A GENEALOGY OF THE CONSTITUTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF CATHOLIC MISSIONS AMONG MINORITIES IN BRITISH BURMA

ANITA AGOSTINI

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
IN SOCIAL SCIENCE

GRADUATE SCHOOL
CHIANG MAI UNIVERSITY
DECEMBER 2018

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THIS THESIS HAS BEEN APPROVED TO BE A PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
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Anita Agostini

หัวข้อดุษฎีนิพนธ์	วงศาวิทยาการสถาปนาและพัฒนาการของผู้เผยแพร่ศาสนาคริสต์นิกายโรมันคาทอลิกท่ามกลางชนกลุ่มน้อยในประเทศพม่าในยุคอาณานิคมอังกฤษ	
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บทคัดย่อ

นักวิชาการหลายท่านเคยศึกษาพฤติกรรมการเปลี่ยนไปนับถือศาสนาคริสต์ในเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ ส่วนใหญ่ศึกษาเหตุผลการเปลี่ยนศาสนาของชนกลุ่มน้อยโดยเน้นศึกษากลุ่มชาติพันธุ์ แต่มิได้ศึกษาบริบทด้านประวัติศาสตร์การเมืองและอุดมคติซึ่งชนกลุ่มน้อยมักจะเผชิญท่ามกลางความขัดแย้งกับความเชื่อของศาสนาคริสต์

วัตถุประสงค์ของดุษฎีนิพนธ์นี้คือการสร้างความรู้ความเข้าใจเกี่ยวกับขั้นตอนการเปลี่ยนศาสนาของชนกลุ่มน้อยในภูมิภาคนี้โดยเน้นศึกษาบริบทและวิเคราะห์การทำงานของผู้เผยแพร่ศาสนาอย่างละเอียด เพื่อให้บรรลุวัตถุประสงค์นี้นักวิจัยใช้วิธีการเชิงวงศาวิทยาการศึกษาร่องรอยเส้นทางของสถาบันและพัฒนาการของคาทอลิกมิชชันสองกลุ่มแรกซึ่งเน้นการเปลี่ยนความเชื่อของชนกลุ่มน้อยที่ไม่ใช่พุทธศาสนิกชนในภาคกลางและภาคตะวันออกเฉียงเหนือของประเทศพม่าเดิม ส่วนเรื่องสถาบันของกลุ่มผู้สอนศาสนามีการศึกษาสภาวะแวดล้อมเชิงประวัติศาสตร์โดยรวมซึ่งนำไปสู่การก่อตั้งมิชชันทั้งสองสถาบันนี้ ด้านพัฒนาการของกลุ่มผู้สอนศาสนามีการวิเคราะห์ยุทธศาสตร์เพื่อการเปลี่ยนศาสนาในชุมชน วิเคราะห์กิจกรรมที่ใช้ในพื้นที่และวาทกรรมทางศาสนา รวมทั้งยุทธศาสตร์ที่ใช้ในช่วงปี ค.ศ. 1868-1939 (พ.ศ. 2411-2482) ผลที่ได้รับจากดุษฎีนิพนธ์ฉบับนี้คือ การแสดงให้เห็นหลักฐานและชี้ให้เห็นถึงความเกี่ยวพันด้านประวัติศาสตร์และการเมือง รวมทั้งปัจจัยเชิงอุดมคติซึ่ง

นำไปสู่ความสำเร็จของกลุ่มผู้สอนศาสนาในการสร้างรากฐานความเชื่อเชิงคริสต์นิกายคาทอลิกในบรรดาชนกลุ่มน้อย

ด้านประโยชน์ทางวิชาการ ดุษฎีนิพนธ์ฉบับนี้ชี้ให้เห็นถึงความเป็นมาในช่วงแรกของการเผยแพร่ศาสนาคริสต์นิกายคาทอลิกแก่ชนกลุ่มน้อยในประเทศพม่ายุคอาณานิคมอังกฤษซึ่งยังไม่เป็นที่รู้จักมากนัก โดยมีวัตถุประสงค์ที่จะสร้างความเข้าใจเชิงวิชาการเกี่ยวกับขั้นตอนการเปลี่ยนไปนับถือศาสนาคริสต์ในชนกลุ่มน้อย

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ABSTRACT

Scholars have devoted great attention to the minorities' conversion to Christianity in mainland Southeast Asian countries. The majority of previously conducted studies share a focus on the reasons for why minorities converted, focusing attention on the agency of the minorities involved yet leaving in the background the historical, political, and ideological context with which minorities found themselves confronted at the time of their encounter with Christianity.

