwoh* guardian and his wife would be there too. The prayer meeting was about to start when I arrived, and I sat among a few other *taohpwoh* members who had joined. Hser Paw handed a bag of salt and two bottles of water to the *taohpwoh* guardian, and he then placed them on the table. This prayer meeting was jointly completed with Ah moh jee in Assam. The *taohpwoh* guardian made a call and placed the phone on the table. Everyone started praying. While praying, the *taohpwoh* guardian and his wife held water and salt up high, to give the objects sacred power. After the praying had finished, the *taohpwoh* guardian and his wife picked up the salt bag and sprinkled it around the house. She started from the living room and went around every corner of the house, followed by the *taohpwoh* guardian who sprayed the

house with holy water. Then they both went to the garden and finished pouring salt and water there. While they were in the garden, I sat beside Hser Paw. She said that the prayer and ritual was part of a dream of Ah moh jee, who saw the Hindu Goddess Kali and other evil spirits nested right below her bedroom. From the nest, there's a passage leading to the garden in the backyard where there were a lot of evil spirits. The land was possessed by evil spirits and therefore required purification. Ah moh jee conducted the ritual of purification while she was in Plor Ner Mu *taohpwoh* – a ritual directed at keeping the spirits out of Hser Paw's family's land. Purification does not eliminate one side of the opposition but, rather, seeks to establish a clear boundary and restore all things to their proper sides of it (Keane, 2017, p. 200). The ritual for Hser Paw and Plor Ner Mu *taohpwoh* represented a successful act of chasing evil spirits out of Hser Paw's property through collective *tana*. However, Pwakanyaw believe that evil spirits co-exist with humans, so the return of these spirit is likely, and they will likely again cause bad fortune and illness. But in this particular moment, Hser Paw was happy and relieved. The healing showed that collective *tana* could defeat evil spirits. For Hser Paw, her suffering was necessary as a test of her *tana* and her status within the *taohpwoh*. The restoration of her *tana* showed that she had a healthy body and therefore could conceive.

I left the Andaman Islands and came back to Myanmar to begin the second part of my fieldwork. Hser Paw was sad when I left the village and requested that I call her and keep in touch. I tried to keep regular communication with her but sometimes we lost contact due to network problems on the Island. In Hser Paw's area, there is typically no phone coverage for two or three days a week. After a few months of sporadic contact, I received a Whatsapp message from Ah mà about Hser Paw's pregnancy. I rang her and she screamed as soon as she heard my voice:

Hello Ah mà! Where have you been? I am pregnant now and you will be a grandmother of our new child. Blessings returned to our family after the bad spirits left our property.

I thank Ah moh jee so much for chasing those bad spirits away and I would never forget her for that.

This happiness did not last for long. A few weeks later, Hser Paw shared some of her test results indicating that her neural tube defects screening was positive, and therefore the calculated risk for spina bifida was high. I rang her as soon as I finished reading her report. She answered the phone, but I could barely hear her because of the poor network but I could sense some determination in her voice.

I am not going to abort my child, the result could be wrong, and Ywa can do anything as long as I have *tana*. He will listen to my prayer, the prayer of my family and the prayer of my *taohpwoh*. I feel so well these days, I have a good appetite and sleep well.

Hser Paw gave birth to a son and the baby died a few days later. She became so upset with the experience and withdrew from *taohpwoh* activities. In our first conversation after she gave birth, she expressed her frustration with her *taohpwoh* and with Ywa, who she believes abandoned her and ignored her prayers:

I've stopped praying and I don't drink holy water anymore. I don't go to Dorcus and Paul prayer services and I don't want to see anyone...since I arrived back from the hospital, nobody comes to visit me. Through many people's eyes I can see what they think of me now...there is no one in the village who has experiences like I had...they are avoiding me, and they think that I am a cursed incapable woman who gave birth to a child that died. I can't stand those eyes and I don't want to go out and socialise with those people.

She sobbed quietly as she told me her experience. In the view of other *taohpwoh* members, Hser Paw's *tana* was depleted. The death of her son was a test from Ywa of her *tana*.

The line disconnected and I couldn't get through to her again that day. I called her the next day but there was no phone signal. A few months after she gave birth, Hser Paw resumed her social activities like teaching at Sunday school, and was again active in the Dorcus and Paul mission. Hser Paw cries every time she is around babies.

I saw Hser Paw again when I visited Plor Ner Mu in late 2019. We were both happy to see each other and I still sensed the same feeling of warmth and care. I visited her house a few times and every time she was busy making cakes. One time, as she whipped icing sugar and milk to make cream for a black forest cake, she said, "I had vomited out the medicine inside me again. They were like slimy black vermicelli." This time her healer is a Bengali Christian who married a Pwakanyaw woman. Through this conversation, I came to further understand the cyclical nature of suffering that is necessary for the production of *tana*. Hser Paw's *tana* had weakened and so she lost her baby. By seeking help from the Dorcus and Paul mission to heal through prayer, she could regain her own *tana*, which is a key element of being a *taohpwoh* member. By coming together in prayer to rebuild Hser Paw's *tana*, the *taohpwoh*'s collective *tana* is strengthened.

As can be seen from Hser Paw's experience, prayer is perceived dualistically, with both positive and negative forms of power. Negative power is linked to Pwakanyaw belief in the existence of bad spirits. This negative power is important in understanding *taohpwoh* members' interpretation of ailment and suffering. The role of bad spirits is intertwined in Pwakanyaw *taohpwoh* members' lived attempt to pursue the positive power of Ywa. Positive power gained through prayer to Ywa can overcome negative power in bad spirits. In other words, *taohpwoh* members accumulate power from Ywa through the concentrated ritual act of praying, and this enables them to overcome the power of bad spirits who are understood to be the main culprits of the suffering that *taohpwoh* members experience. Negative spirits come in animal form such as wild dogs, dragons, crows, crocodiles, as well as some plants, and can also appear as

deformed humans that mislead people. Bad spirits cannot ordinarily be seen by humans, with the exception of *wee*; spiritual leaders who can predict the future. *Wee* also play a healing role, diagnosing the cause of illness. If they see that a bad spirit has captured a human soul, they make offerings of appeasement to the head of the bad spirits, *mawkee*, to release the soul of that human, which then cures the illness. There is also a risk that the soul has already been eaten and therefore some sickness associated with eaten souls cannot be restored or cured. In a Pwakanyaw Christian context, *taohpwoh* guardians and members who are strong in prayer play a role like *wee*, and can diagnose and prescribe different method of treatments. As seen in Hser Paw's experience of illness and treatment, local resources are deployed through the Dorcus and Paul mission, and help is only sought further afield, in Assam, when local interventions fail. Bad spirits are fought through prayer, fasting and the use of holy water, oil, salt and other tactics to rid bad spirits from the *taohpwoh*. Within the *tana* and *tama* dualism, therefore, both belief and practices that resulted in power to sustain *taohpwoh* structure are mutually constitutive.

Evil spells and potions that are solved through performative acts of praying is another form of negative power that *taohpwoh* experience through forms of illness and suffering, which was initially identified as the cause of Hser Paw's illness. These negative forms of power are thought to come from individuals with an intention to cause harm, sickness and even death. If the person can overcome that test through combined individual and communal prayer, they then pass the test and increase their *tana* as individuals and the *tana* of *taohpwoh*. Potions are typically given to a target to ingest, hidden in food that they like, such as sweets or betel. Individuals responsible for casting evil spells or using potions can be both *taohpwoh* members and non-*taohpwoh* members. These practices are called *bà ga thèe* in Pwakanyaw, which literally means exposure to medicine. The fact that the generic word for medicine is used, applying to both Western medicine and black magic, shows a particular conception of health

and healing: medicine is associated with evil and is dangerous. The way medicine works is hidden, and can bring both fortune and misfortune. Someone who uses *bà ga thèe* can end up having multiple kinds of misfortunes, like infertility, unsuccessful crops, failed job interviews, failed exams, poverty, traffic accidents, illness and death. As a result, there is suspicion of Western medicine in part because of this cognitive association with evil. In the case of Hser Paw and other *taohpwoh* members, treatment always involves Ywa and the sacred acts of prayer.

Conclusion

This chapter explored the role of prayer and connected ritual acts in connection with *tana*, a *taohpwoh* form of power that is produced and exchanged, sustaining the spiritual and material needs of individual members and *taohpwoh* as a whole. The varied role of prayer can be seen in individual *taohpwoh* members' experiences of diseases and illnesses, 'healing prayer' rituals in the Dorcus and Paul mission and through the creation of spatial networks of healing that incorporate indigenous Baptists in the north-eastern periphery of India. Prayer and the act of praying, as a valued idea and set of practices, is central to the *taohpwoh* movement and the spiritual and material outcomes of *taohpwoh* members who exchange prayer to Ywa and to each other.

Tana is central to knowledge and practices of health and illness within *taohpwoh*. In a *taohpwoh*, being healthy or sick is meaningful both for how it reflects on an individual's *tana* and the meaning carried over to the social body of *taohpwoh*. The life force of each *taohpwoh* member circulates through the *taohpwoh* and sickness of one member can signify diminished *tana* for the *taohpwoh* as a whole. Diminished *tana* means the presence of Ywa is lessened. Prayer as a key act of *tana* provides a remedy to illness that is social. Individuals learn from

the spirit of *taohpwoh* to pray for their own healing and other *taohpwoh* members must also pray for them and conduct physical rituals. Collectivisation of *tana* within *taohpwoh* aids the recovery of individual members, which strengthens the *taohpwoh* as a whole, giving the social body greater immunity. By giving and reciprocating prayer, *taohpwoh* members reinforce and strengthen the quality of a *taohpwoh*'s *tana* and bind themselves together in a continuous chain of mutual obligation. In this way, Hser Paw's suffering and eventual healing was necessary for *taohpwoh* maintenance, through the collective praying for her recovery. The more Hser Paw and other *taohpwoh* members suffer and then successfully heal through collective prayer, the greater the *tana* of the *taohpwoh*, operating in a never-ending cycle.

Hser Paw's illness, which was interpreted as weak *tana* that requires intensive prayer, was also perceived to be linked to constructions of race and religion, given her partly Malayalam origins and her Hindu siblings. Within *taohpwoh*, racialised Others can reach a point of belonging through conversion. Hser Paw's Hindu brothers embody a negative form of power that saps her *tana*. The otherness in Hser Paw's family is a problem for the *taohpwoh* as a collective that needs to be solved through strengthening *tana* that would involve conversion to Christianity of non-Christian family members, transforming negative *tana* to positive. Since Hser Paw's brothers have still not converted, the cycle of Hser Paw's illness and recovery continue. Future recoveries necessarily involve the *taohpwoh* as a whole, binding members together in collective care that excludes non-Pwakanyaw and non-Christians. The production of *tana* within *taohpwoh* is therefore a continuous project, dependent on both physical illness and the construction of dangerous Others. However, the creation of ties to Karbi Anglong Baptists shows the creativity of Plor Ner Moo *taohpwoh* in finding novel ways to produce *tana* despite the isolation of life on the periphery of India. Through the power of *tana*, practices of prayer and shifting lines of exclusion, *taohpwoh* solidifies itself and expands through the shifting categories of strong versus weak, healthy versus sickness and believer versus non-believer.

Through the Dorcus and Paul mission, Plor Ner Moo *taohpwoh* provides healing to members in a participatory way that fills the gap left by the limited access and the quality and cultural issues associated with state healthcare, combined with members' mistrust of biomedicine. However, the hybridised *taohpwoh* paradigm allows members to make use of biomedical tools and practices, even within prayer rituals, which regularly involve the use of diagnostic tools to test blood pressure and blood sugar. Drawing knowledge from within and outside *taohpwoh* increases the competence of the community in dealing with illness, and thereby increases their autonomy from the state and its healthcare institutions, which operate outside of *tana*. This differs from the situation for *taohpwoh* members in Myanmar, who have access to a *taohpwoh* healthcare system that includes hospitals that operate within a Pwakanyaw worldview. Biomedicine cannot heal without *tana* and *tana* alone cannot heal without the labour of prayer. Through the culture of prayer, *taohpwoh* will continue to hold its importance in the lives of members and the health of their bodies.

Chapter VI: Locating self and relearning *taohpwoh*

‘Pwakanyaw are a *hta* making people’ – T. Thanbyah (1906)

ပတြးအိၣ်ပုၤထံတဂ့ၤ,	pa trüh òh pwā htee ta ghāy	Do not glorify the water of others,
ပတြးအိၣ်ပုၤကီၢ်တဂ့ၤ,	pa trüh òh pwā kaw ta ghāy	Do not glorify the land of others,
ပုၤထံတဂ့ၤပုၤထံဘၣ်ပုၤ,	pwā htee ghāy pwā htee bà	Perfect water of others, other must
ပုၤကီၢ်တဂ့ၤပုၤကီၢ်ဘၣ်ပုၤ,	pwāy	conserve it,
ကတီၤက့ၤပကီၢ်သုၣ်လ့ၤ,	pwā kaw ghāy pwā kaw bà	Perfect land of others, other must conserve
ပုၤသီးအိၣ်မ့ၤပအိၣ်မ့ၤ.	pwāy	it,
	ga tāw gāy pa Kawthoolei	Like others we will be fed and survived,
	pwā thöh àw māy pa àw māy	Just conserve our Kawthoolei.
ပတြးအိၣ်ပုၤထံဘၣ်လဲၣ်,	pa trüh òh pwā htee bà lèh	Why do you glorify other’s water,
ပတြးအိၣ်ပုၤကီၢ်ဘၣ်လဲၣ်,	pa trüh òh pwā kaw bà lèh	Why do you glorify other’s land,
ပုၤထံတဂ့ၤဒုၤဒုၤအဲၣ်,	pwā htee ghāy, ghāy dà a weh	The good water of others, it good for them,
ပုၤကီၢ်တဂ့ၤဒုၤဒုၤအဲၣ်,	pwā kaw ghāy, ghāy dà a weh	The good land of others, it good for them,
ကတီၤက့ၤပကီၢ်ဖိၣ်ဃဲ,	ga tāw gāy pa kaw hpòh hkeh	Like other we will be fulfilled and
ပုၤသီးအိၣ်ဘျဲပအိၣ်ဘျဲ.	pwā thöh àw bleh pa àw bleh	adequate,
		Just conserve our orphanage land.

This was one of the first *hta* that I learned was related to Pwakanyaw country. I first heard and recited it when I was at school in a refugee camp in Thailand, displaced from the *taohpwoh* of my ancestors in Myanmar. In the context of refugee camp life, in the centre of the ethnonationalist movement, the *hta* served as a reminder that Pwakanyaw have their rightful country, where members can form attachments to place and be in conversation with their ancestors, but that country was forcibly taken. It is a *hta* that speaks to Pwakanyaw, giving an assurance that we have land that we belong to, and that we are responsible to reclaim, preserve and protect it. This *hta* helped shaped my Pwakanyaw identity, which was and is in a constant

stage of becoming, transitioning from displacement to belonging, and statelessness to an imagined homeland that has not yet materialised. The *hta* resonated because it spoke to my displacement in a foreign *hteekaw*, land and water, and to my disrupted sense of belonging. The *hta* was also a call to action, to mobilise those speaking it and hearing it to commit themselves to *Kawthoolei*; our inheritance that lay across the border, and that was layered with trauma. I liked this *hta* because, at the time, it gave me hope that there was a land called *Kawthoolei* that was becoming. I took the idea of *Kawthoolei* literally and imagined it as a bounded territory where we would find some sort of freedom and stability, a land that allowed us to have our own dreams and to be Pwakanyaw without the barbed wire fences and checkpoints.

The idea of *Kawthoolei* was popularised in the Pwakanyaw nationalist movement, and this influenced me. I saw *Kawthoolei* as being everywhere Pwakanyaw lived. This ideal differed from that of many I met in my fieldwork: they saw *Kawthoolei* as a specific location in south-east Myanmar, external to their location. Many in Plor Khu viewed Pwakanyaw villages in upper Ayeyarwaddy Delta as part of *Kawlah* (Green Land), which refers to Myanmar. Those in the Andaman Islands also did not see themselves as part of *Kawthoolei* and referred to their location as *Kapalikyun*, island of *Kapali*. (*'Kapali'* is a racial term for black people.) *Kawthoolei* is a metaphorical place. Since Pwakanyaw identification need not be tied to a particular locale, the idea of *Kawthoolei* is deeply contested and does not necessarily travel well through dispersed Pwakanyaw communities outside of the direct influence of the ethnonationalist movement. There is no *Kawthoolei* 'geo-body', to use a concept from the historian Thongchai Winichakul (1997).

Displacement from my *taohpwoh*, *hteekaw* and *Kawthoolei* meant displacement from the land of my ancestors and their poetic knowledge, codified in *hta*. Within the refugee camp, *hta* like the one above are also displaced, orphaned from the many other *hta* that it ought to be in tune

with. These parts of our library are scattered and divided, and thus so are our ways of composing, voicing, listening to and interpreting our oral literature. At the time, I interpreted this *hta* with the knowledge available to me through my experience as a displaced person. I interpreted it as referring to the creation of a modern Pwakanyaw nation state recognised in the world. I was not aware then of the constellation of *taohpwoh* and practices of place-making, which provide a very different model of country that could quietly survive within the dictatorship I was fleeing from.

Eventually I, like many others, migrated deeper into exile in the West. I wanted education and stability as an answer to my displacement. The positive feelings I had from the *hta* later triggered guilt for abandoning the place of *Kawthoolei* by participating in the bureaucratic ritual of belonging to another peoples' country. The *hta* was judging me and kept calling me back. My sense of unbelonging continued as I started to pursue education in an Australian university, which exposed me more deeply to an alien culture of knowledge production.

However, my PhD fieldwork led me to rediscover a Pwakanyaw space that I had misunderstood. This space of *taohpwoh* has its own territory and vibrant intellectual tradition, partially hidden but enduring, despite war, state repression and dispersion. My research has therefore involved a process of rediscovery, in which I have engaged with *taohpwoh* as an epistemic paradigm and a physical territory constructed and maintained by both *taohpwoh* members of the past and present.

This last chapter of my thesis is a reflection of my research journey, a journey that began in childhood loss and displacement, and led me back to the *hteekaw* and *taohpwoh* of my ancestors as a PhD student. I question what it means to be a researcher of a marginalised indigenous community, and how I engage with a Pwakanyaw way of producing knowledge, which, in this particular case, involves thinking through a Pwakanyaw methodology as a body of knowledge and a set of practices which I link to the movement for academic decolonisation.

As a Pwakanyaw *taohpwoh* community member, doing this research is itself an act of *tana*, involving a deep and sincere belief in *taohpwoh* and the (re)making and interpretation of *hta*, prayer and stories. *Taohpwoh* and its practices have led me back to the knowledge and wisdom that I could rightly claim to be part of, which helps me resuscitate what I have lost due to the multiple layers of displacement. This research journey has given me space to reflect, explore and discover a Pwakanyaw research approach that is grounded in the community's agency as producers of knowledge, capable of contributing to society-building.

I begin this chapter by locating myself and my family [where?], and reflecting on Pwakanyaw nationalist discourse. This discourse used to shape my sense of self and community, in conversation with *hta* that I learnt and spoke in exile. *Hta* that I had learned in my refugee camp helped me to form a particular perspective on Pwakanyaw nation-making. These perspectives changed through my fieldwork, as I found *taohpwoh* operates as a *hteekaw*; an alternative and localised model of nation. I then discuss the process of doing research in *taohpwoh* as a Pwakanyaw researcher and a *taohpwoh* member, and what needs to be considered in the context of decolonisation and indigenous research methodologies. As *hta* is the heart of my thesis, I end with a *hta* that reflects on my research journey and on *taohpwoh* constructions of place, power, value and practice.

Locating self in the culture of *hta*

Hta is central to the Pwakanyaw knowledge paradigm. The basic from of *hta* practice requires a subject as a creator or translator. In this research, I have attempted to utilise indigenous Pwakanyaw ways of knowing and communicating knowledge through *hta* as speech and as storytelling, within anthropological practice. Therefore, I shall begin with *hta* of myself and my family, as background to my fieldwork, and shall speak to the centrality of kinship as a

form of relatedness within Pwakanyaw systems of knowledge. This approach is inspired by other indigenous scholars who experiment with indigenous methods.²⁵ Through my family, I have learnt models of *tana* and *tama* for the benefit of myself, my kin and wider community, which is a key principle of *taohpwoh*, which I express in the *hta* below.