The present research endeavors to contribute to the understanding of the processes through which minorities converted to Christianity in this region by focusing on that context and by analyzing in detail missionaries' work. In order to fulfill this goal, a genealogical approach has been used to trace the constitution and development of the first two Catholic missions devoted to the evangelization of non-Buddhist minorities in the center and northeast of the country formerly known as Burma. With regard to the missions' constitution, an account is provided on the general historical conditions that led to the founding of these two missions. With regard to the missions' development, this is explored in terms of the evangelization strategy missionaries employed in their activities

in the field and the discourse encompassing such a strategy during the years between 1868 and 1939. As a result of my research, this study provides the evidence to outline and prove the entanglements between a number of historical and political as well as ideological factors that enhanced the missions' success in rooting Catholicism among minorities.

With regard to the academic relevance of this research, my study sheds light on the poorly known early stages of Catholic missions and their development among minorities in British Burma, with the aim of enhancing academic understanding of the processes by which minorities in the area converted to Christianity.

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ข้อความแห่งการริเริ่ม

ตามความรู้อันเป็นที่สุดของผู้เขียน วิทยานิพนธ์ฉบับนี้ไม่มีเนื้อหาที่เคยเผยแพร่หรือเขียนโดยนักวิจัยท่านอื่นมาก่อนยกเว้นส่วนอ้างอิง อนึ่งผลงานการวิจัยฉบับนี้ยังไม่ถูกนำเสนอเป็นผลงานทางวิชาการในสถาบันอุดมศึกษาแห่งอื่นมาก่อน

STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

To the best of my knowledge, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due references are made. The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted for a degree or diploma at any other higher education institution.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This introductory chapter presents the research background and significance of this work, highlighting the process which led to the realization of this research and its outcomes. It identifies the research questions and objectives, and provides in addition an overview on the current debates of the three main issues discussed in this research, namely: minorities' conversion to Christianity in Southeast Asia, missions as a field of social enquiry, and the relations between missions and colonialism.

1.1 Research Background

During some field trips organized by the faculty of Social Sciences of Chiang Mai University, and in the course of individual journeys I made along the Thai-Myanmar border, I had occasion to meet with Akha association representatives and to take part in events organized by some of these organizations.[1] These associations all pursue the goal of revitalizing Akha cultural heritage, while at the same time promoting the Akha people's rights. The Akha are one of the many ethnic groups living in the uplands of South China, in North East Myanmar, and in the northern regions of Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam. As is the case for many other groups in mainland Southeast Asia, they nowadays display a multinational location, varying living conditions as a result of their inclusion into mainstream societies, as well as different religious affiliations. Faced with the possibility of losing much of their traditional culture, language included, a large part of the Akha associations' work can be defined, in my opinion, as an attempt to revitalize

[1] The Akha I had occasion to meet belong to the following associations: The Associations for Akha Education and Culture in Thailand (AFECT), based in Chiang Rai. *Mam Mirkhanq Aqkaqghanr Tawq-e Armavq* (MATA), translated into English by Morton as the "Myanmar Group for Carrying Akhazang" (Morton, 2013: 43), based in Tachilek, Myanmar. *Aqkaq Sanq Bovq Hawr-e Daevq Jeiq Daevq Kawv Ar Mavq Nymr Tavciqleir Dae* (the "Akha Literature and Culture Association of Tachilek Township"), Tachilek, Myanmar. *Naqkaw AqkaqDzoeqcawq Armavq* (NADA), also known as the "Mekong Akha Network for Peace and Sustainability" (MAPS), based in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

Akha traditional culture through processes of adaptation to current living condition. Reuter and Horstmann (2013: 4) have argued that revitalization "is a form of social change—indeed a deliberate act of social engineering." This interpretation implies a number of pre-conditions, with the first being the partial decline of the traditional world, while the second is the incorporation of a particular group into the mainstream. Both conditions are fulfilled nowadays for a large portion of minorities' communities in mainland Southeast Asia. As a consequence, an "unprecedented degree of cultural and religious self-awareness" is slowly taking shape (Reuter, Horstmann, 2013: 1). Such self-awareness implies both a confrontation between tradition and the newly introduced religions, as well as a process of adaptation of tradition to new conditions. Alongside this process, Akha association representatives show a special interest in Akha ancestor worship. In the case of the Akha, Geusau (1983) defines ancestor worship as the backbone of their overall culture. Scholars have intensively investigated ancestor systems in many areas of the world, and Gluckman and Fortes are the key scholars in this field. Gluckman (1937) is recognized for having distinguished ancestor cults from rituals practiced after a death. Fortes (1964) substantially contributed to a wider understanding of the structural organization patterns that ancestor beliefs imply. Ancestors in fact help to establish links among living communities, and they can regulate kinship systems and marriages, and ensure community survival (Kopytoff, 1971).

Ancestor worship is traceable among many groups in Southeast Asia and not limited to the Akha only, while Christian missionaries of different denominations and in different contexts usually banned the practice of ancestor worship by including it in the broader category of superstition. Scholars have focused on the issue of the relation between Christianity and ancestor worship at large, as well as in the context of Southeast Asia. In the case of the Akha, Kammerer (1990, 1996) for instance, tended to attribute the decline in ancestor worship to the spread of Christianity, while Hansson (1992) argued that ancestor-worshipping practices deteriorated due to economic changes. Whatever the cause, the Akha leaders I met currently devote their attention especially to the impact of Christianity on ancestor worship and the consequences of the decline of this practice in terms of their communities' identity.

As far as researching the emerging relations between evangelization and ancestor worship, I originally planned to investigate how the two systems of Christianity and ancestor worship encountered and eventually clashed through missionaries' attempts to

eradicate this practice. I realized that among the earliest missions active among minorities in mainland Southeast Asia was one group of Italian missionaries belonging to the Italian Seminario Lombardo per le Missioni Estere, the Lombard Seminary for Foreign Missions, and later PIME.[2] This mission has been poorly considered within academic debate despite their long lasting missionary activity in Southeast Asia, and which continues today with missions established in central and northern Thailand, in Cambodia's capital and northwest province, in the Philippine's capital and surrounding provinces, as well as in southern China. By the end of the nineteenth century and following the missions opened in India, Bangladesh, and Hong Kong, Propaganda Fide, responsible for catholic missions worldwide[3], assigned to the Lombard Seminary missionaries the goal of establishing one mission in Upper Burma.

This resulted in one of the earliest missions devoted to the purpose of evangelizing non-Buddhist minorities, closely following Baptist missionaries active in the same area.

My original intention was to limit my research to the Akha group with which Italian missionaries entered into contact with the opening of one station in Kentung in 1912. I planned to examine the friction between ancestor worship and evangelization through consulting missionary documents housed in the PIME Archive in Rome, mostly, and Milan. The documents I begun consulting, however, featured a different narrative, one in which ethnic diversity and specific cultural systems were not investigated or considered relevant. This was different from what Salemink (2003) or Michaud (2007) refer to in the case of the Missions Etrangères de Paris, Society of Foreign Missions of Paris (MEP) missionaries in Central and Northern Vietnam, for which ethnographic knowledge was a tool necessary to gain conversions, as well as to serve French colonial interests in the area. In contrast, the Lombard Seminary missionaries provide few ethnographic insights, and they seemingly did not consider using in depth knowledge of local cultural contexts as a key for the process of evangelization. Because there was limited interest among these missionaries in classifying groups, I realized that to focus on one minority group only would limit the meaningfulness of my research results. On the contrary, narratives on minorities at large would enable me to gain insights into missionaries' understanding of

[2] Founded in 1850 in Saronno (Milan), the Lombard Seminary adopted the name of Pontificio Istituto Missioni Estere, Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions, or PIME in 1926, was once unified with the similar Pontifical Seminary of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, established in 1871 in Rome.
[3] The office's name is today the Congregation of the Evangelization of People. In my work I use the more popular name of Propaganda Fide, by its former title.