မိခင်ဆုံးစိတ်အနိပ်ထံ၊ ပင်ထိပ်ဖိယာအထဲထံ၊ နီဂုံနီဂုံမိယုမံ၊ နီဂုံနီဂုံပုယုမံ၊ ထုကဖန်အံ့အံ့မထီ၊ ခုဆါဆဲးလၢဆၢဟ့ၣ်သါ။	moh hsée sạ yā nèe kàw htēe pạ htàw hpoh yā a hteh htēe nạw ku nạw ghāy moh yū mēe nạw ghāy nạw ku pạ yū mēe htu ga hpà èe u mā htah ku hsgah hsēh lā hsuh hà y thah	I become human at the edge of my mother's sarong, I become human at the root of my father's <i>longyi</i> , Naw Khu Naw Gay was the name they've gave me, They sang <i>hta</i> and pray, For want of decency and diligence,
ဂံၣ်ဒွဲးကူၣ်သ့ဒီးဂံၣ်ဘါ၊ ဂဲၣ်ထၢၣ်ဆူၣ်ဆူၣ်နီၣ်ခါ၊ ဂံၣ်တစီၣ်ဂုံၣ်ပုၣ်မါ၊ တယုၣ်စုၣ်ခိၣ်တဘိးဆါ၊ ဖံးမၤဆူၣ်သ့ၣ်စူးခုဆါ၊ ပဲၤသးစူးဂဲၣ်လိၣ်န့ၣ်ဖျါ။	ghēe dwä gòo thay thoo ghēe bah ghēh htùh hsòo hsòo nạw ku pah ghēe ta sạ nạw ghāy pạ mah ta yoo su kàw ta bōh hsgah hpēe mā hsòo thēe sōo ku hsgah pwēh thă sōo ghēh loh nèh hplah	Calculate knowledge and strength, To rise up and be strong was the father of Naw Khu, The wife of Naw Gay's father wasn't weak, Her bamboo twine was unbroken, Hard work, virtue and diligence was their ethic.
မိခင်နီၣ်ဂုံၣ်သိၣ်လိၣ်သိၣ်၊ နီၣ်ခါပုၣ်ကူၣ်လဲၣ်မၤကၤ၊ ကွၢ်ပုၣ်ဆါနီၣ်ခါအဖံ၊ နီၣ်ဂုံၣ်မုံၣ်ကွၢ်ထွဲၣ်ဖိလံ၊ နီၣ်ခါဖုၣ်သးဖိဒုးတၢ်၊ သိၣ်တၢ်သရၣ်နီၣ်ဂုံၣ်ပုၣ်။	moh nạw ghāy thòh loh hpoh thà nạw ku pạ gòo lēh mā gā gwa pwā hsah nạw ku a hpee nạw ghāy mwēe gwa htweh hpoh lēe nạw ku hpu thū hpoh dü tạ thòh loh ta rah nạw ghāy pwạ	Naw Gay's mother taught children, Naw Gay's father traded, Caring for the sick was Naw Khu's grandmother, Nurtured her children was Naw Gay's great grandmother,
နီၣ်ခါလီၤစၢၤလီၤစၢၤ၊ နီၣ်ဂုံၣ်လီၤစၢၤလီၤစၢၤ၊ မုံၤဒီးပုၣ်ဖံးမိၣ်ပုၣ်၊ သိၣ်လိၣ်အိၣ်ကပၤကဝါ၊	nạw ku lāw sūh ku lāw sūh nạw ghāy lāw sūh ghāy lāw sūh mwēe dāw pwạ hpee hpu moh pạ thòh loh àw ga pūh htee wah	

²⁵ For instance, see Wilson (2008); Windchief and San Pedro (2019).

သုန်ဖျားဘုန်လီဒ်ဟုဖး, thòo hplä bù lāw dèe hu hpä
 ယုန်စဲၤဒီၣ်ဒူထူး. yoo su sēh kàw doo la moo htä

Naw Khu's grandfather was a fighting
 soldier,

Naw Gay's great grandfather preached,

I, Naw Khu and Naw Gay, descended from
 these forebearers,

They taught me to feed from white sweat,

To farm, herd and hatch,

To raise one's arms in the sky and plant one's
 feet on the earth.

Social research cannot be separated from the lived experience of the researcher. As an indigenous Pwakanyaw researcher, I have relational accountability to the *taohpwoh* where I did research. While I have tried to learn, I could not step back and analyse data about them as separate to my own history and experience. Approaching research in a way that honours indigenous ontology involves being clear about who I am, where I am from and who I am accountable to. This has been described as a “self-location statement” (Windchief & San Pedro, 2019, p. xv). Dawson et al. (2017, p. 6) conceptualise self-location as a relational process that is important in indigenous research. They write that a “benefit of self-locating is acknowledging the enmeshed nature of one's personal and professional lives and identity, which... cannot be separated.” Self-location has also been described as “relational placing”, which should be an intuitive act (Kwame, 2017, p. 2). Self-location is not only determined by the researcher. Making myself see-able through research allows those in communities I am researching to locate me and collaborate in the production of knowledge. I could learn because community members in my field sites taught me, sharing their stories and wisdom at the same time they also learnt from me through my telling of my own stories. Therefore, we all collaboratively added more knowledge of our communities and ways we interpret our world. This is part of reciprocity and the process of producing “situated knowledge”, which is crucial

as a decolonising research practice. Situated knowledge, according to Donna Haraway (1988, p. 590), involves knowledge embedded in communities rather than individuals. I am embedded in *taohpwoh* communities and the knowledge I gained through fieldwork is the shared and situated knowledge of my ancestors and the uncles, aunties, grandparents, brothers and sisters who have shared their insights with me during fieldwork.

My name is Violet Cho, meaning “Sweet Violet” from the land of vomiting frogs, Pa-an. A great granddaughter of Ahboe, Aung Khin La, Mi Dun and Pi Padoh (great-grandmother). These elders were Buddhist and animist before they converted to Christianity. I am a granddaughter of Sai Khin, Poe Khin, Celia and Norah. A daughter of Moo Loe and Ruth. Sister of Nicolas and Taw Oo. An aunty of Living Star, Golden Mountain, Golden Buffalo Horn, Dashing Sky and Loving Christ. Like most Pwakanyaw, we do not have a family name, although some Pwakanyaw Christians have adopted a family name practice introduced to Pwakanyaw society as part of British colonisation. Our names themselves are hybrid, mixing Pwakanyaw, Burmese and English. My name has one English word and one Burmese word. Who we are is a mix of these three cultures, so when I tell a story, it reflects the cultural hybridity of Pwakanyaw and our *hta* making culture. This cultural hybridity is also reflected in the *taohpwoh* I am studying.

All my close family are Pwakanyaw from a mix of Pwakanyaw Pwo and Pwakanyaw S’gaw cultural groups. My ancestors who converted to Christianity had experienced multiple religions. For instance, my maternal grandfather was brought up *telakhon*, going to a *telakhon* school in a *telakhon* community. My paternal grandfather was originally a monk, and his Buddhism deeply informed his work as a *taohpwoh* guardian. My upbringing was in a community strongly influenced by Christianity and ethnonationalism. Here, categories were essentialised. Christian forms of *tana* and *tamar* were privileged. ‘Karen’ was essentialised as a ‘race’, separate from others within nationalist discourse. However, despite conversion, pre-

Christian beliefs and practices were around me all along, infusing our Christianity. It was easy to miss given the distance I was from the *taohpwoh* of my ancestors.

In my ancestral lands, Burmese is the dominant language and the language of power, associated with the state, perceived as a fundamental source of the oppression and suffering Pwakanyaw endure. Burmese, along with Pali, are languages associated with Buddhism. English is the language of our colonial experience and the language associated with Baptist Christianity. In the Irrawaddy Delta, the population is cosmopolitan. Burmese language is commonly spoken and mixed with Pwakanyaw. In the Andaman Islands, diverse languages from mainland India are spoken and Pwakanyaw language is mixed with Hindi. I grew up with three languages: Pwakanyaw S'gaw, Pwo and Burmese.

The *hta* of my family is made up of a collection of many *hta* that are embedded and shaped by Buddhism, ancestral practices, Christianity, colonialism, migration, exploitation, repression and self-determination. They are *hta* woven with traumatic experiences, displacement, loss, shame, resentment, hope, pride and sacrifice. They are also *hta* that for a long time were concealed from me for reasons including war and tensions between family members. In this thesis, I have chosen to place my father and his side of the family at the centre because I knew the least about them. I grew up unfamiliar with *hta* spoken by my father of himself and his own family, and the knowledge they contain. For the almost two decades of my life which I spent as a stateless person in Thailand and Australia, I did not have direct personal contact with my father's family, the majority of whom live in the Andaman Islands of India and the Irrawaddy Delta of Myanmar.

This changed in 2015, following Myanmar's transition to partial democratic rule. As a result, members of the diaspora were allowed into the country. A rare visit to the Andaman Islands and Myanmar after this period motivated me to explore and tell stories about my father's family. What I have learned is specific to the two Pwakanyaw Baptist *taohpwoh* examined in

this dissertation. The following is my reflection on how my personal perception of Pwakanyaw *hta*, of country and of *taohpwoh* was formed and shaped in the Thai-Myanmar borderlands, which differed from the context of the *taohpwoh* where I did fieldwork.

***Hta*, Pwakanyaw place-making and exile**

In Pwakanyaw customary belief, which is transmitted through *hta*, the burial ground of one's umbilical cord is one's *hteekaw*, the water and land of one's origin. *Hteekaw* is a Pwakanyaw concept of country. My umbilical cord was buried in eastern Myanmar near the foot of the iconic Kwekabaw mountain range. This ties me to that place and is part of my identity. It is my *hteekaw*, which I am exiled from.

Hteekaw as a concept has multiple meanings that shift according to political position and concept of place, community and nation. Following *hta* conventions, one interpretation of *hteekaw* is a modern Pwakanyaw nation state. This is sometimes linked to a particular origin narrative of Pwakanyaw being the first to settle in lower Burma. For instance, the Pwakanyaw writer Saw Aung Hla (1999 [c. 1932]) recounted a story that Pwakanyaw travelled south from northern Asia and reached the land of what is today, Myanmar. Saw Aung Hla wrote that Pwakanyaw may be the first group of people who reached the southern part of Myanmar, including areas such as Yangon, Ayeyarwady, Bago and Tanintharyi, where many Pwakanyaw are residing. Saw Aung Hla (ibid.) goes on to describe Pwakanyaw settling an empty land and then becoming displaced:

There was a Pwakanyaw couple who went to the shore to fish. They saw a land where there was nobody and thought it would be good to cultivate and settle with their children, so they marked the land by planting a fishing rod with a Pwakanyaw shirt hanging on it. Later an ethnic Mon couple came and found the same land and wanted it

for themselves, so they also marked the land. After them, an ethnic Bamar couple came and found the same place and had the same idea, so they also marked the land. After they left, gāw lā wah came and also took the land for themselves.

The idea conveyed in this narrative *hta* is that many groups rule the place Pwakanyaw people call their *hteekaw*, but it rightfully belongs to them as inheritance from their ancestors. The message is that Pwakanyaw will again rule their *hteekaw* one day. Saw Aung Hla collected and reproduced these *hta*, and he cautions that they must be open to multiple interpretations. Contemporary *hta* and prose continue to reproduce this narrative.

In exile, *hta* are a key medium through which Pwakanyaw ethnonationalism and ideals of *hteekaw* are spread. Like many I have grown up with, Pwakanyaw *hta* has helped to construct my perception of my birthplace as *Kawthoolei*. My ideal of *Kawthoolei* was also constructed by my upbringing under a liberated section of the Pwakanyaw nationalist movement who occupied an area along the Thai-Myanmar borderlands, and by my education through a system administered by the Karen National Union. I have learned different *hta* from texts used in Kaw Moo Rah High School, my refugee camp-based school that lacked recognition from any state. The school was then run by teachers from different parts of Myanmar. Many had left Myanmar with objectives to join the KNU and contribute to the Pwakanyaw cause in any way they could. Pupils in the school were also from many parts of Myanmar with different family backgrounds. Operating as an alternative to the state-based Burmese language education system, Kaw Moo Rah High School provided me a sense of place and identity distant from the *taohpwoh* of my ancestors. Without a localised attachment to an ancestral *taohpwoh*, *Kawthoolei* became primary and this was reflected in the school *hta*, and I translate:

Let's go forward, Kaw Moo Rah students,

Let go and get victory, with one heart we will
work, for our *Kawthoolei* with unity,
Brothers, sisters and friends, with love we
will go,
For our school and our *hteekaw*, we will
strive,
Kaw Moo Rah school, towards victory,
Our *Kawthoolei*, it's our *hteekaw*,
Come and work together and go forward for
our *hteekaw*.

In *Kaw Moo Rah* High School, diverse local and regional identities among teachers and students were collapsed into each other to create a unified whole. In contrast to where I grew up, the two communities where I did fieldwork gave greater emphasis to a localised identity that was influenced by the geographic location and expression of faith particular to the *taohpwoh*. These local forms of identity are less common in nationalist communities, where there is an attempt to position all Pwakanyaw as members of the same family. Under the imagined Pwakanyaw nation of *Kawthoolei*, members are positioned as brothers and sisters, sharing a common experience of suffering as victims of Burmanisation, of being displaced as the Burmese army oppresses and persecutes us, and chases us away from our homeland. The struggle to reobtain our rightful place is articulated as a given duty of every Pwakanyaw, and to love and to struggle for *Kawthoolei* is seen as a noble cause. This ideology is conveyed across multiple mediums: newspapers, books, school curriculum, church sermons and songs. This can be seen in the following *hta*, popularised among Pwakanyaw in the borderlands, which is a love *hta* to *Kawthoolei*, and I translate:

Oh my blessed Pwakanyaw *kaw*,
I wish to sing only of you,
Hills and mountains within you,
Are more beautiful than I could describe,
I love your forests and clear creeks,
I love all your beauty,
Of course I will submit myself to you.

A blessed *kaw*, oh my beautiful
Kawthoolei,
I love all your beauty,
I will give myself to you,
htee hsēh mēh ywā and *Kawthoolei*,
Is for my independent people,
I love all your beauty,
I will surely submit myself to you.

Our ancestors in the past were freedom
lovers,
They were oppressed,
By other people,
So with their children,
They had to move out,
Now our *kaw* became others,
In the past it was Pwakanyaw *kaw*.

Kawthoolei as an imagined *hteekaw* for Pwakanyaw remains a dominant idea within the Pwakanyaw nationalist movement, as armed struggle for Pwakanyaw self-determination and equal rights has continued. Following the military coup in Myanmar on 1 February 2021, the importance of this narrative of *hteekaw* has renewed. At the time of writing, parts of *Kawthoolei* are under attack from the Myanmar military, including through airstrikes and ground attacks that have killed Pwakanyaw civilians and, by one estimate, caused the displacement of more than 500,000 in Pwakanyaw areas (Karen Peace Support Network, 2023). At this time in the history of Pwakanyaw, as part of the long and complex web of Myanmar political change and state building processes, the idea of *hteekaw* is part of the wider movement to build a democracy with ethnic forms of autonomy. Through the course of my fieldwork, I came to understand and experience localised conceptions of *hteekaw* and different practices of place and belonging.

Rediscovering the *hteekaw* of my ancestors

One April morning during my fieldwork in Plor Khu *taohpwoh*, I had a conversation that led me to reflect on the nature of *hteekaw*. After the bell of the prayer hall rang at 5am for dawn prayers, I realised that Ah mà, whose house I was staying in, was not playing the country music that usually accompanies her morning routine and there was no usual smell of smoke from the wood stove.

I got up from bed, opened all the windows in the house and went to check on her. I asked if she was awake: 'Yes', she shouted back. She was still in her night dress with uncombed hair, and with disappointment she said she could not sleep the night before and was very tired. I asked her why she could not sleep and if she was unwell. 'Yes, I am not feeling well!' she replied. She then paused for a few seconds and said that one of her chickens had not returned home last

night. She was very upset, and it kept her awake and therefore she prayed. I asked her about her prayers. Without saying anything, she sat on a wooden bench, reached for a flask and a small white ceramic cup, and poured leftover black tea from yesterday. She then sipped the cold tea and said:

I prayed like this: Ywa, our father, you know I have five chickens and only four had returned last night. You know they are my companions who share this big house with me. You know the exact location of my chicken. You are capable of everything so please help my chicken and lead the chicken back to me. Protect it from dogs and eagles, I beg you in Jesus' name. Amen.

Up until that morning, I had never seen anyone in my life who prayed for domesticated animals. I thought about my family. They pray in the morning before engaging with any other work, and in the evening before bed. My mother is an enthusiastic, determined prayer. I always heard her pray for her family, her friends and people that engage in the Pwakanyaw nationalist movement, but never her animals.

Ah mà asked, “do people in your *hteekaw* pray like us?”

I didn't know the answer, so I shook my head. She looked at me and had another sip of her tea. “We Pwakanyaw are different from each other. Based on the *hteekaw* we live in, we have different cultures, norms and conduct. Even Pwakanyaw from *kaw Hawkata* [Hinthada] are different from those Pwakanyaw in *kaw Pathee* [Bathein],” she said, using *hteekaw* and *kaw* interchangeably.

The brief interaction I had with Ah mà that morning led to more conversations with her and other members of the *taohpwoh* about what *hteekaw* means for them, how *hteekaw* are situated in everyday life experiences and particular geographic locations. Within *taohpwoh*, the idea of *hteekaw* is multiple and decentralised, forming a loosely structured network. The concept of

hteekaw is as the birthplace of a *taohpwoh* community, and is where members trace their connection to land, water and other physical elements such as trees and animals. It is often symbolised by burying the umbilical cord of newly born *taohpwoh* members. The location where one's umbilical cord is buried thereby creates a physical link to the earth in a particular *taohpwoh*.

Each *hteekaw* is a physical place where particular events, rituals, practices and the mundane happenings of everyday life take place and are memorialised in stories, *hta*, conversations and memories passed down across generations. *Hteekaw* is something that is lived and experienced, and the concept comes alive through ritual practices and relationships. This localised and decentralised model allows for diversity between *hteekaw*. The *hteekaw* of *taohpwoh* is not a static and bounded space, it fluctuates with the movement of rivers and the sea, and with the wind and shifting features of the land that are subject to the *ywa* of these natural and human-made forces. *Hteekaw* can therefore multiply or disappear overtime. The hybridised cosmology of *taohpwoh* allows members to combine different acts of *hteekaw*-making, which can include collaboration with the state and the use of scientific methods like surveying and demarcating land alongside prayer, *hta*-making, farming, fishing, animal rearing, caring, protecting, storytelling and, when necessary, relocation.

Hteekaw of *taohpwoh* differs from the concept of *Kawthoolei* which is an imagined community and a political and intellectual project. *Hteekaw* of *taohpwoh* and of *Kawthoolei* are complementary. *Taohpwoh* at a wider level is also an imagined community of dispersed and networked *hteekaw* grounded in everyday experience, with each member linked to a defined, physical territory with its own *tana* and *tama* which can exist alongside the different imaginings of *Kawthoolei*. But, for me, having *Kawthoolei* without living in my *hteekaw* was experienced as a loss, and I came to realise this through the course of my fieldwork.

My positioning in *taohpwoh* and *hteekaw*

Practices of *hteekaw* and my experience of displacement from my ancestral *taohpwoh* impacted my fieldwork. The cultural categories of Pwakanyaw and *taohpwoh* member are enacted locally in *taohpwoh*. I am not from the communities I was studying, even though I have kinship links. Prior to beginning this ethnographic study, I prepared myself to be flexible with my positionality among my research participants. I expected to be positioned by community members as both an insider and outsider, depending on their context. I assumed I would be accepted as an insider through having the same *hteekaw*, *Kawthoolei*, speaking the same language, and understanding (to an extent) the culture. But I also prepared myself to be seen as an outsider because I was there for research, which is unfamiliar, and because of my training in the Western academic discipline of anthropology. The word used for “research” does not have a direct equivalent in Pwakanyaw S’gaw but relates to words such as “seek”, “learn” and “discover”. As a Pwakanyaw Baptist Christian with family connections to the communities that I have been studying, I have approached my community with a sense of attachment, similarity and openness. However, many community members saw me as someone from another *hteekaw*, and that involved my categorisation as a partial outsider. I was unprepared for how this affected me and triggered my sense of displacement and not belonging. It revealed to me that it did not matter how well I speak Pwakanyaw, or that I speak the same dialect, and it did not matter that I am a Baptist with in-depth knowledge of Christian Pwakanyaw culture, I could not fully be an insider even if I wanted to be.

Being connected to a *taohpwoh* mattered far more than my status as a university student. Apart from a *taohpwoh* guardian, who at the time of my research was doing his Doctor of Ministry at the Karen Baptist Theological Seminary, members of both communities that I have engaged with were unconcerned that I was living in their communities as part of my PhD research. What was more important to them was that I was a Pwakanyaw from another *hteekaw* who was there

to learn from them and share knowledge with them. In this sense, I could never be a detached observer but always had obligations to fulfil in the *taohpwoh*, including religious obligations such as prayer, even though I am not religiously active. My engagement was expected in both individual and communal activities, and included being called to the stage of the church to speak, being asked to join in and pray for any concerns of the community, being summoned to help teach Pwakanyaw language, being asked to make donations for the sick, being asked to provide emotional support in various settings like the hospital and schools and being asked to share my stories and personal experience. This made it necessary for me to explore Pwakanyaw ways to do my research, including engagement with indigenous research methodologies.

The kinship links gave me access to the *taohpwoh* and their localised histories, experiences and knowledge, although my status was as a “guest” *taohpwoh* member. My time was therefore understood as an opportunity to seek, listen to and share the stories of *taohpwoh* members past and present. Some *taohpwoh* elders affectionately positioned me as a child, using the verb *kwēh kwä*, which describes the way children learn by inquisitively exploring their surroundings. This reflects particular power relations, where I could be positioned as a junior who was part of the *taohpwoh* family and who lacked local knowledge and experience.