their context and on their method of working. The minorities involved in my research then expanded to include, in addition to the Akha, the Karen, a consistent linguistic group of the Sino-Tibetan language found mainly in southern central Myanmar and along the two sides of the Myanmar-Thailand border; the Lahu, belonging to the Lolo-Burmese linguistic group and dislocated in the area comprising Northern Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam and Southern China; the Lisu who, along with the Akha, belong to the Tibeto-Burman linguistic group and are found in mainland Southeast Asian countries, Southern China and in Northeastern India; and the Wa, an Austroasiatic linguistic group located mostly in Southern China and Northern Myanmar.

However, somewhat surprisingly, the archival documents I begun to consult never mention ancestor worship with regard to any of these groups, usually referring to the number of local practices and ritual beliefs within the broader category of superstition. Taking this into account, I then became interested in the missionaries' general discourse on local minorities and on the link between such discourse and their strategy of evangelization. In addition, I became interested in the reasons leading to the constitution of the Eastern Burma and Divine Providence Missions, given that the area in which they were located was, at that time, poorly known, difficult to reach and far from the main centers where missions were already established. One additional unexpected change in my research direction involved the geographical limitations of my work, which I then had to enlarge. Therefore, in addition to the mission developed in the area surrounding Kentung, with the subsequent name of Missione della Divina Provvidenza, Divine Providence Missions, I had to include a previously established mission, the Missione della Birmania Orientale, Eastern Burma Mission, opened in Toungoo in 1868. These two missions are inextricably linked with each other, as I will later discuss. Koh (2014) argues that an encounter with an archive can change the direction and shape the goals of a research undertaking, and this certainly happened in the case of this research.

Taking an archival research approach, I had chosen a mainly historical perspective, which I attempted to enrich with a Foucauldian genealogic perspective. This approach was taken in order to focus on and connect the general and various political and ideological factors, all of which led to the two missions' constitution and shaped their development and results. By following this perspective, I chose to focus on the macro and meso contextual factors encompassing the minorities' conversion to Catholicism within a given context, and thereby partially addressing the issue at a micro-level. Young and

Seitz (2013) have proposed a multileveled understanding of the various factors determining conversion as a typology of three factors, with the first, the exogenous actors, be they merchants, missionaries or militaries, introducing the new creed and stimulating conversions; the second, the local social and political context; and the third, the locals' agencies, goals, and needs at work in determining conversions. I reached the conclusion that the Christian expansion in the area considered is certainly the result of changed socio-political conditions, determined by the constitution of British Burma combined with a number of choices made by missionaries at large in attempting to establish their missions.

In terms of the literature, it is possible to identify a number of studies that refer to the current or recent states of religious transformations among minorities; these studies are discussed in greater detail in the literature review section. Little is known, however, about the early stages of the evangelization of minorities in this part of mainland Southeast Asia, which is today Myanmar. Furthermore, as it has been previously mentioned, with the exception of certain works in the field of post-colonial studies, anthropologists and sociologists have tended to seldom focus on analyzing the statuses of mission stations. Analyses of these stations have nevertheless proven to be relevant in understanding contemporary local Christian churches and the various negotiations into which they have entered with local traditions.

I analyzed the missionaries' approach to traditional local practices as it occurred in the past, as that approach would have been substantially different from the one applied today, especially given, in the case of Roman Catholic Church missions, the major shift occurring in the consideration of local cultures, pronounced in the course of the Second Vatican Council (1963-1965). The consultation of the documents left by the missionaries and housed mostly in the PIME Archive in Rome[4] soon became the core of my work, and in fact changed and shaped the research outcome itself as well as its significance.

1.2 Thesis Significance

This study combines an interest in the history of missions, with special regard to minorities' conversion in the area of mainland Southeast Asia. It focuses on the discourse of missionaries with regard to the locals and the consequences of that discourse in shaping

[4] The PIME Archive in Rome houses the most consistent part of handwritten or published documents from the missions, as well as the reports on the missions' developments. The office in Milan houses mostly published books and the missions' photo archive.

specific approaches to the evangelization of minorities. In addition, the study provides insight on the formation of the first Catholic communities among minorities in Myanmar, with a particular focus on the work of one Catholic missionary group that has so far received little attention at the academic level.

Through archival research, this study proposes an analysis of the macro and meso contextual factors (Young and Seitz, 2013) encompassing minorities' conversion to Catholicism during the nineteenth to early twentieth century in southern central and northeastern British Burma. The macro factors consisted of one Italian catholic missionary group and its motivations in establishing missions abroad, as well as their understanding of the context and subsequent strategies that were activated to gain conversions. The meso factors consisted in the rise of British Burma since 1852. Both these factors determined and influenced locals' responses to the new creed. I highlight how the entanglement between these two factors influenced the missionaries to act mainly as civilizers and as mediators between local minorities and the British or local authorities, and how this strategy resulted in successfully rooting Catholicism in Burma. A genealogic perspective allowed for the integration of autonomous factors, for example, in one such case, the Roman Catholic Church's agenda at the time of the founding of the two catholic missions combined with the necessities of a British colonial administration. The integration of such factors highlights the contextual complexity which encompassed the phenomena of large scale conversions.

The majority of existing studies on the minorities' conversion in the region share a focus on inter-ethnic relations and the economic factors that influence conversions (Tapp, 1989, 1989b; Hansson, 1992; Hayami, 1996; Kammerer, 1990, 1996). In-depth analysis of mission stations and their institutions, as well as individual missionary groups, is however usually neglected, albeit with few exceptions, as for example, the recent work by Hayami (2018) or the monographs by Salemink (2003) and Michaud (2007), which all rely on archival research to analyze early stages of Christian presence in mainland Southeast Asia. Beidelman (1974), who focuses on missions and social change in Africa, has argued that a detailed knowledge of missions would contribute to the understanding of the spread of Christianity, as well as to its local specificities. Missions are approached as complex institutions into which are reflected the urgencies of the churches to which they belong as well as general Western ideology and discourse. They are considered, at the same time, as spaces of encounter and negotiation between various social actors,

including locals, missionaries, colonial administrations, and local political elites. With regard to the links between missions and colonial powers, while certain scholars have highlighted the continuum between these two Western institutions (Beidelman, 1974, 1982; Huber, 1988; Kipp, 1990; Comaroff and Comaroff, 1986, 1991, 1997), others have focused on the role missionaries played as mediators between the locals and the agents of economic and political subjugation (Burkhart, 1989; Botta, 2013). The cases analyzed in this study seemingly highlight this kind of role for missionaries, confirming Fabian's (1990) argument of a double order of narratives expressed by colonial administrations and missions.

The overall organization of this work displays a historical shape as far as it aims to provide a picture of the early encounters in this part of mainland Southeast Asia between minorities and Catholic missionaries and the general political, social and ideological context in which they were embedded. The relationship between history and anthropology is long and fluctuating in terms of academic debate. Anthropology has occasionally avoided studying peoples and cultures diachronically and, when it has done so, it has contributed to creating perceptions that certain societies live in a different order of time or had no history. This was a result of the influence that the natural sciences and natural history had on the field of anthropological science, which emerged later (Fabian, 2002). Post-colonial and feminist studies have drawn attention to the relationship between anthropology and history, thus emphasizing the relevance of history and past colonial experience to the shaping of the present. Within this perspective, archives are crucial sources of information and data (Mathur, 2000; Rondekar, 2009; Burton, 2003).

Through archival research, this work endeavors to determine why and how Catholic missionaries belonging to the Lombard Seminary for Foreign Missions contributed to the spread of Christianity among minorities in the country that is today called Myanmar. The geographical scope of this research is limited to the Eastern Burma Mission, which was founded in 1868 and had its main station at Toungoo, and to the Divine Providence Mission, which was opened in 1912 with its main station in Kentung.[5] Unlike other historic Catholic missions established within the territory of modern Myanmar, both missions were developed to specifically evangelize non-Buddhist minorities, primarily

[5] The town's name is also spelled KyaingTong. In this work, I follow the spelling used by Lombard Seminary missionaries.

the Karen, Lahu, Akha, and Wa. And it is noteworthy that the earlier Catholic missions had not been successful in gaining followers among Buddhist majorities in Rangoon and Mandalay. The time scope of this research extends from the missionaries' arrival in Toungoo in 1868 to 1939, when the beginning of World War II disrupted many stations and villages, bringing to a halt the early expansion of Catholicism in the area.