My experience of being both an insider and an outsider has basis in the literature. The binaries of “insider” and “outsider”, and “native” and “non-native” have been problematised as part of attempts to decolonise anthropology and its tradition and myth of the distant and objective observer. Kirin Narayan (1993, pp. 671-2) has proposed that instead of focusing on insider and outsider categories, “factors such as education, gender, sexual orientation, class, race, or sheer duration of contacts may at different times outweigh the cultural identity we associate with insider or outsider status.” This was a reality for me when I was doing my fieldwork, as my age, gender and educational background created barriers with particular groups of people within the community, such as younger people, who would sometimes assume that they did

not have enough knowledge to share. In contrast, older people were welcoming and could position themselves as holders of knowledge. Operating within these limits, reciprocating and respecting my obligations as a “guest” *taohpwoh* member, were practices that I see as essential for doing research in a Pwakanyaw way, as an indigenous researcher.

Pwakanyaw methodologies

Research within indigenous communities by indigenous researchers can be often driven by an intention to re-locate, re-connect, re-discover, re-define and re-visit our own stories and modes of knowledge production (Absolon & Willet, 2005). For me, studying *taohpwoh* meant making sense of the knowledges flowing within and across *taohpwoh*. To research as a Pwakanyaw about our own communities in our own *hteekaw* is to research in our own way, led and governed by the methodology and ethos of our community, in this case *taohpwoh*. *Hta*, a key body of knowledge of the two *taohpwoh* communities that I have researched, are woven together through threads of colonial subjugation, exploitation and oppression. The end product of this engagement can reflect these problematic, entrenched and historically embedded power relations and misrepresentations, which can be internalised and hard to unpack. In my initial conceptualisation of the social categories of Pwakanyaw and Christianity, I did not see Pwakanyaw Christianity as authentically Pwakanyaw, because of the association of Christianity with colonialism. Pwakanyaw research should not perpetuate colonial relations. It should remain open to possibilities for mental transformation and be empowering and beneficial for us.

Doing this research as a Pwakanyaw researcher, in Pwakanyaw communities, I am informed by the work of other indigenous scholars across the world. As Dawson et al. (2017) outline in a review of indigenous research methods, for many indigenous scholars, doing indigenous

research is more than simply creating new knowledge. It can rather be a process linked to the broader project of decolonisation, and a way for marginalised people to rebalance power: a process of healing and a strategy to gain social justice. This requires a research method that is culturally relevant and that gives weight to indigenous ontologies and epistemologies. This means intentionally using indigenous language and concepts, some of which may not be easily interpreted in languages other than Pwakanyaw. The result means indigenous people can recognise themselves in the knowledge produced and own that knowledge, which is part of decolonisation.

Key values of Pwakanyaw research include relationality and reciprocity. Through reciprocity, the researcher and the community can develop stronger bonds and connections. For instance, my field sites, which are part the same *taohpwoh* network, share a history and culture of *hta* but are separated by a violent and exclusionary maritime border. In this context, one way I reciprocate is to share stories, including of my own family. This helps fill a gap produced by the injustices caused by colonialism, the system of nation states and particular, violent practices of sovereignty. Research within *taohpwoh* should be normative because researchers should make their values and their biases clear, rather than presenting a mask of objectivity. Linda Tuhuai Smith (1999) argues that research should be part of social justice to be decolonising. It should create an image that reflects who we are in a way that is recognisable to us. It can also be part of an attempt to gain a voice, in contrast to the history of research that has silenced indigenous people. Research should be part of the struggle to validate stories about ourselves. Decolonising research is, therefore, an act of resistance, a way of writing back (Smith, 1999, p. 7). I also see research as part of my own, evolving practice of identity, as an “act of imaginative rediscovery” (Hall, 1990, p. 224).

As part of my attempt to decolonise Pwakanyaw research, I engaged in varied knowledge-making practices that incorporate storytelling, *hta* and prayer. These methods lay a path to learn

and share knowledge. Storytelling is common to a lot of indigenous communities and has been used in varied contexts as part of practices of decolonisation. One form of storytelling as method developed by indigenous researchers in Australia is yarning, which ‘enables the unfolding of information through the process of storytelling (narrative) in a relaxed and information manner that is culturally safe for indigenous people’ (Bessarab & Ng’andu, 2010, p. 47). Yarning involves telling stories through informal conversations that develop knowledge following indigenous communication protocols (Walker et al., 2014). Knowledge formed through this process heightens the validity of data collection in indigenous communities because it is respectful and honours roles and relationships in an indigenous context. Within a Pwakanyaw context, I see the use of storytelling as a way to demonstrate value in Pwakanyaw practices of knowledge-making. Storytelling is a relational process which involves participants and researchers forming a partnership in sharing knowledge, and which involves deep listening and retelling in a way that is accountable to the *taohpwoh* that stories come from. Storytelling is also closely related to *hta* and prayer, which are containers for Pwakanyaw cosmology, and a method to transmit that knowledge.

Everyday mundane and ritualised *taohpwoh* practices like praying, reciting or singing *hta*, storytelling and *tapoetethakot* (Cho, 2010) are informal conversation similar to yarning. *Taohpwoh* members engage in these to build a culture of learning from each other and of solving problems in a way that benefits the community. Prayer, *hta* and storytelling are a Pwakanyaw way of doing research that is embedded in Pwakanyaw values, epistemology and ontology. Through prayer, *hta* and stories, *taohpwoh* members build on the knowledge they have inherited from their ancestors and others in their community, and build new knowledge and insights which are shared with all. Through praying, composing and reciting *hta* and storytelling, *taohpwoh* members explore their location in the world unconfined to the bounded sovereign territories in which the *taohpwoh* is located. The social location of Pwakanyaw,

which is perceived as outside the realm of conventional geography, is a result of co-creation through these practices of “research”. In *taohpwoh* rituals of research, all members of *taohpwoh* can participate, share and learn, and these rituals are embedded in Pwakanyaw knowledge systems, internalised as *tana* and practices of *tama*.

As a Pwakanyaw researcher in *taohpwoh hteekaw*, active engagement and the readiness to seek, learn and participate in prayer is important. Prayer is a recitation of graceful and creatively crafted words and the utterance of sounds which follow the conventions of *hta* and draw from the wider body of *hta* passed down from our ancestors. Prayer is also a sacred *tama* that involves calling for action. Communal prayer communicates messages that are important to community, reproduces ancestral knowledge and involves the co-creation of new knowledge and insight. The obligation of prayer participants is to listen deeply and critically and to act on the messages. Prayer is a type of informal and indirect communication which transfers knowledge and information within the community, where the primary object is Ywa and the secondary objects are the community members who are listening. Applying indigenous methods to prayer involves learning through prayer in a way that respects Pwakanyaw ontology and epistemology. Engagement with prayer in this research as a methodology and a method is a way of doing Pwakanyaw indigenous that could be counted as part of the process of decolonisation.

To research in a Pwakanyaw way, involving prayer, *hta* and storytelling, means the researcher must share her own prayer, her own *hta* and her own stories, breaking down the barriers between the researcher and the researched, within complex relationships of trust. This has similarities to autoethnography, which has also been applied and used as part of indigenous approaches to research because of its emphasis on positionality and accountability (McIvor, 2010). Through auto-ethnography, a researcher can contribute knowledge in a meaningful way to produce new knowledge through community processes of learning. Auto-ethnography

within an indigenous framework should encourage the researcher to position themselves within indigenous systems of knowledge, guided by values of being kind, open and passionate within and towards community members (Wilson, 2007). By opening oneself through telling one's own prayer, *hta* and stories, debates about neutrality and objectivity become irrelevant. A strength of auto-ethnography is that it is a way to re-claim authority as indigenous researchers, as we can speak for ourselves with authority over our own experience that is intertwined with the experience of our fellow *taohpwoh* members and our ancestors.

Most important of all to be a Pwakanyaw researcher with *taohpwoh* and Pwakanyaw community in general is to be guided by *taohpwoh* principles of *tana* and *tama*. *Tana* is part of recognition and acknowledgment, a need to see *taohpwoh* as independent entities throughout history that operate in their own terms, protecting and nurturing one another. A *tana* that they voice and set for themselves is that benefits are shared for the advantage of the community. They had built on the past with the resources available to them, adapting to the present with openness and flexibility, allowing themselves to approach the future with power that they themselves created. Sharing this good *tana* with *taohpwoh* is essential but this *tana* must be put into play and exercised in reaching the ultimate knowledge about *taohpwoh* that a researcher is seeking. *Taohpwoh* grounding ethos are collective attempts to produce *tana*. Having *tana* that members can produce knowledge is not enough. As a member of *taohpwoh* and a researcher, it is my responsibility to engage and perform action that brings benefits to *taohpwoh*. The action of *tana* is varied but primarily must be led by the convention of *hta*, storytelling and prayer that form the world of Pwakanyaw people.

Conclusion

Taohpwoh is a particular model of a Pwakanyaw country, *hteekaw*, operating from the bottom up by drawing in localised conceptions of place and sociality, connected through translational

networks. *Taohpwoh* is a space where Pwakanyaw negotiate and form their cosmology that makes use of diverse principles, ethos, beliefs and practices that are produced and reproduced across generations and through the *taohpwoh* network. *Taohpwoh* maintain their *tana* through *hta*, prayers and stories, which are continuously practiced as sacred *tama* with the intention to build an ideal form of community.

In my upbringing in exile, I was disconnected from my *taohpwoh*, where the spirit of my ancestors and their nurturing community reside, along with their *hta*, prayers and stories. In place of a localised form of nation, *hteekaw*, which is linked to *taohpwoh* and where belonging can be claimed, I had access to a pan-Pwakanyaw identity, centred on *Kawthoolei*. The idea of *Kawthoolei* is part of an attempt to build a unified *hteekaw*. But this *Kawthoolei* level political project cannot replace the wealth of wisdom that is available within individual *taohpwoh*. They are complementary. Living in exile meant I was not used to and had not experienced being a member of an established and continuously inhabited *taohpwoh*. I took *taohpwoh* for granted when I first started this research project, considering it narrowly as a religious domain, and reflecting the dominance of a Western paradigm that divides the secular from the religious. This was also a result of my childhood experience of the divisions within the Pwakanyaw ethnonationalist movement on religious lines, and its violent aftermath, in which a self-proclaimed Buddhist Karen army attacked and burnt down the refugee camp where I was residing. In contrast to *taohpwoh*, I used to see *hteekaw* as referring to formal, internationally recognised, secular states. I did not have awareness of the plurality of models of *htweekaw* within Pwakanyaw society. This was disempowering to me and many in my community, positioned as stateless or as refugees, when we have our own model of *hteekaw*. This research therefore led into alternative forms of *hteekaw* and to gain a deeper awareness of *taohpwoh* which I had been physically and mentally distant from.

As a diasporic Pwakanyaw researcher outside of *taohpwoh*, researching is more than producing knowledge. For me, it has been a way to re-engage and re-discover what I have been distant from. It is a journey that involves accessing things that many take for granted and to try to reconnect the missing pieces of my personal stories, *hta* and prayers with wider Pwakanyaw stories, *hta* and prayers that has been dislocated, disrupted, damaged and hidden due to state violence, displacement and separation. By using Pwakanyaw *taohpwoh* ways of knowing and doing, incorporating my position as a Pwakanyaw researcher moving from exile to my homeland and back again, my own history and experience needs to be counted as a valid part of this learning process in a way where I can be accountable to my community. To be an accountable Pwakanyaw knowledge seeker is to cultivate a notion of reciprocity, collaborations and co-creation. From the *hta* of *taohpwoh*, I draw my knowledge about the different reality of Pwakanyaw and the world. And through *hta* I have to reciprocate and return my input. Only then the *hta* of *taohpwoh* can further continue.

Hta of *taohpwoh* is not a fixed body of knowledge like a museum display. *Hta* carries living stories, prayers and songs that requires contribution of those who hear and speak them. In this sense, it is my role as a Pwakanyaw who is contributing to knowledge on Pwaknyaw to give back by building on knowledge about *taohpwoh* and *hteekaw* through *hta*, following the principles of *tana* and *tama*. This means adapting and building on the *hta* of my ancestors. I have therefore chosen to end my thesis by expanding on the *hta* of *hteekaw* that I introduced at the beginning of this chapter. I have chosen to add on new stanzas that I composed myself in relation to my experience of *taohpwoh*, *hteekaw*, and Pwakanyaw constructions of value, practice and power. *Hta* is collaborative across generations and by building on *hta*, I am able to collaborate with ghosts of my ancestors.

တၢ်အိၣ်ဖျိၣ်မ့ၢ်ဒိၣ်ဆဲးလီၤ
 တၢ်အိၣ်ဖျိၣ်ပုၤဒိၣ်သ့ၣ်လီၤ
 လၢထံအဃၤမိၢ်သ့ၣ်လီၤ
 လၢကီၢ်အစၤပၢ်ဆဲးလီၤ
 ဆီအထူၣ်လၢသ့ၣ်တကျါ
 ကျဲၤအဒူၣ်လၢထးတၢ်
 သ့ၣ်ဖျိၣ်လီၤဒီးတၢ်န့ၣ်ကျါ
 ဆုၣ်နီၤလၢယွၤဒိၣ်အဃၤ

မ့ၢ်သ့ၣ်အိၣ်ဖျိၣ်တဘီးဆါ
 ပုၤသ့ၣ်အိၣ်ဖျိၣ်တဘီးဆါ
 တယုၤထဲစုဒီးဘါယွၤ
 ထဲတယုၤခိၣ်ကျဲၤထီၣ်ယွၤ
 မုၢ်ဂီၤဘီၣ်ဂဲၤမၤဒီးဖဲး
 ဂဲၤကလံၣ်ဖဲလိခံးခံး
 ဒီးတၢ်န့ၣ်ထီးဖျိၣ်အိၣ်
 တၢ်မၤသးဘူးအီၤယွၤအိၣ်

နးယုၤလၢမူယုၤယံၣ်လံ
 ဘီၣ်ယုၤလၢဒုယုၤယံၣ်လံ
 နးလဲၤတစိၤတဝံၤဒီး
 ဖျိၣ်လဲၤခံစိၤတဝံၤဒီး
 တၢ်န့ၣ်တၢ်မၤန့ၣ်ဟံး
 စိၤစိၤယုၤယုၤတသံ

ယွၤ...ထီၣ်လီၤတရံးဒုလ်မူထံး
 ဒံထံဖိယွၤသီၣ်ရံးရံး
 အထံးဖဲလဲၣ်,အခံဖဲလဲၣ်
 လၢမူခိၣ်ဒါဟီၣ်ခိၣ်ဒါ
 လၢကစၢ်ဒါဟီၣ်လဲၣ်ဒါ
 မ့ၢ်အစ့ၣ်ဒါအထွဲဒါ
 အထံဒါအသဝံဒါ
 ယုၤထီၣ်အလုၢ်ဆူမူခိၣ်
 စဲၤလီၤအပူၤလၢဟီၣ်ခိၣ်
 လီၤဆူလ်ဒီးထီၣ်ဆူထး
 ယွၤတရံးလုၢ်ဘၢတၢ်ဝံး.

Taohpwoh mwēc dòh hsēh
 lāw

Taohpwoh pwə dòh thòo
 lāw

luh htee a hkūh mōh thòo
 lāw

luh gaw a sūh pə hsēh lāw
 hsaw a 222haw luh thày ta
 glūh

222haw a dòo luh htä ta
 ghūh

thòo hplä lāw dāw tana
 glūh

hsay nāw luh ywā dòh a
 hkūh

mwēc thòo òh hpwòh ta
 bōh hsgah

pwə thòo òh hpwòh ta bōh
 hsgah

ta yōo hteh su dāw bah ywa
 hteh ta yōo kàw 222haw
 htàw ywa

mū ghāw baw ghēh mā dāw
 hpēe

ghēh ga lèc hpeh lah kēe
 kēe

dāw tana htōh hpwòh a kōh
 tama thū böo āw ywa òh

nā yōo luh moo yōo yēc lee
 baw hkay luh doo hkay yēc
 lee

nā lēh ta sōh ta wēc dēc
 hpwāw lēh kee sōh ta wēc
 dēc

tana 222haw222ə may hēe

Ancestors plotted *taohpwoh*,
 Forbearers planted *taohpwoh*,
 On the edge of water mother
 plotted it,
 Between the land father planted it,
 They erected a tree pole, yet it
 collapsed,
 They built a metal wall, yet it fell
 apart,
 With *tana*, they built.
 Beside Ywa, they sat.

Bamboo ties unbroken when
 ancestors built,
 Bamboo ties unbroken when
 forebearers built,
 They do not raise hands to look up
 to Ywa,
 They do not pull up their legs to
 lean against Ywa,
 They plunged into action, with the
 Sun,
 In moonlight, they vested in dance.
 Head-to-head with *tana*,
Tama drew them near to Ywa.

Sword flies around for long,
 Spear runs around for long,
 Lament travels for a generation,
 Torment journeys for two
 generations,
 And yet their journey greets its
 ending.
 Embracing the ethic of *tana* and
tama,
 Infinity is Ywa.
 Ywa...up and down

ထို...နတ်ဟးတရုံးဒုလ်မူထံး
ဒ်ကလံအူသိုဝံးဝံး
လီၢ်အိုၣ်ဆိးထံးလၢဖဲလဲၣ်
လၢနီၢ်ခိၣ်ခိၣ်သးခါ
ခိၣ်န့ၣ်ခါစုညါသးခါ
မ့ၢ်အိုၣ်ဂၢ်ခါဟူးဂဲၤခါ
အိုၣ်ပတုၣ်ခါလဲၤတၢ်ခါ
အူလၢဂီၤကွၢ်လၢဟါ
ဆူၣ်စၢ်ကီၢ်မ့ၢ်အဒိပုၢ်ဝဲၢ်
အူၣ်န့ၣ်လိာ်သးထါတၢ်အဲၣ်

တၢ်တဲ...စံၣ်စိၤကန့ၣ်မူထံးဒုလ်
ဒ်မ့ၢ်ကဲၤလၢဖၣ်ဆါကျါ
အိုၣ်ဟဲလၢလဲၣ်လဲၤဖဲလဲၣ်
မ့ၢ်လၢပျါၤခါခါအံၤခါ
မ့ၢ်ဆူၣ်ခါဆူညါခါ
မ့ၢ်အမုၢ်ခါအခွါခါ
မ့ၢ်အဖိခါအလံၤခါ
သိုၣ်လၢနံၤတဲလၢနၤ
သ့ၣ်သးပူၤဒီန့ၣ်ဒီန့ၣ်
ပိာ်ထီၣ်ကျဲၤလဲၤသကိးတၢ်.

တၢ်ထုကဖၣ်...သကွံၢ်ကညးမူထံးဒုလ်,
ဒ်စီဆုံထီၣ်ဖိမုၢ်သါ,
အိုၣ်မုၢ်ထီၣ်ခါမုၢ်န့ၣ်ခါ,
ကလံၤစိးကလံၤထံးခါ,
ကီၢ်ခါၣ်သးခါကီၢ်ချါခါ,
အကစၢ်ခါကလၢခါ,
ထုလၢနီၢ်ကဖၣ်လၢသး,
လုၢ်ဒီးပုၤအတိၤတဟ်,
ထုးဖိၣ်ကီၢ်အဆၢတဖျါ.

ထံတဂ့ၤယွၤဖိသ့ၣ်ဖျိး
ကီၢ်တဂ့ၤယွၤလံၤဟးဖျိး
ဟးအိုၣ်ကဒုလၢထံဒိၣ်
ဟးအိုၣ်ကစီၤလၢကီၢ်ကီၢ်

sōh sōh hkà hkà ywa ta
thee

Ywa... htàw lāw ta rēe doo
la moo htēe
di htee hpoh ywa 223haw
rēe rēe
a htēe hpeh lèh a kee hpeh
lèh
luh moo kòh ahahh hàw
kòh ahahh
luh ga sùh ahahh pàw lèh
ahhah
māy a sày ahahh a htweh
ahhah
a htee ahahh a tha wee
ahhah
yọo htàw a lū hsoo moo
kòh
sēh lāw a pwāy luh hàw
kòh
lāw hsoo la dāw htàw hsoo
hta
ywā ta rēe lū buh t̃a wā

Hta... nū hā ta rēe doo la
moo htēe
di ga lēe oo 223haw wēe
wēe
lāw òh hsōh htēe luh hpeh
lèh
luh nāw koh ahahh nāw thā
ahhah
kòh nọo ahahh
223haw223a thā ahahh
māy òh ghuh hah hōo ghēh
ahhah

spinning around
here on the Earth and across the
universe.
Like trickling water in the creek,
Where did it come from?
From the sky or from the ground?
From the mountain peak or from
the ocean?
From the left or from the right?
Is its form liquid or gas?
Ritualises in the sky,
Set a price on the soil,
Up above its gone,
And through to the ground it bows
down,
Flow swirls and spills around.

Hta...in and out
whirling around
here on the Earth and across the
universe,
Like the *whee* of the breeze,
Where is it from?
From the mind or from the heart?
Is it shaped like a brain or one's
palm?
Stillness or movement?
Going or pausing?
Play at dawn and whistle at dusk,
Strong and weak,
Well and diseased,
They are siblings.
Reciting a *hta* of affection,
To one another.

Stories...speak and hear,
spreading around

ထိတၢ်အိၣ်မူသီၣ်ယံၣ်ယိၣ်
မၤလုၢ်အုၣ်ထီၣ်သ့သမိး

ပုၤထံၣ်ဂ့ၤလၢထူတုၤလီၤ
ပုၤကီၢ်ဂ့ၤလၢယုၤဟံၣ်လီၤ
ထံၣ်ဂ့ၤယိၣ်သ့ၣ်မံၣ်န့ၢ်အိၣ်
ကီၢ်ဂ့ၤယိၣ်သးမံၣ်န့ၢ်အိၣ်
တသ့ၣ်ကွံးသးကိပုၤကီၢ်
တဆၢဒီးဆၢန့ၢ်ပုၤလီၤ
မ့ၢ်ပုၤမံၣ်လီၤမ့ၢ်ယုၤကီၢ်
ထဲးယၤဘျးထီၣ်က့ၤဒီးအိၣ်

òh pa tų ahhah lēh tǎ ahhah
oo luh ghāw gw ay luh hah
hsòo sǎ gaw mụ a daw pu
wēh
ù nǎy ləh thǎ htah tǎ èh

tǎ the... sèe sōh ga nà doo
lǎ moo htēe
di mǎy gēh luh hpà gwǎ
htēe
òh heh luh lèh lēh hpeh lèh
mǎy luh plūh ahhah keh ēe
ahhah
mǎy hsoo kee ahhah hsoo
nyah ahhah
mǎy a mù ahhah a kwah
ahhah
mǎy a hpoh ahhah a lēe
ahhah
thòh luh nēe I luh nǎ
thòo thǎ pōo daw
n224haw224ǎnǎ
pəh htàw gleh lēh tha gōh
tǎ

tǎ htu ga hpà... tha gwēe ga
nyǎ moo htēe doo lǎ
di saw hsgee htàw hpoh mụ
hkah
òh mụ htàw ahhah mụ nụ
ahhah
ga lēe sōh ga lēe htēe ahhah
gǎw kùh thǎ ahhah gǎw
kluh ahhah
a ga sǎ ahhah ga lǎ ahhah
htu luh nōh ga hpà luh thǎ
lụ dǎw pwāy a tōh tǎ pǎ

here on the Earth and across the
universe.
Like fire asleep under the ashes,
Where is it coming from and where
it is going?
From the past or right now,
Or from the future?
Is it feminine or masculine?
Is about a child or grandchildren?
Mentoring at day and taught at
night,
At the centre of the heart, they
listen.
Chat away a path of life,
Together they embark on a journey.

Prayer...seek and pledge,
exploring around,
here on the Earth and across the
universe,
Like fairies conceive purity,
Is it in the East or the West,
The North or the South
Central country or outer nation
Embodied or spirited?
Sworn with lips and made an oath
with heart,
Drawing no line between ritual and
value
Bring lands together with no
marks.

Ywa's child snuck away from
disturbed water,
Ywa's child slipped away from
trouble land,
Snug in high water,
Comfortable in a hot land,

htü hpwòh gaw a hsuh ta hplah	As the tune of life keeps playing, They become good at rhythm.
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htee ta ghāy ywa hpoh hkay hplōh gaw ta ghāy ywa lēe hä hplōh hä òh ga du luh htee dòh hä òh ga sāw luh gaw gōh htah tạ òh m225hawhàw yẹc yōh mā lụ ù htah thay tha möh	Ywa moulds the water of others Ywa shapes the land of others For their good land and water I am content, But over them, I have no desire, Ywa's lands where my ancestors' spirits rest, Pulling me back.
---	--

pwā htee ghāy luh htoo tay
lāw
pwā gaw ghāy luh htoo tay
lāw
htee ghāy hkoh thòo mee
nạy āw
gaw ghāy hkoh thă mụ nạy
āw
ta thòo gwee thă gah pwā
gaw
ta hsuh dòh hsuh nạy pwā
lạw
mwēe pwa mee lạw mạy
ywa gaw
htēh yā bōo htàw gāy dāw
āw

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*rañ' praññ' nay' sa muiñ' 'phrac' cañ' ' a kyañ' "*တိုင်းရင်းသားကရင်လူမျိုးများ၏သမိုင်းကြောင်း,ယဉ်ကျေးမှု

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Appendix I: Saw Tha Ree's letter, *Morning Star*, 1851

တၢ်အိၣ်ဖျိၣ်တဖၣ်အဂ့ၢ်လၢပသံၣ်လၢ ဃ.န. ၁၈၅၀ နံၣ်

တၢ်အိၣ်ဖျိၣ်တဖၣ်န့ၣ်အဂ့ၢ်အပီၢ်ဟဲဝဲဒ်အံၤ.လၢသီလၢအခိၣ်ထံးလၢအကဲထီၣ်သီဃရံးအတၢ်အိၣ်ဖျိၣ်န့ၣ်,မ့ၢ်အိၣ်လၢပံၤယီၤ
အကီၢ်ဒီးပဒိၣ်တဖၣ်န့ၣ်ဂ့ၢ်တြီအကျဲဆူၣ်ဆူၣ်ကလဲၣ်လီၤ.မ့ၢ် အဂ့ၢ်ဒ်လဲၣ်,မံၤအသုတ ဘၢတၢ်ဒ်ကီၤလၢဝါအလုၢ်အလၢ်အသိး
န့ၣ်တဂ့ၤ.ဘၣ်ဆၣ်ဒီးအပျဲၢ်အဘီၣ် တဖၣ်တဒိကန့ၣ်ဝဲဘၣ်.မ့ၢ်အ ဂ့ၢ်ဒ်လဲၣ်,မ့ၢ်လၢအသးခုဒီးဘၣ်အသးအဂ့ၢ်လီၤ.မံၤလၢအတ
ဒိကန့ၣ် ဘၣ်ပံၤယီၤအပဒိၣ်အကလုၢ်အခိၣ်အ ဃိဘၣ်ဒီးဘၣ်ဒီးတၢ်ဖျိၣ်တၢ်နးအိၣ်တနီၤ,ဒီးဘၣ်လၢ်အစုလီၢ်ခိၣ်ခိၣ်အိၣ်
တနီၤ,ဘၣ်ဒီးတၢ်ဖျိၣ်တၢ်နးအဂ့ၢ်န့ၣ်ဟဲဝဲဒ်အံၤ,တပျဲၤဒီးသိးအကပျဲၤ,တစူးကွံာ်ဒီးသိးအကစူးကွံာ်,ဒီးသိးအကစူးကွံာ်ဝဲသပျဲ
တၢ်ဒီးပဒိၣ်တဖၣ်ဖျိၣ်န့ၣ်အီၤဒၣ်အီၤလၢဃိၣ်ပူၤတနီၤလီၤ.ဘၣ်လၢ်အစုလီၢ်အခိၣ်ခိၣ်တနီၤအဂ့ၢ်န့ၣ်ဟဲဝဲဒ်အံၤ.မ့ၢ်လၢပဒိၣ်တ
ဖၣ်ဖျိၣ်န့ၣ်အပျဲၢ်အဘီၣ်,ဒီးဒၣ်န့ၣ်ဝဲလၢဃိၣ်ပူၤဒီးဒိဝဲတီၢ်ဒ်န့ၣ်ဒီးအပျဲၢ်ပသုၣ်ကသးပျဲတဖၣ်န့ၣ်ကတိၤဖျဲးထီၣ်ဝဲဒီးပဒိၣ်စံးအီၤသု
မ့ၢ်ဟ့ၣ်စုထဲအံၤထဲန့ၣ်ဒီးပကပျဲၤလီၤ.ဒီးဒီးသိးပဒိၣ်စံးဝဲအသိးန့ၣ်ဒိပုၤဝဲၣ်အပျဲၢ်သကိးအပျဲၢ်တဖၣ်န့ၣ်ဒ်သိးအဒိပုၤဝဲၣ်တဖၣ်က
ထူၣ်ဖျဲးထီၣ်ဘၣ်ဝဲဒီး,ဟံၣ်ဖျိၣ်အစုလီၢ်အခိၣ်ခိၣ်တသ့ဖဲအသ့တဂၤတစဲးတဂၤတစဲးလီၤ.ဘၣ်တစုစုလၢ်တပီၢ်,ဘၣ်တစုစုလၢ်
ဒီးလၢအအါလီၤ.ဘၣ်ဆၣ်ဒီးမ့ၢ်လၢတၢ်အဲၣ်တၢ်ကွံာ်အဂ့ၢ်သတးဒီး,ပုၤလၢအဘၣ်နးဘၣ်ဖျိၣ်ဒ်န့ၣ်တဖၣ်တအိၣ်စ့ၢ်ကီးဘၣ်တုၤ
အကဲကုၢ်လီၤမၤဘၣ်.မ့ၢ်အဂ့ၢ်ဒ်လဲၣ်,မ့ၢ်လၢအပျဲၢ်သကိးအပျဲၢ်အဲၣ်လိာ်ကွံာ်လိာ်အသးအဂ့ၢ်လီၤ.

မ့ၢ်ခဲကနံၣ်အံၤတၢ်အံၤ,မ့ၢ်ကစၢ်ယွၤအကူၢ်အတနၢ်ဒီးအပျဲၢ်အဘီၣ်အိၣ်လၢကီၢ်ပသံၣ်တဖၣ်မ့ၢ်လၢအဝဲတမံၤန့ၣ်ပူၤဖျဲးလံဝဲ
လံ.မ့ၢ်ပဆိကမိၣ်လၢကစၢ်ယွၤဘိးလိၤဃၣ်လိၤက့ၤပံၤယီၤတဖၣ်အသးအလီၢ်အိၣ်ဝဲလီၤ.မ့ၢ်မၤအယွၤအပျဲၢ်အဘီၣ်ထီၣ်ဘိးန့ၣ်
ဒီးယွၤအဖိအလံၤကအိဘၣ်အမံၤ ထံမံၤနီၣ်ထီၣ်ဘိးကီးလီၤ.ဒီး လၢအဘၣ်ဖျိၣ်ဘၣ်နးအကတီၢ်န့ၣ်ဆိကမိၣ်ဝဲတၢ်အဖျိၣ်အိၣ်,ဒီး
တၢ်အမုၢ်ကအိၣ်,တၢ်သးအုးအိၣ်ဒီးတၢ်သးခုကအိၣ်ဝဲလီၤ.ဒ်အဆိကမိၣ်ဝဲအသိးန့ၣ်,ခဲကနံၣ်အံၤမၤသးဒ်အထံၣ်လံဝဲတဒိၣ်တ
ဆံးတအါတစ့ၤလီၤ.မ့ၢ်အဂ့ၢ်ဒ်လဲၣ်,လၢတၢ်မၤအစ့ၤလီၤအဂ့ၢ်လီၤ.

မၤကဒီးတမံၤအိၣ်ဝဲခဲအံၤအဂ့ၢ်န့ၣ်ဒ်လၢပျၤလၢအအိၣ်ဝဲလၢမုၢ်ကီၤလံာ်အစုပူၤအသိးတမ့ၢ်လၢၤဘၣ်.လၢပျၤန့ၣ်အိၣ်ဝဲဒၣ်ၣ်
ဟံၣ်တပူၤ,၅ဟံၣ်တပူၤ,၆ဟံၣ်တပူၤ,၇ဟံၣ်တပူၤလီၤ.ခဲကနံၣ် အိၣ်ဝဲဒၣ်တသဝီတသဝီ,ဒီးတသဝီတသဝီန့ၣ်အိၣ်ဒီးဟံၣ်
အဖျၢၣ် ၂၀ တနီၤ, ၃၀ တနီၤ, ၄၀ တနီၤ. ဒီးလၢန့ၣ်အမဲၣ်ညါတသဝီ န့ၣ်အိၣ်ဒီးအသရၣ်လၢအကစံးဘၣ်တဲဘၣ်က့ၤအီၤ,ဒ်
ပစံးတၢ် အသိးကလုာ်အိၣ်လုာ်အီၤက့ၤအီၤလၢ တၢ်အိၣ်အဝံၣ်ကတၢ်အဆၢကတၢ်လၢအဘၣ်ဃးဒီးသးလီၤ. ဒီးမၤထီၣ်ဘျီ
ဘျီၣ်လၢအကအိၣ်ဖျိၣ်ဘါယွၤလၢအိၣ်ဘျးအနံၤစ့ၢ်ကီးတနီၤနီၤလီၤ.ကွၢ်လၢတၢ်အကျဲအလီၢ်အိၣ်ဒီးတမံၤတုၤအံၤဆူညါအသဝီ
ဒၣ်ဝဲန့ၣ်ကအိၣ်ဒီးအဘျီၣ်ဘျီၣ်ကီးအဂၤဒဲးလီၤ.မ့ၢ်အဂ့ၢ်ဒ်လဲၣ်,ပံၤယီၤအတၢ်ဒူတၢ်ဟ့ၣ်လီၤစ့ၢ်န့ၣ်ဒီး,တနီၤနီၤလၢအဟံၣ်ဒူအသး
လၢသီန့ၣ်တဒူ လၢၤဘၣ်ဝဲဘၣ်.မ့ၢ်အဂ့ၢ်ဒ်လဲၣ်,မ့ၢ်ယွၤအစိအကမီၤလီၤ.

မၤကဒီးအဂ့ၢ်တမံၤဟဲဝဲဒ်အံၤ.အသရၣ်လၢအသိၣ်က့ၤသီက့ၤအီၤတဂၤန့ၣ်မၤန့ၣ်ဝဲအဟံၣ်,လုာ်အိၣ်လုာ်အီၤဝဲလၢတၢ်အိၣ်တၢ်အီၤ
လၢအဘၣ်ဃးဒီးနီၢ်ခိၣ်ကစၢ်,ပံၤယီၤမ့ၢ်ဃုအသရၣ်လၢသွဲဟ့ၣ် လီၤန့ၣ်ခဲဒၣ်အမဲၣ် ညါလီၤ.ပစံးလံၤလၢအအိၣ်ဒီးအ သရၣ်တ
ဂၤ,ထဲန့ၣ်တမ့ၢ်ဒီးဘၣ်. ဘၣ်တသဝီ ဝီဝီန့ၣ်အိၣ်ဒီးအသရၣ်လၢအ သိၣ်က့ၤအီၤတဂၤ,ဒီးပုၤဒုးန့ၣ်လိအဖိအလံၤတနီၤနီၤလီၤ.

ဘၣ်ဆၣ်ဒီးကီးအသဝီဒီးန့ၣ်လၢထီၣ်ပွဲၤထီၣ်တသ့တဝၢ်ဒီးဘၣ်.ဘၣ်ဆၣ်ဒီးဆူညါပကွၢ်လၢအကျဲအလီၢ်အိၣ်လီၤ.အလၢဒီးအ
တလၢန့ၣ်,အလၢတခီန့ၣ်အါသဝီတက့ၢ်လီၤ.မ့ၢ်အဂ့ၢ်ဒ်လဲၣ်,သဝီလၢအအိၣ်တဖၣ်န့ၣ်လၢလဲဝဲကစီဒီလံၤလီၤ.မ့ၢ်သဝီလၢအဆံး
တဖၣ်န့ၣ်တလၢတဝၢ်ဒီးဘၣ်.ဘၣ်ဆၣ်ပုၤသိၣ်သီတၢ်လၢကီၢ်ပသံၣ်တဖၣ်န့ၣ်သရၣ်ကီၤလၢဝါဟ့ၣ်လီၤအီၤတလါတလါစ့ၢ်
ဘး,၇ဘးဒ်န့ၣ်တမ့ၢ်ဘၣ်.အပျဲၤအဘီၣ်ကွၢ်အီၤမ့ၢ်တလၢဘၣ်ဒီးသရၣ်ဟ့ၣ်လီၤမၤစၢၤတဒိၣ်တဆံးလီၤ.

လၢန့ၣ်အမဲၣ်ညါ,အကစၢ်ပုၤဒၣ်ဝဲစံးသရၣ်ၤ,ယပျဲၤယဘီၣ်လုာ်အိၣ်ယၤတလၢတပွဲၤဘၣ်,ဟ့ၣ်လီၤယၤထဲအံၤထဲန့ၣ်တက့ၢ်,ဒ်
န့ၣ်တဟဲစံးဟဲဃုသရၣ်ဘၣ်.ပသုၣ်က့သးပုၤလၢအသဝီန့ၣ်,ဟ့ၣ်ဒုးအိၣ်အသရၣ်လၢတနံၣ်အတီၢ်ပူၤန့ၣ်စ့မ့ၢ်ဂ့ၤ,ဘုမ့ၢ်ဂ့ၤ,ဟုမ့ၢ်
ဂ့ၤ,ညၢ်အုၣ်မ့ၢ်ဂ့ၤ,ကသံၣ်မ့ၢ်ဂ့ၤ,ကယဲၢ်တၢ်လၢပုၤကညီအိၣ်ဝဲလၢအလုာ်အလၢဟဲဝဲအသိးန့ၣ်ကွဲးနီၣ်ဝဲလၢလံာ်ကစီဒီးမ့ၢ်ဘၣ်
အကတီၢ်လၢတၢ်ယီၤထီၣ်လါနီၤအပူၤမ့ၢ်ဂ့ၤ,လါပျုၤအပူၤမ့ၢ်ဂ့ၤ,ကယဲၢ်ပုၤသိၣ်သီတၢ်ဒီးသရၣ်ကွၢ်တၢ်ပုၤကညီမ့ၢ်ဂ့ၤ,သရၣ်ကွၢ်

တၢ်ကီၤလၢဝါမ့ၢ်ဂ့ၤ,လၢအဘၣ်ဃးလိာ်အသးတကရၢန့ၣ်,အိၣ်ဖျိၣ်ရိၣ်ဖျိၣ်ဒီးပသးပျၢ်တဖၣ်န့ၣ်ဟဲစ့ၢ်ကီၤ,ဒီးဟ့ၣ်လိာ်အလံာ်ကွဲး
နီၣ်န့ၣ်လၢသရၣ်ကွၢ်တၢ်ကီၤလၢဝါအစုပူၤဒီးလၢပုၤအိၣ်ဖျိၣ်ဂီၢ်မုၢ်အကျါန့ၣ်သရၣ်မၤပုၤတဖၣ်ဃးလံာ်ကွဲးနီၣ်န့ၣ်ဒီးဖးဝဲ,ဒီးသရၣ်
တဒိအသးလၢသ့ၣ်ညါဒၣ်တၢ်န့ၣ်နီၤဖးအဆၢ,ပုၤသိၣ်သီတၢ်တဂၤန့ၣ်အပျဲၢ်အဘီၣ်ဟ့ၣ်အီၤထဲန့ၣ်ကြၢၤန့ၣ်ဒီးထဲအံၤ,အဝဲတဂၤ
န့ၣ်သရၣ်ဟ့ၣ်လီၤအီၤဒီးဟံးန့ၣ်ဝဲလီၤ.အဝဲတဂၤန့ၣ်အပျဲၢ်အဘီၣ်မၤဘျီၣ်အီၤန့ၣ်ထဲန့ၣ်သရၣ်ဆိကမိၣ်လၢအဘၣ်လံာ်,ဒီးအကစၢ်
ဆိကမိၣ်လၢအဘၣ်လံာ်စ့ၢ်ကီၤလီၤ.မ့ၢ်အဆိကမိၣ်ဝဲလၢအဘၣ်လံာ်သတးဒီးသရၣ်မ့ၢ်ဟ့ၣ်ဘၣ်ဆၣ်အီၤလၢအါမၤဒီးတဟံးန့ၢ်
ဘၣ်ယွၤအစု ကလီက လီဘၣ်.အဂ့ၢ်န့ၣ်ပသ့ၣ်ညါလီၤ.ဒ်န့ၣ်အသိးပုၤလၢအသဝီဒိၣ်,ဒီးအပျဲၢ်အဘီၣ်ကွၢ်အီၤသ့ တဖၣ်န့ၣ်
သရၣ် မ့ၢ်ဟ့ၣ်လီၤဘၣ်ဆၣ်ဒီးအစုအထူဒီးတဟံးန့ၣ်ဝဲဘၣ်.ကစံးဆၢသရၣ်,“သရၣ်ဧၤ,ဟ့ၣ် ယၤတဂ့ၤ,ယတဟံးန့ၢ်ဘၣ်.
မ့ၢ်အဂ့ၢ်ဒ်လဲၣ်,ယဲဒၣ်ခဲကန့ၢ်အံၤယအိၣ်ဒီးယပျဲၢ်ယဘီၣ်လီၤ.မံဒ်န့ၣ်ဒီးအပျဲၢ်အဘီၣ်ကွၢ်ယၤကစီဒိလီၤ.ဒီးသိးယကဟ်ဖျိၣ်ဘၣ်
စ့ၤထူဧၤလၢယထၢ်ပူၤဒီးယကဲပုၤသိၣ်သီတၢ်တမ့ၢ်ဘၣ်.မ့ၢ်အဂ့ၢ်ဒ်လဲၣ်,မ့ၢ်ယမၤယွၤအတၢ်လီၤ.ယွၤကကွၢ်ယၤလီၤ.ယပျဲၢ်ယ
ဘီၣ်အိၣ်ဘၣ်တမီ,ယဲဒၣ်ယမ့ၢ်အိၣ်ဘၣ်တမီန့ၣ်ဘၣ်လံာ်.ယတဟံးန့ၢ်ဘၣ်ယွၤအစုကလီကလီဘၣ်.”ဒ်န့ၣ်အသိးပုၤသးပျၢ်လၢ
အသဝီန့ၣ်ကစံးစ့ၢ်ကီၤဝဲ,“သရၣ်ဧၤ,ပသရၣ်လၢအသိၣ်က့ၤသီက့ၤပုၤအံၤပကအံးက့ၤကွၢ်က့ၤဒၣ်ပဝဲလီၤ.သရၣ်သုတဟံးန့ၢ်ပုၤ
အမုၢ်ကၤဖိအစုဒီးဟ့ၣ်ပသရၣ်တဂ့ၤ.ပဝဲဒၣ်ပုၤကညီသကိးပုၤကညီကကွၢ်လိာ်ဒၣ်အသးလီၤ.ဘၣ်ယိၣ်လၢပသရၣ်ကအိၣ်
ဝံၤသံအသးတဂ့ၤ.”