1.3 Research Questions

In developing the present research, the general broad question was split into three sub-questions, all of which approach the same subject of investigation from slightly different angles.

1. To what extent did the Roman Catholic Church determine the spread of Catholicism among minorities in Myanmar? How did it do so?

1.1 Why were the Eastern Burma Mission and the Divine Providence Mission set up?

1.2 What understanding did missionaries have of local minorities?

1.3 Which tools and strategies were employed to promote conversions?

1.4 Research Objectives

In line with the main research questions, this work is intended to achieve the following objectives:

1. Obtain evidence of a choice on the part of the Roman Catholic Church to spread Catholicism among minorities and to determine how the process of evangelization proceeded.

In order to do so, this work features a discussion intended to achieve the following goals:

1.1 Shed light on the multiple reasons that led to the foundation of these two missions;

1.2 Understand the missionaries' own understanding of locals; and

1.3 Highlight the practical strategies missionaries employed in the field in order to promote conversions.

1.5 Literature Review: Minorities' Conversion to Christianity

Minorities' conversion to so called world religions is a central topic among scholars in the field of social and anthropological research, and explanations are variously framed. Because conversions from traditional to world religions have occurred most consistently during colonial expansion, these conversions highlight a relation between a colonial enterprise and Christian missions. In this section, I present briefly the state of academic debate on the issue of conversion from traditional to world religions, with a special focus on studies conducted within a Southeast Asian context.

Robert Hefner's work *Conversion to Christianity. Historical and Anthropological Perspectives on a Great Transformation*, edited in 1993, has had a significant impact on the study of conversion to so called world religions. The book, through interdisciplinary approaches and through a wide range of cases presented, provides a fair articulation of possible variables and outcomes at play with regard to a group's conversion to Christianity. Above all, it poses the question of how the process of the "conversion of tribal peoples to more socially expansive and doctrinally formalized religions" (3) should be conceptualized. In his introduction to the volume, "World Building and the Rationality of Conversion," Hefner is consistent in defining the difference between world religions and traditional religions, highlighting how "religious reformation is implicated in the making of the modern world" (3). Nevertheless, he repeatedly links a conversion to world religion with civilization by arguing, for instance, that the "conversion to world religion seems to recur in the civilizing process" (6), moreover by civilization he means the emergence of "state-based societies" (28). His perspective is based on borrowing Max Weber's (1963) concept of rationalization and the distinction Weber made between traditional and world religion. Weber argues that world religions display a higher level of coherence, rationalization, and comprehensiveness when compared to traditional piecemeal ones, oriented more toward mechanical manipulations of the supernatural through rites. By rationalization, Weber is referring to the development of a stable and codified doctrine alongside the rise of a religious leadership. Hefner (1993), in dialogue with Weber, proposes to replace the Weberian concept of rationalization with that of

rationality, and by this he means "the effectiveness of certain ideas at making sense of an individual or a group's life-world, again with reference to some underlying value complex" (15). With this understanding, Hefner (1993) shifts from a Weberian rationalization model, intended as "rationalization at the level of the doctrine," to a "life-world rationality at the level of the individual" (16).