ပုၤလၢအသဝီဆံးဒီးအပျဲၢ်အဘီၣ်ဟ့ၣ်အီၤန့ၣ်လၢအစုတဖၣ်န့ၣ်သရၣ်မ့ၢ်ဟ့ၣ်လီၤအီၤထဲအံၤထဲန့ၣ်ဒီး“သရၣ်ဧၤ,တအါဒီးဘၣ်,”
တစံးဝဲဒ်န့ၣ်ဘၣ်.အၢၣ်လီၤအီၤလီၤစ့ၢ်ကီၤသရၣ်ကစီဒိလီၤ.ဒီးမ့ၢ်ပသပျၢ်လၢအသဝီတဖၣ်ကဲၤဆၢထၢၣ်ကတိၤထီၣ်တၢ်ကစံး
ဝဲ, “သရၣ်ဧၤ, ပဝဲဒၣ်ပသရၣ်အံၤအိၣ်လၢပကျါ ဒီးသိၣ်က့ၤ သီက့ၤပုၤလၢအဘၣ်ဃးဒီးသးအံၤ,ပဝဲ ဒၣ်တဒိပသးအိၣ်စ့ၢ်ကီၤ
လၢပကအံးက့ၤကွၢ်က့ၤအီၤလၢတၢ်အိၣ်တၢ်အီၤန့ၣ်လီၤ.ဘၣ်ဆၣ်ဒီးဒ်ပသးအိၣ်အသိးန့ၣ်ပမၤတလၢတပျဲၤဘၣ်.မ့ၢ်အဂ့ၢ်ဒ်လဲၣ်,
ပဝဲဒၣ်ပုၤကညီတကလုာ်အံၤ,မ့ၢ်ပုၤအဖျိၣ်အယာ်,အိၣ်ဘၣ်လၢပံၤယီၤဝံခိၣ်တလၢပံၤလံာ်လီၤ. ဒ်သးအိၣ်အသိးန့ၣ် ပစုလီၢ်
ခိၣ်ခိၣ်တအိၣ်ဘၣ်,ဒီးပမၤတ သ့ဘၣ်,တလၢဒီးဘၣ်.ဘၣ်ဆၣ်ဒီးတဒိတဆံးဖဲပမၤသ့န့ၣ်ပမၤစ့ၢ်ကီၤလၢ ပသ့ၣ်တံာ်ပသးဖျု,

ဒ်ပစံးတၢ်အသိးလၢပသုၣ်ကံၢ်ပသးလဲၣ်စ့ၢ်ကိးလီၤ.ဒ်န့ၣ်အသိးသရၣ်န့ၣ်,တုၤအံၤဆူညါဒ်သိးပလုၢ်အိၣ်လုၢ်အိၣ်ပသရၣ်ကလၢ
ထီၣ်ကပွဲၤထီၣ်ဒီးဘါထုကဖၣ်န့ၢ်ပဂီၢ်တက့ၢ်."ဒီးသရၣ်ကစံးဆါအီၤ,"ဒီပုၤဝဲၣ်သးပုၤဃရံးအပျဲၢ်,ဒီးတၢ်အိၣ်ဖျိၣ်ခဲလၢ်တဖၣ်
သ့ၣ်န့ၣ်,မံၤသုၣ်သုၣ်တက့ၢ်.တသ့ဖဲအသ့,သုမၤတၢ်မၤအဂ့ၤတမံၤလၢသုသုၣ်အံၤတဲာ်သးအံၤတဲာ်ဒ်န့ၣ်,အိၣ်ဖျါထဲပုၤကညီ
အမဲၣ်ညါတမ့ၢ်ဘၣ်.လၢပၤယွၤအမဲၣ်ညါစ့ၢ်ကိးလီၤ.သုဝဲသ့ၣ်အံၤပမုၢ်လၢယွၤအဘီအမုၢ်ကဲထီၣ်လၢသုကျါအလီၢ်အိၣ်လီၤ.
ဒီးပသးခမုၢ်လၢသုခိၣ်သုဃိလၢသုမၤတၢ်မၤလၢအဂ့ၤကတၢ်တမံၤန့ၣ်လီၤ."အကူၢ်မ့ၢ်အပျဲၢ်အဘီတဖၣ်တဖၣ်လၢအ
အိၣ်လၢကီၢ်ပံၤယီၤ,လၢကီၢ်ပသံၣ်လၢအဘၣ်ဃးဒီးသရၣ်အးဘးတခီအံၤ,မ့ၢ်အအိၣ်ဒီးအတၢ်မၤဘျီအသရၣ်ဒ်ဝဲဒ်စ့ၢ်စ့ၢ်
န့ၣ်သတးဒီး,တလၢ်လၢဘၣ်ပုၤအမ့ၢ်ရံၤကၤဖိပဒီပုၤဝဲၣ်လၢအမုၢ်လၢပုၤလၢပကကဲထီၣ်ဃရံးအပျဲၢ်တံၢ်နီၢ်အဘီတံၢ်နီၢ်,တုၤမ့ၢ်
ပသံပသုတလီၤဘၣ်ဆူလၢတၢ်ဒဲးဘးအတၢ်ဖျိၣ်အပူၤန့ၣ်,ဒီးသုတအိၣ်လၢလၢတၢ်ဒဲးဘးအတၢ်ဖျိၣ်န့ၣ်အထူအယီၢ်တဂ့ၤ
န့ၣ်ပုၤအမ့ၢ်ရံၤဖိအစ့မၤဘျီယွၤလၢအသုၣ်အံၤတဲာ်အသးအံၤတဲာ်န့ၣ်,လၢအအါလၢပုၤသိၣ်သီတၢ်အဂီၢ်န့ၣ်တလၢ်လၢဘၣ်.
ပစံးဒ်န့ၣ်အလီၢ်အိၣ်စ့ၢ်ကိးတဒိၣ်တဆံးတအါတစ့ၤလီၤ. စီၤသၣ်ရံၤ

The history of *taohpwoh* started like this. At the beginning, Christ's *taohpwoh* was in *pēe yāw kaw* and authorities tried very hard to stop it. The reason is that they did not want us to adopt *gāw lā wah* culture when we worship. However, *a plēh a bàw* did not listen. The reason was because we were happy, and it was so appealing to us. Because we did not listen to *pēe yāw* authorities, some got into trouble and lost assets. The reason for facing persecution came about like this. In order to create fear within those who do not have fear and to encourage the will to abandon what one does not want to abandon, authorities arrest some of us and put us in jail. The reason for losing assets was like this: Authorities arrested *a plēh a bàw* and put them in jail and tortured them. Elder *a plēh a bàw* negotiated for their release and authorities agreed to release them when money is paid. As ordered by authorities for the release of their siblings, *a plēh a bàw* had to collect assets in an amount that they could afford. Sometimes it costs a hundred or sometimes more. Because of love and empathy, those who are experiencing

persecution have not been abandoned to be slaves and disappeared. This is because *a plēh a bāw* love one another. These days we *a plēh a bāw* in *kaw Pathi* are liberated from this kind of persecution because of lord Ywa's help. We think that it is necessary for lord Ywa to twist and change *pēe yāw* mentality. If they always persecute Ywa's children, we have to always feed on our tears. We believe that as there are both good and bad times, there is both sadness and happiness. In our belief, we are now witnessing some small changes as there is a decrease in persecution.

Another thing is happening these days that is unlike time in the past when we were in the hands of Satan. In the past, people stayed together in places as small as five, six or seven houses. Now in a village there are 20, 30 or 40 households. In addition, each village has a *thara* to guide them and we would say to feed the most delicious and the sweetest food for their *thā*²⁶. Some ceremonial halls have been built in order to collectively worship Ywa on rest days. A hope for the future is for every village to have their own ceremonial hall. The reason is *pēe yāw* ferocious actions have been reducing and they could not be like this forever because of Ywa's power.

There is also another thing: houses are built and food is given to *thara* who guide them and they pay for *thara* when *pēe yāw* asks for taxes. Some villages even manage to have *thara* as well as those who teach children.

But this cannot be implemented in every village. However, this is something that we are hoping to happen in the future. When compared to the numbers of those who have enough [*thara*] to those who do not, the number with enough is larger because most larger villages have enough [*thara*] and smaller village still experience inadequacy. *Thara* who give guidance in *kaw Pathi* are not getting monthly salary of six, seven *bah* from *thara gāw lā wah*. *A plēh a bāw* looks after them and only when addition is required *thara gāw lā wah* will offer a small amount.

²⁶ A S'gaw word for heart, mind and spirit.

Thara who give guidance himself wouldn't approach and say, oh *tharah* my *a pleh a bàw* cannot provide enough for me, therefore give me this amount of money. He will record what the villagers provide him such as money, paddy, rice, fish paste, medicine and every kind of food that Pwakanyaw traditionally consume and to present at the meeting of collective *taohpwoh* matters that normally happens in dry season of November and December. This meeting will be joined Pwakanyaw *thara*, *gāw lā wah thara* and also elders and recorded notes will be handed to *gāw lā wah thara* and read out in public and if *thara* thinks that *thara* who give guidance should get more than what *a pleh a bàw* pays him and decides to give him more, he would take it. Another *thara* will receive donations from *a pleh a bàw* and if *gāw lā wah thara* think that he had received enough then he would also accept that. If he thinks that he has received enough and if *gāw lā wah thara* offers him in thousands, he would refuse, taking Ywa's money freely. Of course, we know the reason of this kind of action. The same with *thara* from larger village who *a pleh a bàw* can look after him, if *gāw lā wah thara* offers him silver and gold, he won't take it. He would respond to *gāw lā wah thara*, 'Oh *thara* don't give it to me, I won't take it, because I now have my *a pleh a bàw* and of course they will look after me. I am not becoming *tharah* who give guidance because I want to collect gold and money in my pocket. I am working for Ywa and Ywa will look after me. If my *a pleh a bàw* can afford a meal, it is enough to have a meal. I am not taking Ywa's money for nothing.' And elders in the village will also say 'oh *thara*, it is our job to look after our *thara* who is guiding us, please do not take money from American people and give it to our *thara*, we are Pwakanyaw and we will look after each other, do not ever worry that our *thara* will go hungry.'

Thara from a small village will be satisfied with what his *a pleh a bàw* can afford. He won't ever say 'oh *thara*, it is not enough.' Elders from small villages will stand up and say 'oh *thara*, we have our *thara* who guides us so therefore we are willing to return the favor by providing food. However, we cannot fulfill it as we wish it to be. The reason is we Pwakanyaw are poor

and live under pēe yāw and ta lūh rules. We do not have assets and could not do much and it is incomplete but in ways we can, we will do it wholeheartedly. Therefore, from now and ever, do pray for us so that we can look after our *thara* better.’ And *thara* will respond Elder followers of Christ and all *taohpwoh* members, may you all be well and happy. Because you have done the good work with your whole heart and this is not only known by human but also to father Ywa. We have hope the kingdom of Ywa will emerge among you. We are so grateful for the good work that you have done. Because of *a plēh a bàw* in kaw pēe yāw and kaw Pathi has their own way of providing for their *thara* therefore the money donated by Americans who want you to be a genuine *a plēh a bàw* of Christ is not wasted. (166-170 July, 1851)

Appendix II: T. Thanbyah Excerpt, 1903

The story of t'e 'lost b'ok' as told by T. Than Byah in his book, *Karen customs, ceremonies and poetry* (1903, pp. 12-15):

အအံ့မုတ်တံခံစိတဲစိတဲမံဘဉ်ယးပုကညီအလံာ်အဂုၤ.-တၢ်စံးဝဲဒၣ်လၢပျၢၤန့ၣ်ပုကညီအံၤအိၣ်ဒီးဒီပုဝဲၣ်ခွဲၣ်န့ၣ်လီၤ.

ပုန့ၣ်လၢအကျါအံၤပုကညီမုၢ်အဝဲၣ်ကိဒီးကိလၢဝါမုၢ်ပုသဒါလီၤ.တၢ်စံခံစိတဲစိတဲလၢပုအဂၤတဖၣ်အဂုၤအိၣ်ဘဉ်ဆဉ်တၢ်
အဆၢတစဲဘူးဒ်သိးတၢ်စံခံစိတဲစိတဲလၢပုကညီဒီးကိလၢဝါအဘၢၣ်စၢၤဘဉ်.ပုဒီပုဝဲၣ်ခွဲၣ်န့ၣ်လၢအံၤအပၢ်မုၢ်ယွၤလီၤ.ဒ်န့ၣ်အ
ဃိယွၤန့ၣ်တၢ်ကိးအီၤလၢပၢ်ကစၢ်ယွၤလီၤ.ဖိန့ၣ်လၢအံၤပၢ်အဲၣ်ဒိၣ်မးလီၤ.မ့ၢ်ဖိဝဲၣ်ကိန့ၣ်တၢ်အဲၣ်အဒိၣ်အိၣ်လၢအဂီၢ်လီၤ.တၢ်စံးဝဲ
ဒၣ်,ဘဉ်မုၢ်တနံၤတခါန့ၣ်,ယွၤကက့ၤဆူအအိၣ်အဆိးအလီၢ်န့ၣ်,ဟဲက့ၤဘဉ်လၢအဖိဝဲၣ်ကိပုကညီအအိၣ်ဒီးစံးဝဲဒၣ်,"ဖိဝဲၣ်ကိ
ပုကညီဧ,လဲၤဆှၢပၢ်တဘီမီၤ."ပုကညီတခါမုၢ်ပုမၤခူးဖိဒီးဘဉ်ကျါနီၣ်သ့သ့တနံၤလီၤ.လၢတၢ်န့ၣ်အဃိစံးဆၢပၢ်ကစၢ်ယွၤ
ဒီးစံးဝဲ,"မုၢ်တနံၤအံၤနီၣ်တကရၢထီၣ်အါမးလီၤပၢ်ဧ,စလဲၤဆှၢန့ၣ်တချုးဒီးဘဉ်.မ့ၢ်က့ၤစိၣ်စိးကုတဘျီအံၤတက့ၢ်."ပုက
ညီတဆှၢယွၤဘဉ်,ဟ့ၣ်လီၤဝဲထဲစိးကုတဘျီလီၤ.ယွၤက့ၤကဒီးဆူညါဒီးတုၤလၢပံၤယီၤအအိၣ်ဒီးစံးဝဲ"ပံၤယီၤဧ,လဲၤဆှၢယၤ
တက့ၢ်.ပံၤယီၤတခါစံးဆၢယွၤ,စလဲၤတချုးဘဉ်.က့ၤစိၣ်စိးတဘျီတက့ၢ်.ဒီးယွၤက့ၤဒ်န့ၣ်ဆူညါကွၢ်ကွၢ်ဒီးမၤပုဆှၢအီၤတ
တီၤဘဉ်တတီၤဘဉ်ဆဉ်ပုတဆှၢအီၤဘဉ်.မ့ၢ်က့ၤတုၤလၢကိလၢဝါအအိၣ်လီၤ.ယွၤစံးကိလၢဝါန့ၣ်"ဖိဒါကိလၢဧလဲၤဆှၢ
ပၢ်တဘီမီၤ."တၢ်လၢကိလၢဝါအံၤတၢ်စံးဝဲလၢအအိၣ်ထံးန့ၣ်မုၢ်ပုအဖျိၣ်ဒိၣ်မးတဂၤလီၤ.တုၤယွၤမၤအဆှၢအီၤန့ၣ်,ကိလၢစံး
ဆၢအီၤ,"ပၢ်ဧတၢ်မိၣ်ဆှၢစသးန့ၣ်ယၢ်,ဘဉ်ဆဉ်စတၢ်တအိၣ်နီၣ်တမံၤဘဉ်."ယွၤစံးကိလၢဝါန့ၣ်,နတၢ်မုၢ်တအိၣ်နီၣ်တမံၤသန့
က့ၤနသးမုၢ်အိၣ်ဆှၢယၤဒီးဟဲကံၢ်နဲၣ်"အန့ၣ်တစုယွၤဒီးပုသဒါကိလၢဝါခံၣ်အံၤပိၣ်လိာ်အခံလီၤ.လဲၤလဲၤတၢ်ဒ်န့ၣ်တုၤလၢပိၣ်
လဲၣ်ဖးဒိၣ်အသရူၤထံးလီၤ.ယွၤဟံၤလီၤစိးကုလၢပုကညီဟ့ၣ်အီၤန့ၣ်ဒီးတၢ်ကဲထီၣ်လၢကဘီဒီးထီၣ်ဒီးဝဲဒ်ကဘီအသိးဒီဖိပၢ်ခံ
ဂၤန့ၣ်လီၤ.လဲၤတၢ်ဒ်န့ၣ်တဘျုးအဆၢကတီၢ်ဒီးတုၤလၢယွၤအိၣ်အလီၢ်န့ၣ်,ဒီးယွၤစံးကိလၢဝါန့ၣ်,အအံၤနဟဲဆှၢပၢ်အံၤတုၤ
ကီးလံၤ.ပၢ်ကဟ့ၣ်န့ၣ်လၢတၢ်ဟ့ၣ်တမံၤဒီးပၢ်ကဟ့ၣ်ယုၢ်စ့ၢ်ကီးနဝဲၣ်တဖၣ်အတၢ်လီၤ.ယွၤဟ့ၣ်လီၤကိလၢဝါန့ၣ်လံာ်တၢ်ဖဲး,

ပံ့ပိုးပေးရန်အတွက်အလံာ်ထီလုာ်,မုတမုာ်ပုာ်ကညီန့ာ်ယွာ်ဟ့ာ်ယုာ်အီာ်လၢလံာ်ထူလံာ်စ့လီာ်.ယွာ်စံးကီာ်လၢဝါန့ာ်,"အအံာ်မံာ်
န့ာ်န့ာ်န့ာ်ပုာ်ကညီအလံာ်အံာ်တုာ်အတုာ်တက့ာ်."ဒီးယွာ်မၤလိာ်လၢကီာ်လၢဝါကဟ့ာ်က့ာ်ပုာ်ကညီအစီးကုလီာ်.

ယွာ်မၤလိာ်ကီာ်လၢဝါအတၢ်ဒ်န့ာ်ဝံာ်ဒီးကီာ်လၢဝါဒီးထီာ်စီးကုလၢအကဲထီာ်လၢကဘီန့ာ်ဒီးဟဲက့ာ်က့ာ်လီာ်.ကီာ်လၢဝါဟဲက့ာ်
လၢက့ာ်န့ာ်ကွာ်တၢ်ဟ့ာ်လၢယွာ်ဟ့ာ်လီာ်လၢအစုပူာ်တဖၣ်တမံာ်ဘၣ်တမံာ်ဒီးဆိကမိာ်ဝဲလၢအသးဒ်အံာ်"ပာ်တဂၤစ့ာ်အီာ်
တခီတၢ်ဘျးမးစသးလီာ်.မ့မ့ာ်အဖိပုာ်ကညီတခီအတၢ်ဆုာ်အီာ်ဘၣ်.မ့ာ်သနာ်က့ာ်တခီဟ့ာ်ယုာ်ထဲလံာ်တၢ်ဖဲးတဘျးလီာ်.အဖိ
ပုာ်ကညီတဆုာ်အီာ်သနာ်က့ာ်ဒီးဝဲလၢလံာ်ထူလံာ်စ့လီာ်လဲာ်."ကီာ်လၢဝါဆိကမိာ်ဒ်န့ာ်ဒီးအိးထီာ်ဖးလံာ်ထူလံာ်စ့လၢယွာ်
ဟ့ာ်ယုာ်ပုာ်ကညီန့ာ်ဒီးထံာ်မးဝဲထဲယွာ်အတၢ်ဖဲးတၢ်မၤ,ယွာ်အတၢ်မၤလိာ်တၢ်ဆိကမိာ်တဖၣ်ဒီးတၢ်မၤအိာ်မၤအီာ်တဖၣ်လီာ်.
ကယံာ်တၢ်လၢအကမၤဂ့ၤပုာ်ကညီတဖၣ်ခဲလၢာ်အိာ်လၢလံာ်ထူလံာ်စ့အပူာ်န့ာ်လီာ်.လၢတၢ်န့ာ်အဃိကီာ်လၢဝါလဲလိာ်ပုာ်ကညီ
အလံာ်ထူလံာ်စ့န့ာ်ဒီးတၢ်ဖဲးဒီးဟံးန့ာ်ဝဲဒီးဟ့ာ်ယုာ်ပုာ်ကညီလၢလံာ်တၢ်ဖဲးလၢယွာ်ဟ့ာ်ဒ်အီာ်န့ာ်လီာ်.

ကီာ်လၢဝါဟဲက့ာ်တုာ်ပံ့ပိုးအအိာ်ဒီးဟ့ာ်က့ာ်ပယီာ်အလံာ်ထီလုာ်ဒီးမၤပံ့ပိုးလဲာ်ဆုာ်န့ာ်ပုာ်ကညီလၢလံာ်တၢ်ဖဲးန့ာ်လီာ်.စီး
ကူတဘျးလၢကီာ်လၢဝါတဟ့ာ်က့ာ်ပုာ်ကညီဘၣ်.ပံ့ပိုးတခီဟံးထီာ်လံာ်တၢ်ဖဲးဒီးလဲာ်ဆုာ်ပုာ်ကညီအအိာ်ဒီးစံးဝဲ,"ပုာ်ကညီ
ဒၤ,ယွာ်ဟ့ာ်ယုာ်န့ာ်လံာ်တၢ်ဖဲး,ဟဲဟံးတက့ာ်."ပုာ်ကညီတခီကျိာ်နီာ်ဝံာ်ထၢာ်အခိာ်တချုးဘၣ်.မ့မ့ာ်ပုာ်ကညီတခီထဲအကျိာ်နီာ်
န့ာ်သါဘျးတချုးဘၣ်.မၤတၢ်တုာ်မုာ်ဘၣ်ဒီးဟံးထီာ်အသးဒီးဒဲးတၢ်ဒီးတၢ်လုာ်ဝံာ်ကဒ်ကဒ်ဒီးက့ာ်က့ာ်ဆူဟံာ်လီာ်.တလဲဟံး
က့ာ်ဘၣ်လံာ်ဘၣ်.က့ာ်က့ာ်တုာ်လၢဟံာ်ဒီးသ့ာ်နီာ်အသးဒီးစံးဝဲ,"ဟၢာ်အၤ,ယွာ်ဟ့ာ်ယုာ်ပယီာ်အိာ်လၢသ့ာ်ခိာ်ဆၢာ်အလီာ်န့ာ်စ
သးပုၤနီာ်စသးတဘီဃီ,ခဲမုာ်ဆုာ်စကဟဲက့ာ်စိာ်က့ာ်လီာ်."ဘၣ်ဆၢာ်ဒီးမၤကဒီးတနံၤန့ာ်ပုာ်ကညီမၤကဒီးတၢ်သ့တနံၤကျါဒီး
လၢမုာ်ဘၣ်န့ာ်ကဒ်ကဒ်ဒီးသးပုၤနီာ်ကဒီးလံာ်လီာ်.မၤဒ်န့ာ်အါနံၤအါသီဒီးမ့ာ်အူဟဲက့ာ်အိာ်တၢ်လၢပုၤဒီးအိာ်ဃုာ်သ့ာ်ခိာ်
ဆၢာ်ဒီးလံာ်ခဲလၢာ်ခဲဆူလီာ်. တၢ်အံာ်ဘၣ်ဆၢာ်ပုာ်ကညီတသ့ာ်နီာ်အသးဘၣ်,သုးနံၤသုးသီဒ်တၢ်ကိးနံၤဒဲးလီာ်.ထါစံးဝဲဒ်အံာ်,

“ယွဟွာ်ယုပလံာ်တံးဖံး

အိၣ်လၢသမံယုခိၣ်ထံး

ကွဲးလံာ်လၢမူလံာ်တံးဖံး

လံာ်ဟါမံတံးတချုးခိး.”

ပုၤကညီတဟံကါတၢ်နီတမံၤဘၣ်.ဒီးကျိၣ်ဒၣ်အနီၣ်ကိးမုၢ်န့ၣ်ဒီးလီၤ.မ့ၢ်တုၤလီၤလၢတၢ်အၢၣ်လီၤကလၢဒီးပအူၤထီးသ့ၣ်ခိၣ်
ဆၢၣ်အကဘိၣ်လၢလံာ်အိၣ်လၢအလိၤန့ၣ်,ထီးလဲၤကဒွံပအူၤအဒီးဆီတဖၣ်လဲၤဝဲးအိၣ်ပအူၤလီၤ.အန့ၣ်တဘီပုၤကညီသ့ၣ်
နီၣ်ထီၣ်အသးဒီးလဲၤကွၢ်ဝဲဒီးထံၣ်လၢထီးကဒွံတၢ်ဒီးဆီဝဲးတၢ်အဃိလူၤဒိထီးလူၤဒိဆီဒီးဟဲက့ၤတၢ်က့ၤဖၣ်ဆါဒီးသ့ၣ်လးတဖၣ်
န့ၣ်လီၤ.

တၢ်တမံၤအံၤလီၤတၢ်လီၤဆီမးလီၤ.တုၤပုၤကညီဘၣ်တၢ်ဆူးတၢ်ဆါကအိၣ်ဘူးန့ၣ်မၤန့ၣ်ဝၣ်ထီၣ်တကျိၣ်ဒီးသ့ၣ်လးတလိၣ်ဒီး
ဒွဲးသ့ၣ်လးလၢဝၣ်ထီၣ်အလိၤလီၤ.တၢ်အံၤမံၤလံာ်အိၣ်ဘၣ်လၢသ့ၣ်ခိၣ်ဆၢၣ်အလိၤအဃိလီၤ.ပုၤကညီအိၣ်ဘူးန့ၣ်အိၣ်ဝဲလၢ
ဆီဒီးအိၣ်ဝဲလၢထီးလီၤ.တၢ်အံၤလီၤကံးထီးကလဲၤကဒွံဘၣ်သ့ၣ်ခိၣ်ဆၢၣ်အသ့ၣ်လးဖၣ်ဆါဒီးဆီလဲၤဝဲးဘၣ်အဃိလီၤ.တုၤပုၤ
ကညီသံဒီးတၢ်မၤကွၢ်အီၤလၢအကလၢကဟဲက့ၤဒီးတဟဲက့ၤဘၣ်လဲၣ်န့ၣ်,မၤန့ၣ်ဖၣ်ဆါလၢလၢဆီကဆူးပူၤဝံၤတစ့ၤန့ၣ်ဝဲက
မူၣ်ခူၣ်ဝံၤဟံလီၤဝဲလၢကီၢ်လဲၣ်ပူၤဒီးဟဲဝဲဒီးတၢ်အိၣ်တၢ်အိၣ်သီတနုၤကျၢၤလီၤ.လၢဂီၤတခါမ့ၢ်ထံၣ်ဝဲအိၣ်လီၤဖိဃၣ်အမံၤညါဆူ
တၢ်ပျီပူၤန့ၣ်စံးဝဲလၢတဟဲက့ၤလၢဘၣ်.မ့ၢ်ထံၣ်ဝဲအိၣ်လီၤအခိၣ်မ့ၢ်လိၤဆူဟံၣ်န့ၣ်စံးဝဲလၢအကဟဲက့ၤလိၣ်ထီၣ်ဒီးလီၤ.

လံာ်တံးဖံးအံၤတမ့ၢ်ယွဟွာ်ယုပုၤကညီအလံာ်လၢကိၤလၢဝါအစုပူၤန့ၣ်ဘၣ်ဒီးလံာ်အံၤဒၣ်လဲၣ်ကိၤလၢဝါတဆုၤလၢအကစၢ်
ဒၣ်ဝဲဒ်ယွမၤလိာ်အီၤအသိးဘၣ်.ဒ်ပုၤကညီအတၢ်စံၣ်စိၤတဲစိၤဟဲဝဲလၢထးအသိး,ကိၤလၢဝါကဘၣ်ဆုၤပုၤကညီအလံာ်ထူ
လံာ်စုၤလၢယွဟွာ်လီၤအီၤန့ၣ်တုၤအတုၤလီၤ.ဒီးစီးကုၤန့ၣ်ကဘၣ်ဟ့ၣ်က့ၤပုၤကညီလီၤ.တၢ်အံၤလၢမိၢ်စိၤဟံၣ်ဃၣ်န့ၣ်,ပုၤကညီ
ကွၢ်လၢအကျဲလီၤ.ဒ်ပစံးလံာ်ထးအသိးန့ၣ်ထါဘၣ်ဃးလံာ်တံးဖံးန့ၣ်,

“ယွဟ့ၣ်ယုပလံာ်တံးဖိး

အိၣ်လၢသမံယုၣ်ခိၣ်ထံး

လံာ်အမဲၣ်ခီအဖျါၣ်ဆံး

ပုၤဒိနုၤဖးတဘၣ်ဒီး

ကွဲးလံာ်လၢရူလံာ်တံးဖိး

လံာ်ဟါမၢ်တၢ်တချုးခံး.”

ထဲလံာ်တံးဖိးတဘျီအံၤဘၣ်ဆၢတၢ်တဆှၢတုၤအတုၤပုၤကညီအစုပူၤဒီးပုၤကညီတကန့ၣ်ဃုာ်ဘၣ်ဒီးအတၢ်ဟါမၢ်သဒၣ်
ကွံာ်အီၤလီၤဒီးပုၤကညီစံးဝဲသါလံာ်ဟါမၢ်အဃိသါဘၣ်ဖျါဘၣ်နးလီၤလံာ်ကဘၣ်တုၤက့ၤတစုသပုၤတၢ်လီၤကီၤလၢဝါက
ဘၣ်ဆှၢတုၤအတုၤလီၤတုၤပုၤကညီန့ၣ်က့ၤအလံာ်အလဲၣ်လၢယွဟ့ၣ်ယုအီၤဒီးမၤလိသ့က့ၤအသးန့ၣ်ကအိၣ်မုၢ်အိၣ်ခုၣ်ဘၣ်
က့ၤလီၤစံးဝဲဒၣ်,အန့ၣ်မုၢ်ပုၤကညီအတၢ်ကွၢ်လၢဒီးအတၢ်မုၢ်လၢအမိၢ်အပၢ်လၢပျၢၤပိၣ်ဃဲတဲယုၤအီၤန့ၣ်လီၤတၢ်အံၤဘၣ်ထွဲ
လံာ်ဃုာ်အသးဒီးပုၤကညီအထံအကီၢ်အလိၣ်အပၤအတၢ်ကတံာ်ကတီၤက့ၤတဖၣ်ခဲလၢကလီၤလၢတၢ်န့ၣ်အဃိပုၤကညီအိၣ်
လီၤဖးဒီးပုၤကလုာ်ဂၤတဖၣ်ဘၣ်ဃးတၢ်ထီၣ်ဖိန့ၣ်မၤဒီးတၢ်ကဲထီၣ်တကလုာ်ဃီဒီးပုၤကန့ၣ်,တုၤမုၢ်မဆါတနံၤအံၤလီၤပုၤကညီ
အိၣ်ဘျးန့ၣ်တၢ်တဟ့ၣ်ဘၣ်အခွဲးလၢအကတီၤပံၤယီၤအကျိၣ်ဘၣ်.တကတီၤဘၣ်ပုၤဂၤအကျိၣ်ဘၣ်.ဘၣ်ကတီၤထဲပုၤကညီအ
ကျိၣ်တမံၤဇီၤလီၤ.

This is one account of Pwakanyaw lost book [written culture]. There is a saying in the past that Pwakanyaw have seven brothers. Among these seven brothers, Pwakanyaw is the oldest and gāw lā wah is the youngest. Sayings regarding the interaction with his other sibling was there but they were not like stories of the interaction between Pwakanyaw and gāw lā wah. The father of these seven brothers is Ywa therefore Ywa is called father lord Ywa. Father loves his seven sons so much and his immense affection is kept for his eldest son. One day Ywa was

going back to where he lived and passed the place of his eldest, Pwakanyaw, and called his son to accompany him home. ‘Pwakanyaw my older son, do accompany me?’ Pwakanyaw was a cultivator and was busy clearing weeds all day. Therefore, he replied to his father, lord Ywa, “There are so many weeds to clear today father, I do not have time to accompany you but take a rain cover with you.” Pwakanyaw declined to accompany Ywa but gave Ywa his rain cover. Ywa carried on and arrived where pēe yāw lives and again asked pēe yāw to accompany him. Pēe yāw refused and said he cannot but asked Ywa to take his paddle. And Ywa carried on further and asked his son to accompany him, but nobody agreed. Finally, Ywa arrived at gāw lā wah place. Ywa said, “my youngest son, do accompany me home.” There was a saying that gāw lā wah was once a very poor person. When he heard Ywa asked him to come along, he answered, “I want to send you off my father, but I don’t have anything with me.” Ywa said he could come if he was willing. Then Ywa and younger brother gāw lā wah went together. As they went, they arrived on the edge of a large ocean. Ywa dropped the rain cover that Pwakanyaw gave on the water, and it turn into a boat. Father and son boarded the boat and went to the place where Ywa lives. They went on for a while and reached where Ywa lived and Ywa told his son, “I have reached my place with you, and I am going to give you something and also something for your brothers.” Ywa gave *gāw lā wah* a book of leather, a palm book for pēe yāw and a golden and silver book for Pwakanyaw. And Ywa sai‘, ‘make sure you send this book to your Pwakanyaw broth’r.’ And Ywa asked gāw lā wah to give Pwakanyaw’s rain cover back.

After Ywa gave his instruction to gāw lā wah, gāw lā wah got on the boat that had transformed from the rain cover and returned home. On the way back, he inspected all the gifts that Ywa gave one by one, and he thought, “I accompanied father and it was exhausting, and he gave me this leather book. His son Pwakanyaw did not come with him, but he gave him the golden and silver book.” While gāw lā wah thinking like that he opened the golden and silver book and

saw that it was the work of Ywa, his teachings and blessings and instructions for different means of livelihood. Everything that will be beneficial to Pwakanyaw were written there. Because of that gāw lā wah took the golden and silver book and decided to give the leather book Ywa gave him to Pwakanyaw.

When gāw lā wah reached pēe yāw, he gave his palm book and asked pēe yāw to deliver the leather book to Pwakanyaw. Gāw lā wah did not give the rain cover back to Pwakanyaw. Pēe yāw took the leather book and went to Pwakanyaw and called out, “Pwakanyaw, father gave you a leather book, come and get it.” Pwakanyaw heard his brother and replied, “yes leave it on a stump there.” Pēe yāw placed the leather book on the stump and pēe yāw went. Pwakanyaw kept on weeding and had no time to rest. By sunset he picked up his bamboo basket, took some vegetables and went home. He did not pick up his book. When he arrived home, he remembered and said, “Oh well! Ywa gave us a book and it was placed on the stump, and I forgot to bring it back with me. I will bring it back tomorrow.” The next day, he worked all day again and forgot the book. Many days passed and there was a bush fire that burnt the stump and the book along with it. Pwakanyaw do not remember and keep procrastinating every day. And there is a *hta* which is said like this:

Ywa gave us the book of leather,

Placed at the foot of *tha mee yu*²⁷,

The leather book on which was written the universe,

Disappeared before dusk.

Pwakanyaw fall into a deep negligence and keep weeding every day. When the cloud is clear, termites built their nest on the stump where the book was placed, and pigs and chickens came

²⁷ A Pwakanyaw demon that guarding the entrance of the hell.

to dig and scratch and feed on the termites. At that time Pwakanyaw remembered the book but when they went to check on it they saw the pigs and chickens and so shooed them away. Pwakanyaw gathered the ashes that were left behind.

Something very curious. When Pwakanyaw encounter sickness and conduct a healing ritual *àw bwä*,²⁸ they pick up a piece of bamboo with a charcoal to make prediction. The practice was derived from the fact that the book was once on the stump and become charcoal. Pwakanyaw healing ritual *àw bwä* includes the consumption of chicken and pig. And this is because pig dug and chicken scratched and both fed among the stump that became charcoal after it was burnt. When a person dies, to know his/her reincarnation people collect ashes from the fire pit in the kitchen and take a *ga mòo kòo*²⁹ and place it on a large tray with some food and leave it over night. In the morning when the tiny foot steps of the insect face toward outside the house it means the person has left and is not returning. If they see tiny foot steps face toward the inner side of the house then the person will reincarnate again.

The leather book is not the book that Ywa gave to Pwakanyaw through Gāw lā wah and Gāw lā wah did not even bother to deliver it by himself as Ywa commanded. A Pwakanyaw saying remains: Gāw lā wah must hand the silver and golden book to Pwakanyaw and also return the rain cover to Pwakanyaw. This is something that Pwakanyaw had waited for for so long:

Ywa gave us the book of leather,

Placed at the foot of *tha mee yu*,

The script in the book was small,

Those who listen cannot read it,

²⁸ Pwakanyaw ritual

²⁹ A kind of insect

The leather book written in the office,

Disappeared before dusk.

A leather book failed to be placed in the hand of Pwakanyaw and Pwakanyaw also ignored it therefore the book was lost. Pwakanyaw interpret suffering as caused by the loss of the book and therefore the book must be returned. Gāw lā wah must bring it back and hand it back to Pwakanyaw. When Pwakanyaw received the book that Ywa gifted, he will learn to read it and live well. That's the expectation of Pwakanyaw as based on the saying passed down by ancestors. This is also related to the setting of Pwakanyaw *hteekaw* and governing structure. Therefore, Pwakanyaw live separately from each other and avoid intermarriage that leads to becoming one group. Pwakanyaw who practice àw *bwā* do not allow the speaking of pēe yāw language during the ritual, they do not speak other languages, and must only speak Pwakanyaw language.

Appendix III: *Hta* about Ywa

Hta about Ywa (copied and translated from a Pwakanyaw's *hta* book by Saw Tot)

ဟိန်ခိန်လၢပျၢတအိန်ဒဲး
အိန်ထဲကလီဒီးကလံၤ
လၢပျၢမ့ၢ်ထံတလဲးလဲး
အိန်ထဲလုၢ်မဲးဒီးဝုၢ်မဲး
တၢ်နီၤနီၤနီၤမ့ၢ်ထံ
ထိန်ချုၢ်အိန်လၢညၢ်မဲၢ်ခံ

The Earth has yet existed,
There was only the wind and thunder,
Liquid sparkled and sprinkled,
There was only *lòo mēh dāw wà mēh*³⁰,
Water has gathered,
*Tohklū*³¹ landed on a fish tail.

တပျီခိန်လၢဂုၢ်သီဝံ
တပျီလၢလၢဂုၢ်သီဝံ
ထူဟဲလီၤဟဲတဘျုးဒဲး
ယွၤဟဲလီၤဟဲတဘျုးဒဲး
တၢ်ဟဲလီၤဆိမ့ၢ်ကလံၤ
လဲၤတရံးမူခိန်ခိန်ထံး

On a bush, a venomous snake is hibernating,
Under a bush, a venomous snake is hibernating,
Gold³² is afraid to come,
Ywa is afraid to come,
So first to come down was the wind,
Travelling across the universe.

ဟိန်ခိန်လၢပျၢဘၣ်တသံး
ယွၤတၢ်လၢအခိန်နၢ်ခံ
ဟိန်ခိန်လၢပျၢဘၣ်တကး
ယွၤတၢ်လၢအခိန်ညါသး

The Earth was the size of a quarter coin,
Marked by ywa's heel,
The Earth size is incomparable,
Ywa used its sole to mark it,

ထံဖဲးခိန်မဲးခုၣ်လုၢ်လုၢ်
ဘျုးဘျုးတီထံလၢအစု
ထံဖဲးခိန်မဲးခုၣ်ဝါဝါ
ဘျုးဘျုးတီထံအစုညါ

Particles are flying across the surface of water,
A Swallow dams water with its foot,
On the water, particles are spraying white,
A swallow blocks water with its foot.

ဒုၣ်သုၣ်ပီၢ်ထံယွၤစၢၢ်ပျံၤ
ပီၢ်လဲၣ်ပူၤထံယွၤတကံ
ဒုၣ်သုၣ်ပီၢ်ထံယွၤစၢၢ်ဆါ
ပီၢ်လဲၣ်ပူၤထံယွၤကဒါ

A toad swims and ywa ties a rope,
A current is forming in the ocean,
A toad swims and Ywa ties a bamboo thread,

³⁰ The word *mēh* in S'gaw Karen is sand so I translated as fine dust and particles.

³¹ Lesser racket-tailed drongo

³² Another name of Pwakanyaw diety Ywa.