In addition, Hefner (1993) addresses how a geopolitical process by which individuals and groups are incorporated "into a larger social order acts as a catalyst for both conversion and the reformulation of indigenous religion"(21). Moreover, that process of being incorporated into a wider macro-cosmos has been given impetus and taken place through colonialism. According to Hefner (1993), world religion and Christianity provide "social redemption, that is, a state that provides relief from an intolerable situation through new morality and social relations" (29), with the effect of relocating "the divisive solidarities of language, custom, and region within a broader community" (34). I would argue that, Hefner's work (1993) provides a fair articulation of possible variables at play with regard to a group's conversion to Christianity, including for instance, economic change and identity. In so doing, Hefner questions Horton's (1975) influential understanding of the same topic. Horton (1975) argues that conversion to world religions is a mean to reframe the general worldview according to a new enlarged macrocosms. He explains conversion to either Christianity or Islam, in the case of Africa, in terms of a shifting dialectic between microcosm-macrocosm that is activated by the social changes introduced by colonialism. Hefner not only understand the process of conversion as a shift in terms of worldview, but he in addition emphasizes the practical consequences of conversion to a world religion within the reality of a social field in terms of, for instance, identity reformulation. A similar understanding is also proposed by Young and Seitz (2013), which in general tends to reduce the weight and centrality of the concept of conversion itself. They highlight the complexity of analyzing the phenomenon of conversion through the merging of macro-, meso-, and micro-contextual factors. As we have seen, those levels involve the exogenous actors, be they merchants, missionaries or militaries, at the first level; the local, social, and political context, at the second level; and the individual agencies at work, at the third level. By proposing such a model of analysis, Young and Seitz (2013) advocate for a multicausal understanding of the process of conversion. In addition, however, they also partially abandon the focus on conversion intended in Horton's intellectualist manner. The multiple reasons behind conversion have,

as a theoretical consequence, the impossibility of explaining conversion to Christianity as a unique phenomenon.

Nevertheless, attempts are made to find one comprehensive explanation for the conversions from traditional to world religions in general. In this regard, I share Keyes' (1993) perspective that the concept of rationality should be replaced with the idea that world religions encode a more abstract creed. Keyes (1993) states that "it is not that premodern religions lack coherence, but that historic religions derive their coherence from a belief in an abstract being or principle under which all other supernatural powers as well as humans are subject" (21). In this sense, world religions, such as Christianity or Buddhism, have offered a more universalistic view, able to "transcend the limitations of local place and time" (Keyes 1993: 21). In so doing, those systems of religion are more adaptable to multiple living conditions. The inclusive ability of universalistic religions, flexible enough to adapt to a multiplicity of living conditions and contexts, is from my perspective a preferred way to define world religions This is a view quite different than that of Hefner (1993) who suggests that world religions are historical and civilizing as opposed to the pre-modern.

Other scholars, in approaching this issue of conversion to Christianity from traditional religions, have partially abandoned the project of a wider understanding of what makes world religions more appealing than traditional ones, in comparative terms. Rather, they focus on the contextual reasons determining conversions and on the consequences of conversion.

Explanations based on identity politics, which have been used alternatively to explain mass conversions or resistance to conversion, are particularly popular and are, in some cases, intertwined with the view that universalistic religions are more suitable for entering into modernity. In the latter vein, Kammerer argues that Christianity "is simultaneously a claim to difference from and a claim to equality with valley-dwelling Buddhists" (Kammerer, 1990: 285). Similarly, Tapp emphasizes the White Hmong's dilemma and their fluctuating choices between Buddhism and Christianity in light of both their relations with majoritarian Buddhist groups and their ethnic identity in the context of Thailand. In Keyes (1993), the issue of identity is employed to explain why Buddhist Thai, unlike minorities, did not convert to Christianity, as they perceived the faith as being alien to their Thai identity (Keyes, 1993). Kammerer reaches the conclusion that, in the

early stages of evangelization, the Akha did not convert to Christianity because this would have resulted in a loss of their 'Akha-ness' (Kammerer, 1990: 281). An exhaustive account of key contributions in this vein has recently been provided by Salemink in *Is Protestant Conversion a Form of Protest?* (2009). In addition to cases where conversion to Christianity seems to have been intended to draw a line between converts and other, non-Christian groups, Salemink considers cases in which such conditions were not observed, concluding that this interpretation cannot be considered as the only explanation. In fact, some scholars have noted the use of markers other than religion to construct ethnic boundaries (Hayami, 1996). Salemink (2009) concludes that the specific context in terms of policies and national policies toward minorities, as well as the status of religion in each context, tends to frame the meaning and inform the reasons behind the conversion.