ပတီၢ်ထီၣ်မူအထူၣ်ဆံ
ဘျၣ်ဘျီၣ်ဝါယူၤဆုၣ်မူထံး
ပတီၢ်ထီၣ်မူအထူၣ်အါ
ယူၤဆုၣ်မူထံးဘျၣ်ဘျီၣ်ဝါ

ယွၤမိၢ်သ့ၣ်လီၤမိၢ်ဘိစ့
ကဲထီၣ်ချၢၣ်လဲၤကဲအဒု
ယွၤမိၢ်သ့ၣ်လီၤမိၢ်ဘိထူ
ကဲထီၣ်ချၢၣ်လဲၤကဲအဖူ

ယွၤဟဲလီၤလၢချၢၣ်လၢၣ်ကျါ
ချၢၣ်လၢၣ်မ့ၢ်ယွၤအဘိသွါ
ယွၤဟဲလီၤလၢချၢၣ်လၢၣ်လိၤ
ချၢၣ်လၢၣ်မ့ၢ်ယွၤအတိၤဘိ

လၢၢ်မုၢ်မုၢ်ထူတုယွၤတု
လၢၢ်ကီၤမုၢ်ထူတုယွၤတု
ထူတုထူဒုကံၣ်ဒုဝါ
ယွၤတုယွၤဒုကံၣ်ဒုဝါ
သံၣ်ဘိၣ်ထီၣ်လၢအနီၤစ့ၤ
ဖိဖးထီၣ်လၢအနီၤစ့ၤ
ဒံးထီၣ်ယွၤဖိသြီၣ်လၢလု
ယွၤပုၢ်ယွၤဖိသၢၣ်လီၤကွၢၤ

ဟီၣ်ခိၣ်လၢပျၢၤမုၢ်ထူကၢ
ဟီၣ်ခိၣ်လၢပျၢၤမုၢ်ယွၤကၢ
ထူကၢထူဘိးနီၣ်ဘိးသၢ
ယွၤကၢယွၤဘိးနီၣ်ဘိးသၢ
တကွဲၢ်ကီၢ်ဘိးကွဲၢ်စုၤနၢ
ထွဲၣ်ဖါဖုံကျိၤမုၢ်ဂဲၤဒၢ

လၢၢ်မုၢ်ခိၣ်ကိၢ်ကိၢ်ကိၢ်ကိၢ်
လၢၢ်ကီၤခိၣ်ကိၢ်ကိၢ်ကိၢ်ကိၢ်

In the ocean there is a reversing tide.

We rise to the sky with poles,
Flying around the sky are white swallows,
With many poles we rise to the sky,
White Swallows fly across the sky.

Mother ywa³³ plants a silver *moh boh*,³⁴
Evolved into Banyan's tree branches,
Mother Ywa plants a golden *moh boh*,
Turns into a Banyan's tree stem.

Ywa comes through Banyan's leaves,
Leaves are ywa's stair,
On Banyan's leave ywa has come,
Leave are ywa's bridge.

Gold builds a large rock,
Ywa made a large stone,
Gold embellishes while making,
Ywa decorates while making,
Flower buds on its nose,
Flower blooms on its nose,
Wear the flower oh! Ywa's children,
Ywa aged and became a child.

Gold shaped the Earth,
Ywa shaped the Earth,
Gold moulded the shape,
Ywa moulded the shape,
Twist their fingers when moulding the land,

³³ Matriarch ywa

³⁴ Bamboo pipe-stem

ထူလဲၤဟးထူဘၢ်ထီၣ်ဃီ
ယွၤလဲၤဟးယွၤဘၢ်ထီၣ်ဃီ
ဘၢ်ဘၢ်ထီၣ်ဘးလၢမူဒီ
လဲၤထီၣ်ပွဲၤတၢ်ဒီးလီ

ထူလိၣ်ထီၣ်လၢဘီလၢနဲၤ
ယွၤလိၣ်ထီၣ်လၢဘီလၢနဲၤ
ထူအိၣ်ထးသံလၢ်သၢၣ်
ယွၤအိၣ်ထးနီၤလၢ်သၢၣ်
ထီၣ်ချၢ်မ့ၢ်ယွၤအဆီကဲး
ဒိၣ်လီၤလၢတၢ်ရၢၣ်ဒီးဖဲ

ထူမိၢ်ဒိၣ်အိၣ်မ့ၢ်ဘီ
ယွၤမိၢ်ဒိၣ်အိၣ်မ့ၢ်ဘီ
ယီၢ်ထီၣ်လၢအလီၢ်အိၣ်ထီ
ယီၢ်လီၤလံၤအလီၢ်အိၣ်ထီ
ယီၢ်ထီၣ်မ့ၢ်မူခိၣ်လီၤပွဲၤ
တၢ်ကွဲၤဟ့ၤဖးလၢတလီ

မူခိၣ်ဒိၣ်တလုၢ်ဆီသိ
ဟီၣ်ခိၣ်ဒိၣ်တလုၢ်ဆီသိ
ထီၣ်လၢဂ့ၢ်သူထီၣ်တတိ
ထီၣ်လၢဂ့ၢ်ဂီၤထီၣ်တတိ
တၢ်ပွဲၤလၢပျၢၤမ့ၢ်ယွၤဖိ
ထုးလီၤတၢ်ကွဲၤလၢမူလီၤ

မူခိၣ်ဒိၣ်ပၤနွံက့ၣ်ထံ
ဟီၣ်ခိၣ်ဒိၣ်ပၤနွံက့ၣ်ထံ
တၢ်ပွဲၤလံာ်ထူအကဘျံး
တၢ်ပွဲၤလံာ်ယွၤအကဘျံး
ကလုာ်တၢ်နံၤဩၣ်နံၤဩ
ကတိၤတၢ်နံၤဩၣ်နံၤဩ
ထွဲအစုထီးဒီးဘီရံး
ထွဲအခိၣ်ဆွဲဒီးနးရံး

A dog made a path and the Sun plays a drum.

The surface of the large rock is hard,
The surface of the stone is hard,
Gold went for a visit and built stairs,
Ywa went for a visit and built stairs,
As the stairs reach the universe,
with thunder, ywa went up to recite a riddle.

Gold evolves as a spear and poison,
Ywa evolves as a spear and poison,
Gold consumes metal worth thirty ounces,
Ywa eats magnets worth three ounces,
Toklu is Ywa's screaming chicken,
Lays its eggs on *Ta rày* and *Däw hpeh*³⁵.

Mother gold's feet are fire,
Mother ywa's feet are fire,
Imprint on stone when she steps,
Imprint on rock when she steps,
She steps on the Sun and the sky collapses,
Rainbow conceives with thunder.

Mighty universe works smoothly and orderly,
Mighty Earth works smoothly and orderly,
Its process cannot be measured with black
rattan,
Its process cannot be measured with red rattan,
Supernatural was Ywa Junior,
From the universe pull the rainbow.

Might universe flat shapeless like water,

³⁵ Mountains in Central Myanmar.

ထွဲတထံပ်လီၤမုၢ်တနံၤ
 ထွဲခံထံပ်လီၤမုၢ်ခံနံၤ
 ထွဲတုၤလၢဒုအတမံး
 ထွဲတုၤလၢကီၢ်အတမံး
 ထီၣ်မံလၢကွဲၣ်ဒိၣ်အခံ
 ထီၣ်မံလၢတြးဒိၣ်အခံ
 ဒိလုၤဒီးအပျဲၢ်တမံ
 တီၢ်ဖဲဒီးအပျဲၢ်တမံ
 ဒီးန့ၢ်ထူထံၣ်ကတံၤ
 ဒီးန့ၢ်စုထံၣ်ကတံၤ
 ဘုၣ်ဒၤတၢ်ကွဲၣ်အဘိဆံ
 ဘုၣ်ဒၤတပီၤအဘိဆံ
 ကျူးဝါထီၣ်အရုမဲၢ်ခံ
 ကျူးဘီထီၣ်အရုမဲၢ်ခံ
 ဂၤမုၢ်က့ၣ်ကျီၤတဝီထံ
 ဂၤလါက့ၣ်ကျီၤတဝီထံ
 သုၣ်ပုၤအဖိလွဲၢ်ညိးညိး
 ဝံၣ်ပုၤအဖိလွဲၢ်ညိးညိး
 ဟီၣ်ခိၣ်သူယွၤဘုၣ်ကဘျိုး
 ဟီၣ်ခိၣ်လါထီထီၣ်အဒံး
 လဲၤတၢ်ဒံးသီးကဟံၣ်ရံး
 ထူဒိၣ်အိၣ်လၢလၢၢ်မုၢ်ပူၤ
 ယွၤဒိၣ်ဆိးလၢလၢၢ်မုၢ်ပူၤ
 ကုၣ်ခိၣ်ဒၤထူတၢ်မူ
 ကုၣ်ခိၣ်ဒၤစုတၢ်မူ
 ဘုၣ်ဒၤညၣ်စုကသုၣ်ယူၤ
 အိၣ်ကီၢ်လၢဒၤမုၢ်ကဆူး

 သူလုၤဟီၣ်အမိၢ်သူလုၤ
 သူလုၤဟီၣ်အပၢ်သူလုၤ
 ဟီၣ်အမိၢ်သံတဂဲၤကွၢ်
 ဟီၣ်အပၢ်သံတဂဲၤကွၢ်

Mighty Earth flat shapeless like water,
 Power is the paper of gold,
 Power is the paper of ywa,
 Uttering with laughter,
 Speaking with laughter,
 move its arms to reach for a spear,
 move its legs to reach for a sword,
 One move come the first day,
 Two moves come the second day,
 Move toward the edge of the field,
 Move into the edge of the land,
 Sleep on top of the teak,
 Sleep on top of a bird trap,
*Doh lay*³⁶ and his servants do not sleep,
*Taw Hpeh*³⁷ and his servants do not sleep,
 Attain seven pots of gold liquid,
 Attain seven pots of silver liquid,
 Domesticate seven sets of rainbows,
 Domesticate seven thickets of bushes,
 Colour painted white,
 Colour painted yellow,
 Fenced the circumference of the sun and
 measured the water,
 Fenced the circumference of the moon and
 measured the water,
 Radiate far and beyond,
 Dazzle far and beyond,
 Radiate on Ywa's grandchildren,
 Dazzle on Ywa's grandchildren,
 Young trees came after old trees,
 Young bamboo came after old bamboo,

³⁶ A name of a person.

³⁷ A name of a person.

ယွၤဟီၣ်ထီၣ်သၢထံၣ်ဂဲၤက့ၤ
ဒံၣ်မုၢ်က့ၤကီၢ်မုၢ်က့ၤ

ထူလဲၤတၢ်ဒီးကသ့ၣ်မံၤ
ယွၤလဲၤတၢ်ဒီးကသ့ၣ်မံၤ
ထံၣ်ဃီၣ်လိာ်သါကဘိသံး
ထံၣ်ကိၤလိာ်သါကဘိသံး
ဘိဘိအဝဲတအံၣ်သံး
ကွၢ်ဒီးထးသံတွံၢ်အပျံၤ

မုၢ်ခိၣ်ဒိၣ်တိၤပျံၤတိၤပျံၤ
ဟီၣ်ခိၣ်ဒိၣ်တိၤပျံၤတိၤပျံၤ
တိၤပျံၤမုၢ်ထိးကလံာ်တု
တိၤပျံၤမုၢ်ထးကတ်တု
ယွၤသ့ၣ်ကီၢ်ဆၢလၢသ့လ့ၤ
ဟံၣ်ခိၣ်ဖျါဒၢကီၢ်မုၢ်က့ၤ

ထူဒိၣ်ပစီၤလိာ်အသး
ယွၤဒိၣ်ပစီၤလိာ်အသး
ပစီၤဃာ်ယူၤကဘၣ်ပှၤ
ပစီၤဘီယူၤကဘၣ်ပှၤ
တၢ်ပှိၤလၢပျါပုၤသဒါ
မုၢ်သံဘိးဂဲၤလိာ်ပသး

ယွၤမိၢ်ထီၣ်ရံးကီၢ်လဲၤဒၢ
ကသ့ၣ်မဲၤဂ့ၤလၢနီၣ်စၢ
ယွၤမိၢ်တခွဲၤစိာ်မဲၤသ့
တခွဲၤကီၢ်နွံၣ်မုၢ်ကဆူး
ယွၤမိၢ်တခွဲၤဃီၣ်အကျိ
လုကဲၢ်ကိၢ်ယွၤတခွဲၤဘိ
လုၣ်ကဟၣ်စုးမိကဲ
ဒါချီၣ်စုးလုးယၢ်တၢ်ကွဲၤ
ယွၤမိၢ်တခွဲၤစိာ်မုၢ်အူ

Ywa peeled off blackened Earth,
The Earth turned green and grew it wings,
Journeying in the form of a spinning wheel.

Mighty Gold resides in a large rock,
Mighty Ywa resides in a large rock,
Wears a golden hat and shakes the universe,
Wears a silver hat and shakes the universe,
Domesticated silver fish and flying horse,
Governed the land under the Sun.

Cicada cried for mother cicada,
Cicada cried for father cicada,
Motionless is a dead mother,
Motionless is a dead father,
A third cry of ywa resumes the movement,
Just like peace has returned to the land.

Gold rides a wild horse and makes a trip,
Ywa rides a wild horse and makes a trip,
Meets *Hkòh loh* ³⁸ and wants to pump it dry,
Meets *Gāw loh* ³⁹ and wants to pump it dry,
While pumping he changed his mind,
Learnt from dead metal which pulls its chain.

The Mighty Sky is stripey,
The Mighty Earth is stripey,
The stripe is handcrafted by worms,
The stripe is handmade by angels,
Ywa marks the border in the land of cicadas,

³⁸ Salween

³⁹ Sittang

ကသုန်ခိန်နွံဖျါဟဲယူ

The land is peaceful when wasps nest on the roof.

လာ်မုၢ်ယွၤဆှီၣ်ဒီးဒံ
မုၢ်ခိန်ဟါၣ်လီၤပန်မံ
ယွၤမိၢ်မၤလဲၤဒီးဆံးဂုၤ
ဟီၣ်ခိန်ပသီထီၣ်လုာ်လုာ်
မုၢ်ခိန်ထူၣ်ဖျါယွၤဆးကျး
ထီထီၣ်မုၢ်အခိန်လာ်နး
ယွၤစိာ်နးဆှီၣ်တဲာ်လာ်သူ
ထီထီၣ်ပီၤဟါအခိန်ယူ

Mighty Gold fighting with each other,
Mighty Ywa fighting with each other,
Fighting knives may fly toward us,
Fighting spears may lay among us,
In the past power were with youngest sibling,
If we die we'd raise each other.

မုၢ်ခိန်ဒိၣ်အတီၢ်လဲၤဒိၣ်
ဟီၣ်ခိန်ဒိၣ်အတီၢ်လဲၤဒိၣ်
တၢ်ဒိၣ်မုၢ်လဲၤမုၢ်ဟးဖျိး
တၢ်ဒိၣ်လါလဲၤလါဟးဖျိး
တၢ်တဟးဖျိးမုၢ်ယွၤဖိ
လဲၤဆှီၣ်ကလံၤအမဲၢ်ကိ

Mother ywa spins the winnowing tray,
A good horsetail makes a whisk,
Mother ywa carries black *meh*⁴⁰ when fishing,
She fishes between the land of seven Suns,
Mother ywa is fishing in *Hkòh loh*,
Shone hot light against ywa's fishing rod,
Silver cart spins *maw geh*⁴¹,

ထူထူစံာ်လာ်ပျီမူထံး
ယွၤလိာ်ပွဲၤလာ်ပျီမူထံး
ပတီၤလုာ်ထူလုာ်စုရံး
ပတီၤလုာ်စုလုာ်ထူရံး
တၢ်မျါကျဲၣ်ကျီၣ်ဒီးထးသံ
တၢ်မုၢ်ဘၣ်ပလီၤလာ်ခံ

Spread the silver mat and snuggle under a rainbow blanket,
Mother ywa carries light when she is fishing,
Toward her seven headed horse fly.

ထူသံကနံၤထီၣ်မူထံး
ယွၤသံကနံၤထီၣ်မူထံး
ကနံၤတူၢ်ဂီၤအမဲၢ်ခံ
ကနံၤတူၢ်ဟါအမဲၢ်ခံ
ကိၤနီၣ်မုၢ်ဒီးခုၣ်နီၣ်ထံ
လဲၤတၢ်ဒီးယဲးဒီးကလံၤ

Ywa chopped the rock like a soft cut on cucumber,
Steaming the rice when buffalos sleep,
Mother Ywa exchanged goods with *hsëe ghū*⁴²,
Since then the Earth is in tension,
The universe breaks and ywa sews it back,
Ywa mends the Sun's leg with swords,
Ywa picks up a sword and cuts apart the black rock,

ထူစံာ်ကျဲၣ်လာ်ပျီမူထံး

⁴⁰ Bracelets, bangles

⁴¹ Bamboo splint.

⁴² A kind of demon.

ယွၤအူမိလၢပျီမူထံး
လ့ၣ်ထူပတီၤလ့ၣ်စ့ရံး
လ့ၣ်စ့ပတီၤလ့ၣ်ထူရံး
လၢ်မုၢ်ကၢ်လီၤဆၢၣ်မူထံး
တၢ်ဂ့ၤဘုကွဲမ့ၢ်အံၤ

သ့ၣ်ခိၣ်ဒီးထူလိၣ်ထီၣ်ဃုာ်
ဖီခိၣ်ဒီးယွၤလိၣ်ထီၣ်ဃုာ်
အစုညါသးကံသံၣ်ဘုး
အခိၣ်ညါသးကံသံၣ်ဘုး
ယွၤမိၢ်မၤလဲၤဒီးဆံးဂုၤ
မၤထံလ့ၢ်ဘဲကပီၤထုး

ထူဟးထီၣ်လၢလၢ်မုၢ်ပူၤ
ယွၤဟးထီၣ်လၢလၢ်မုၢ်ပူၤ
အစုဒုၣ်ထဲညါတဖူ
အခိၣ်ဒုၣ်ထဲညါတဖူ
ဝံၢ်ကစၢ်ကစၢ်ကၢ်တူၢ်
ဝံၢ်ကလိကလိကၢ်တူၢ်
ဝံၢ်တဃုာ်သီသံၣ်တဖူ
ကထူၣ်နွံၣ်ဟီၣ်ခိၣ်ဟူး

မူခိၣ်ဒိၣ်ဖးလဲၤဖးထီ
ဟီၣ်ခိၣ်ဒိၣ်ဖးလဲၤဖးထီ
တၢ်ဒိၣ်မုၢ်လဲၤမုၢ်ကၢ်ဆီ
တၢ်ဒိၣ်လါလဲၤလါကၢ်ဆီ
တၢ်အါၣ်စံးသါတကၢ်ဆီ
လဲၤတၢ်ဒီးဃဲဒီးပစီၤ

တၢ်ယံၤမူထံးယံၤမူထံး
တၢ်စၢ်မူထံးစၢ်မူထံး
တၢ်ဒိၣ်မုၢ်လဲၤဝီၢ်ဝီၢ်ဝံး
တၢ်ဒိၣ်လါလဲၤဝီၢ်ဝီၢ်ဝံး
ကိၢ်နီၣ်မ့ၢ်ဒီးခုၣ်နီၣ်ထံ
လဲၤတၢ်ဒီးဃဲဒီးကလံၤ

Ywa mends a steaming pot with a flying lid.

The circumference of the sky is big and wide,
The circumference of the earth is big and wide,
Mighty Sun embarks on a journey and got lost,
Mighty Moon embarks on a journey and got
lost,

Those who do not get lost are ywa junior,
Insert a splinter to support the tail of the wind.

Gold ploughs on a field,

Ywa cultivates on a field,

He rides on a golden cart and a sliver cart goes,
He rides on a sliver cart and a golden cart goes,
When precious stones mixed with metal,
Be thoughtful of our past,

Gold leaned against the edge of the universe
before death,

Ywa leaned against the edge of the universe
before death,

Leaning against the tail of Morning Star,

Leaning against the tail of Evening Star,

The hot fire and the cold water,

Rain and wind travel together.

Gold dances on the edge of the field,

Ywa plays *maw* at the edge of the field,

He rides on a golden cart and a sliver cart goes,

He rides on a sliver cart and a golden cart goes,

The rock breaks and covers the field,

This is the best paddy.

မူခိၣ်ဒိၣ်သူအထူၣ်ကိၤ
ဟီၣ်ခိၣ်ဒိၣ်သူအထူၣ်ကိၤ
လီၤဆဲးနီၣ်လၢယိၣ်အကျိၤ
လီၤဆဲးနီၣ်လၢကိၤအကျိၤ
ဟံၣ်ဃုာ်ဆီၣ်ဖါနွံတိၤဘိ
ဒိၣ်တဖျါၣ်ဖးယဲၣ်ကထိ

အူလီၤမ့ၣ်သဲးကဖျါၣ်လု
ယွၤတခွဲထံကၣ်ညၣ်စု
အူလီၤမ့ၣ်သဲးကဖျါၣ်မူ
ယွၤတခွဲထံကၣ်ညၣ်ထူ

ထံဖံးခိၣ်ယွၤမိၣ်လိာ်ကွဲ
ပယိၤမ့ၣ်ယွၤအနီၣ်ဆဲး
ထံဖံးခိၣ်ယွၤမိၣ်လဲၤဟး
ပယိၤမ့ၣ်ယွၤအနီၣ်ခး

ယူၣ်ထီၣ်ကွၢ်ပတီၢ်ထီၣ်လု
သမူလၢၣ်ယူၤန့ၣ်ခွဲ
ကတီၤအိၣ်ယူၤန့ၣ်ဘိဘိ
စိၣ်လီၤလၢမူကဟိၣ်လိၤ

တၢ်မုၢ်လၢယွၤအိၣ်ယွၤဆိး
ချၢၣ်နွံထူၣ်ထံယွၤကပိၤ
တၢ်မုၢ်လၢယွၤအိၣ်တပၤ
ချၢၣ်နွံထူၣ်ထံယွၤဝးဝး

ထူလိၣ်ထီၣ်လၢလၢၣ်မုၢ်ပူၤ
ယွၤလိၣ်ထီၣ်လၢလၢၣ်မုၢ်ပူၤ
အစုမုၢ်ထဲညၣ်တဖူ
အခိၣ်မုၢ်ထဲညၣ်တဖူ
စိၣ်ကစၢၢ်မၤလံာ်မၤလှာ်
စိၣ်ကလိမၤလံာ်မၤလှာ်
ဆီလီၤလၢမူအတလှာ်
ဟီၣ်ခိၣ်စၢၢ်ထံယွၤတဩၤ

Gold evolves together with tree,
Ywa evolves together with flower,
Their palms spread across the land,
Their soles spread across the land,
Mother Ywa exchanges with *Hsitgu*,
A thread needs water to spin, spiders to pull.

Gold deserted from large rock,
Ywa deserted from large stone,
His arms is a piece of flesh,
His calf is a piece of flesh,
He twists the mountain and breaks it,
He twists the hill, and break it,
He twists a range of *thawthi*,
The earth shudders and roars for seven days.

Mighty sky is big and lengthy,
Mighty earth is big and lengthy,
The great Sun travels and has a break,
The great moon travels and has a break,
The cloud says it needs no break,
Rain and wind are its travelling, companions.

The edge of the Sky is far,
The edge of the Sky is distant,
Mighty Sun travels in a circle,
Mighty moon travels in a circle,
But for fire and water,
With the rain and the wind they travel.

Mighty Sky used a strong pole,
Might Earth used a strong pole,
A year was set on *hkəh ləh*,

တၢ်အုအုလၢဟီၣ်ခိၣ်လၢ
တၢ်အဲးအဲးလၢဟီၣ်ခိၣ်လၢ
အုအုမ့ၢ်ထူဃၢ်အသး
အဲးအဲးမ့ၢ်ယွၤဃၢ်အသး
မုၢ်မ့ၢ်ပိၣ်ပီၤလၢတဖး
လၢမုၢ်ပိၣ်ပီၤမုၢ်တဖး
ပုၤဖးမ့ၢ်သ့တဂၤဂၤ
ပုၤပိၣ်နီၣ်ထူဃၢ်နီၣ်ယွၤ

ထူဟးထီၣ်လၢလၢမုၢ်ပုၤ
ယွၤဟးထီၣ်လၢလၢမုၢ်ပုၤ
အစုမ့ၢ်ပီၤတြိးပီၤတြိး
အခိၣ်မ့ၢ်ပီၤတြိးပီၤတြိး
စီၤပၤယုၤလီၤနီၣ်ဖျၢထူ
ကသ့ၣ်မိၢ်မၤဖျၢမၤဖျၢ

ယွၤဟးလီၤဃီတၢ်တဘျီး
ယွၤတက့ၢ်က့ၤအလီၢ်ခံ
တၢ်ဒိၣ်ထူထူအသ့ၣ်အၤ
တၢ်ဒိၣ်ယွၤယွၤအသးအၤ
သက့ၢ်သက့ၢ်တန့ၢ်လၢ
ကညးကညးတန့ၢ်လၢ
ဘျးထီၣ်အကွဲၤလၢသံနၤ
ကီၢ်မုၢ်န့ၢ်ကတမုၢ်လၢ

ထူဒိၣ်ဒိၣ်အသ့ၣ်အၤအၤ
ယွၤဒိၣ်ဒိၣ်အသးအၤအၤ
ဟးဒိၣ်ပုၤဟးဒိၣ်ခဲလၢ
ဟးဒိၣ်ဝဲၤဟးဒိၣ်ခဲလၢ
ဟ်လီၤတၢ်ကွဲၤပန့ၢ်နၤ
အူတသ့ဖးတဘျီလၢ

ထူသံဟ်လီၤတၢ်အဂီၢ်
ယွၤသံဟ်လီၤတၢ်အဂီၢ်
ကွဲၤလၢချၢၣ်ခံတဘျီထီ

An angle was set on *gāw loh*,
Includes seven perches,
Five thousand hatched from one egg.

Blow the fire to unsettle the cliff,
Ywa fishes in water and grills silver fish,
Blows the fire to unsettle the Sky,
Ywa fishes in water and grills golden fish.

Mother ywa plays on the water's surface,
Dragon is Ywa's tool to stab,
Mother ywa visits the water's surface,
Dragon is ywa's tool to shoot.

Lifting a hammer and preparing a rock,
Flying rock help catch a leopard,
Conserve the food caught from flying spear,
Like resting in the sky.

The land where ywa lives is peaceful,
Around seven Banyan trees, water is flowing,
There is peace where ywa lives,
Water flows around seven Banya trees.

Gold evolves from the rock,
Ywa evolves from the rock,
His thumb is a piece of flesh,
His toe is a piece of flesh,
Pick up a mountain and mould it,
Gather a hill and shape it,
Build a sky that cannot fall,
Immature earth, water flows against it.

ကွံင်လၢဃီခံတဘျးထီ
ကွံင်မ့ဘျးထီလၢတပွဲ
သယုၢ်ပုၤဒီတံၣ်ဒီဃီ

ထူကဟးလီၤလၢမကိၣ်
ယွဲကဟးလီၤလၢမကိၣ်
မၤမ့ၢ်လဲၤဆှၢမ့ၢ်ဂ့ၢ်လိာ်
မၤပုၢ်လဲၤဆှၢပုၢ်ဂ့ၢ်လိာ်
ကီၤလၢလဲၤဆှၢဘၣ်ဆံးကိၣ်
ကီၤလၢဒီးယွဲဒ်သီးသီး

ထူသံကန့ၤထီၣ်လၢၢ်ထး
ယွဲသံကန့ၤထီၣ်လၢၢ်ထး
ထူစံးပုၢ်သုတခါသါ
ယွဲစံးဝဲၣ်သုတခါသါ
ယွဲကံၢ်လီၤအသးလၢလၢ်
ဒ်မံၤညီၤဝါသံၣ်ခိၣ်ထး

ကစၢ်ခိၣ်သ့ဒီးပဟၢ
ကလိခိၣ်သ့ဒီးပဟၢ
ထူကွၢ်မုၢ်အလီၢ်လၢပျၢၤ
ယွဲမၤဝဲၣ်အလီၢ်လၢပျၢၤ
ကစၢ်ခိၣ်ဆီမံၤဝဲးဘၢ
ယွဲလီၢ်ယွဲကျဲတအိၣ်လၢၤ

ပုၤချုးန့ၢ်ထူမ့ၢ်မိၤန့ၢ်
ပုၤချုးန့ၢ်ယွဲမ့ၢ်မိၤန့ၢ်
တၢ်အဆံၣ်န့ၢ်အိၣ်ဘၣ်အါ
တၢ်အဆံၣ်န့ၢ်အိၣ်ဘၣ်အါ
ဟီၣ်ခိၣ်လၢယွဲကံၢ်ကဒါ
ယွဲက့ၢ်ဝဲၣ်ဆူလဲၣ်တပၤ

တီၣ်အူၣ်ပၤပၤတီၣ်အူၣ်ပၤ
အါတ်ပၤပၤအါတ်ပၤ

Grumbling sound underneath the Earth,
Chirping sound underneath the Earth,
The groan is when gold turns,
The chirp is when ywa turns,
The moon cannot answer the riddle of the sun,
The sun cannot answer the riddle of the moon,
If anyone can guess the answer,
It is powerful like gold and gwa.

Gold has deserted the large rock,
Ywa has deserted the large rock,
His nails are twisted,
His toes are twisted,
The king hands down the golden whip,
A mare came to save.

Ywa leaves the house and destroys the ladder,
He does not look back,
Mighty Gold is cruel,
Mighty Ywa is cruel,
He cannot be begged,
He cannot be persuaded,
When he hangs a buffalo horn on *thee nūh*⁴³,
He feels no peace when the land is peaceful.

Mighty gold is unkind,
Mighty ywa is unkind,
Left behind all his younger siblings,
Left behind all his older siblings,
He left behind a buffalo horn,
We do not know how to blow and play.

⁴³ A Place' name.

ထူခွန်လီအမိလ်ယုၤ
ယွၤဘါလီအပၢ်လ်ယုၤ
ကျးလၢလံာ်ထွံနွံကထၢ
ကျးလၢလံာ်စွံနွံကထၢ
ထိးမဲပၢ်ဒီးခိၣ်ဒုၣ်ဒၢ
လိၣ်ထီၣ်ဘၣ်ပျီၤဘၣ်ပျီၤလၢၤ

ပုၤချုးန့ၢ်ထူမ့ၢ်မိၤယၢ
ပုၤချုးန့ၢ်ယွၤမ့ၢ်မိၤယၢ
တၢ်အဆၣ်ယအိၣ်ဘၣ်အါ
တၢ်အဆၣ်ယအိၣ်ဘၣ်အါ
ယွၤက့ၤဝဲဆူဟီၣ်ခိၣ်လါ
က့ၤပၢ်မူက့ၤကျဲၣ်အကျါ

ချါၣ်ခိၣ်အိၣ်လၢတၢ်အဒိ
ဃီခိၣ်အိၣ်လၢတၢ်အဒိ
လံာ်မဲၣ်ခိၣ်ထူဟ့ၣ်ဒ့ဒိ
လံာ်မဲၣ်ခိၣ်ယွၤဟ့ၣ်ဒ့ဒိ
ဘၢၣ်လီၤဃီစ့ဆၣ်ကဆီ
ပုၤလူၤဘၣ်သ့တနီၤနီၤ
လံာ်ကွဲၣ်ကီၢ်လၢဆီဝဲဒဲးဘၢ
ပိၣ်က့ၤဖးက့ၤတဘၣ်လၢၤ

ထူကဟးလီၤအိၣ်မၤလိာ်
ယွၤကဟးလီၤအိၣ်မၤလိာ်
မၤလိာ်ကတီၤပုၤအဖိ
မၤလိာ်ကတီၤဝဲၣ်အဖိ
ကတီၤမ့ၤဃုစဲဘျးကျါ
ဆူညါဘၣ်မူဘၣ်သကိး

ထူဟးထီၣ်လၢတၢ်အဒိ
ယွၤဟးထီၣ်လၢတၢ်အဒိ
ထူအလီၢ်ဟးတုၢ်ကယီၤ
ယွၤအလီၢ်ဟးတုၢ်ကယီၤ
ဟ်လီၤတံာ်အခိၣ်ကျါဘီ

Gold leaves his form when he dies,
Ywa leaves his image when he dies,
Throw it toward a Banyan there but it does not
stay,
Throw it toward a stair but it does not stay,
If the image stays on shrubs,
Grief is upon the entire family.

Gold has planned to leave,
Ywa has planned to leave,
Older rejected his request for accompaniment,
Elder rejected his request for accompaniment,
Gāw lā accompanied him,
Gāw lā and ywa become one thing.

Gold leans on rock and metal when he dies,
Ywa leans on rock and metal when he dies,
Gold told his younger sibling not to step over
him,
Ywa told his older siblings not to step over him,
Ywa presses himself down below,
Like a cat on a white comb head,

Lush and abundant on the mountain,
Lush and abundant on the hill,
It was a place where gold cultivates,
It was a place where ywa cultivates,
Junglefowls destroy the mountain,
Ywa's place vanished,

You have known gold for long,
You have known ywa for long,
With him you have tasted lots of sourness,

နမူထီၣ်ယမဲၣ်ထံလီၤ
ထူဟးထီၣ်လၢလၢ်မုၢ်ပူၤ
ယွၤဟးထီၣ်လၢလၢ်မုၢ်ပူၤ
အလီၢ်မံၤပၤလံာ်ပၤလူၣ်
အလီၢ်ဒါပၤလံာ်ပၤလူၣ်
ဟ်လီၤတဲာ်အဆွၢ်ကၤသ့
ညီသ့ခိၣ်ကၤထီၣ်လီၤလူၣ်

ထူဟးထီၣ်ထံမိၤဒိၣ်နံၤ
ယွၤဟးထီၣ်ထံမိၤဒိၣ်နံၤ
အလီၢ်မံၤထူကဘျဲးဒီး
အလီၢ်မံၤစုကဘျဲးဒီး
ယွၤက့ၤအခံတဒၢလံ
အိၣ်တုၢ်လၢခံသယုၢ်သ့

ထူကဟးလီၤသ့ၣ်ပိၢ်သြဲ
ယွၤကဟးလီၤသ့ၣ်ပိၢ်သြဲ
ထူမၤမ့ၢ်ဆှၢ်မ့ၢ်တလဲၤ
ယွၤမၤပုၢ်ဆှၢ်ပုၢ်တလဲၤ
လဲၤဆှၢ်ခံၣ်ထီၣ်ဘီၣ်သြဲ
ကွၢ်သ့ၣ်ညါယွၤလီၤယွၤကျဲ

ထူကဟးလီၤဂံၢ်ကျိၣ်ဆူး
ယွၤကဟးလီၤဂံၢ်ကျိၣ်ဆူး
ခီၣ်ယိၣ်လိာ်ကထူၣ်ပြုးပြုး
ခီၣ်ကိၤလိာ်ကထူၣ်ပြုးပြုး
ခီၣ်မ့ၢ်ဒီးထီၣ်ချံထူ
ကီၢ်ကမ့ၢ်လၢလဲၣ်တပူၤ

လၢ်မုၢ်ထူတုၢ်န့ၢ်လၢပျၤ
လၢ်ကီၤယွၤတုၢ်န့ၢ်လၢပျၤ
ထူတုၢ်န့ၢ်ထူတဆဲးဂၤ

With him you have tasted much bitterness,
The earth that ywa recalls,
To where he has gone.

*Taw Oo*⁴⁴ is flat,
*Ah wa*⁴⁵ is flat,
In the past, gold buried his mother there,
In the past, ywa paid tribute to his father there,
He laid seven layers of gold paper,
He laid seven layers of silver paper,
Since the time of *htöh meh pə*⁴⁶ and human
conceived in the calf,
We evolve without supernatural power.

I have known gold,
I have known Ywa,
I have tasted so much sourness,
I have tasted so much bitterness,
Ywa goes back to the blue earth,
To unite with his father.

A big Banyan is on high ground,
A big ladder is on high ground,
Gold is unclear in giving big letters,
Ywa is unclear in giving big letters,
The Star of Elephant hangs down a silver ladder,
Some who can catch, they will learn.

Gold gave a command before he left,
Ywa gave a command before he left,

⁴⁴ Toungoo

⁴⁵ Ava

⁴⁶ A Pwakanyaw's mythical figure

ယွၤတ့ၢ်န့ၢ်ယွၤတဆဲးဂၢၤ
ဆၢ်ကဆီၣ်ဒါမုၢ်ဆဲးဂၢၢ်
ကီၢ်လၢပစီၤတမုၢ်လၢၤ

တလၢ်လဲၤလဲၤတလၢ်လဲၤ
သီခါလဲၤလဲၤသီခါလဲၤ
သ့ၣ်ဖျါၣ်ထူၤလီၤတီၤလၢကျဲ
သ့ၣ်ဖျါၣ်စ့ၤလီၤတီၤလၢကျဲ
တၢ်ဒိၣ်ထူထူဂံၢ်တကဲ
တၢ်ဒိၣ်ယွၤယွၤဂံၢ်တကဲ
တၢ်အဂံၢ်ကဲယၣ်မၢ်မဲ
ဆဲးလံာ်တုၤအါတ်ကံၢ်မဲ

မူခိၣ်ဒိၣ်လၢပျၢၤထူတု
ဟီၣ်ခိၣ်ဒိၣ်လၢပျၢၤယွၤတု
ထူတုတနံၤတသရ့ၤ
ယွၤတုခံနံၤတသရ့ၤ
ယွၤတုတုယွၤမံသပုၤ
ဒီးထီၣ်ဝၣ်သိဒီးဝၣ်ဘွဲ

ထူလိၣ်ထီၣ်လၢဟီၣ်ခိၣ်ဂီၤ
ယွၤလိၣ်ထီၣ်လၢဟီၣ်ခိၣ်ဂီၤ
လိၣ်လၢကံာ်သုတဒုၣ်လီၤ
လိၣ်လၢဃုသုတဒုၣ်လီၤ
လိၣ်ညၣ်သုၣ်ဖးလၢညၣ်ထီ
ခံၤအီၤထံတလိၣ်ဃီ

နမ့ၢ်န့ၢ်ဟူယွၤအူတူ
ဘၣ်မုၢ်ထူၣ်လူၤမုၢ်ဃုၢ်လူၤ
နမ့ၢ်န့ၢ်ဟူယွၤအူကွဲၤ
ဘၣ်မူထူၣ်လဲၤမုၢ်ဃုၢ်လဲၤ

ယွၤဟဲကွဲၤလၢသ့ၣ်ခိၣ်ချါ
သုတမိၣ်လၢသ့ၣ်ပဒါ

Command to look after children of younger
siblings,

Command to take care of children of older
siblings,

With unity in caring and connecting,

Long term companionship can be formed.

Gold deserted the high ground,

Ywa deserted the high ground,

The place of gold is abandoned,

The place of ywa is abandoned,

Left behind his yellow headband,

Its scent brings me tears.

Gold deserted the land of rocks,

Ywa deserted the land of stones,

His bed is flat,

His resting space is flat,

He left behind his black tops,

Human tried to fit in but unfit for them.

Gold left from the bank of *māw dōh* ⁴⁷ river,

Ywa left from the bank of *māw dōh* river,

His bed is the sheet of gold,

His bed is the sheet of silver,

Ywa had gone and vanished,

Left behind us and we grieve,

Trees shriek when gold planned to leave,

Trees shriek when gwa planned to leave,

Gold's request for accompaniment was rejected
by elders,

⁴⁷ Name of a place.

ယွဟဲကွလၢသ့ၣ်ဒိၣ်ထံး
သုတမိၣ်လၢသ့ၣ်ဘ့ၣ်ဖံး

တၢ်အၢၣ်လၢမူလဲၤခံးခံး
တၢ်ခံးလၢမူလဲၤခံးခံး
လဲၤမုၢ်မိၣ်သၢနီၣ်တဝံၤ
လဲၤလၢမိၣ်သၢနီၣ်တဝံၤ
ကွဲၤထူကွဲၤစ့နမ့ၢ်ဟံး
ကီၢ်ကမ့ၢ်ကွဲၤနီၣ်ဒီးထံ

နီၢ်ဂ့ၤအိၣ်လၢထံအဆၢ
စိဝါဆိးလၢကီၢ်အဆၢ
ဘၣ်ယိၣ်သ့ၣ်လီၤဘၣ်အချၢ
ဘၣ်ယိၣ်ဂီၤလီၤဘၣ်အချၢ
ဆဲးတတုၢ်လၢသ့ၣ်တကျၢၤ
ဆဲးတတုၢ်လၢဝၣ်တကျၢၤ
ဆဲးတတုၢ်လၢအစုနၢ
ဆ့ၣ်နီၤလၢယွၤဒိၣ်အဃၢၤ

Ywa's request for accompaniment was rejected
by elders,

Two yellow birds accompanied,
They have noted ywa's land.

Gold counts drums when he planned to leave,
Ywa counts drum when he planned to leave,
He makes noises when he crossed *Hkòh loh* ,
He makes noises when he crossed *Gāw loh*,
While crossing if he has boarded on a golden
boat,
Which part of the land will be peaceful.

Gold built a large rock in the past,
Ywa built a large rock in the past,
Gold built it but didn't set it firm,
Ywa built it but didn't set it firm,
The Star of Elephant and the Sun set it firm,
Peace vanished in our land.

*Talar*⁴⁸ went,
Monks went,
Golden log also went but was destroyed,
Silver log also went but was destroyed,
Mighty Gold power could not withhold,
Mighty Ywa power could not withhold,
The withholding power is the *Yà mà meh*⁴⁹,
Pinned down papers in *Ah wa*⁵⁰ and *Gee meh*⁵¹.

Gold constructed the mighty Sky,

⁴⁸ Pwakanyaw's goddess of fortune

⁴⁹ Rama King

⁵⁰ Ava

⁵¹ Chiang Mai

Ywa constructed the mighty Earth,
Gold does not finish in one day,
Ywa does not finish in two days,
Ywa falls asleep as he builds,
Shooting up many bamboos,

Gold evolves in red land,
Ywa evolves in red land,
If he evolves like a grub, do not accept it,
If he evolves like a worm, do not believe it,
Even he evolves in other forms of fish,
May we keep drinking from the same place,

If you hear Ywa blowing *too*⁵²,
Even in midday, follow it,
If you hear Ywa blowing *gwēh*⁵³,
Chase it even in midday,

Ywa has returned from the back of the tree,
Do not wish to see Ywa in a tree sprout,
Ywa has returned from the bottom of a tree,
Do not wish to see Ywa on the tree bark.

The cloud turned grey,
The Sky is darkened,
Lasted three years of travelling sun,
Lasted three years of travelling moon,
If you keep golden and silver *gwēh*,
The land will be peaceful like the cool of water.

Good woman lives at the edge of water,

⁵² Musical instrument like horn

⁵³ Musical instrument like horn

Pure man stays at the edge of a land,
Worried the hail will hit her back,
Anxious the sandstorm will hit his back,
Can't fence herself from a tree,
Can't fence himself from bamboo,
With their finger fencing themselves,
They sit beside mighty ywa.