In addition, scholars have also focused upon economic changes and the processes of modernization to explain conversion, as do Hansson (1992) and Tooker (2004), in the case of the Akha in Thailand. In a similar vein, Tapp (1989b) highlights one additional relevant issue: the severe economic conditions many minorities were facing at the time of their encounter with missionaries, mentioning the case of "rice bowl conversions" among the Hmong in China (70). From a different perspective, scholars have also investigated the pre-existing cultural conditions which made conversion to Christianity possible and successful. This is the argument of traditional oral stories, as for instance, the ones recorded about a lost book among the Karen and Hmong in the case of mainland Southeast Asia, which, according to scholars and missionaries, acted as a basis for the acceptance of the new foreign religion (Wa, Soward and Sowards, 1963; Tapp 1989).

In conclusion, I argue with Tapp (1989) that explanations regarding conversions from traditional to world religions can only be provided with a consideration of the multiplicity of intertwined factors. Given that Christian missions rose globally with the establishment of colonial empires, relevant works have addressed the link between colonialism and Christian missions. The following section presents a brief overview on the state of mission studies within a historical and socio-anthropological framework. And from there, I will frame these issues in the context of the two missions considered for my research.

Although a number of intertwining factors are used to explain minorities' conversion, little attention has been devoted to analyzing the practical development of

missions in their specificities. The literature suggests, on the one hand, that generalizations are barely able to explain the all phenomenon while on the other, research on this issue deepens the sense of complexity and the variety of stories and histories that trace the spread of Christianity worldwide. The research also contributes to reconstructing the development of Christian missions and of Christianity among minorities in a detailed manner, so as to provide reasonable pictures of the local reasons and conditions which made evangelization either successful or unsuccessful. The following sections present an overview on the debates in the rest of the literature relevant to my research. They specify the Christian missions as a unit of analysis and the main issues debated as they relate to the study of missions in a socio-anthropological perspective, namely the relation between missions and colonial administrations.

1.6 Literature Review: Conceptualizing Christian Missions

Missions have been an essential feature of world religion as they moved out of their places of birth. In the case of Christianity, this feature is found in the Bible verse: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15-18). For the Roman Catholic Church, mission is doctrinally paired with 'Church' as they both share the goal of revealing God to the people, where 'people' potentially is understood as embracing all humankind (Robert, 2009). A missionary's archetype is embodied by Paul, who traveled unceasingly within the territories of the Roman Empire to found churches. Missions should then be conceptualized as an organic component of Christianity for all denominations as far as "for Christians the practices of mission are driven by theological beliefs," Robert (2009: 2) comments. In addition, the history of missions has developed to trace the development and expansion of Christianity worldwide. The history of missions developed within a missiology perspective, theologically founded. However, by the beginning of the twentieth century, a shift toward more historically grounded research occurs in the study of missions. Pioneering work in this vein are the works by Adolf von Harnack (1908), who traces the history of the church's foundation in early Christianity; by Robinson (1915), with a focus on protestant missions; and by Latourette (1937-1945), who firmly located the history of missions as a branch of historical studies, by lamenting "one of the strangest omissions of historical scholarship has been the slight attention paid to the story of the expansion of Christianity" (Latourette, 1925:108). In focusing on

Christian missions especially in the colonial world, the history of missions has entered into communication with the social sciences.

From a wider historical perspective, missions show substantial changes in the way they have conducted their work throughout the centuries, in accordance with the general socio-cultural as well as the political context in which they have operated (Robert, 2009). For instance, in the early centuries Christianity spreads because of its direct link with political authorities. During the middle ages, the spread of Christianity relies mainly on mendicant orders, while in modern times, moving alongside colonial expansion, it imposes conversion. In subsequent post-colonial times, missionary strategy shifts toward enculturation strategies, based on the principle that Christianity is shaped by the cultures into which it merges. Nowadays, it is usually agreed that Christianity should move increasing toward indigenization, having lost its features of a European-Western religion. For insiders, such a concept implies not only the translation of the main Christian concepts from one culture to another but also the "incarnation" of Christian content into local cultural contexts (Nthambury, 1989). This process involves both doctrine and liturgy, in a complex balance between orthodoxy and adaptation. Such debates are recorded in the history of missions' works, such as in the work by Neill (1964), where the author addresses the issue of the proper missionary strategy in the face of new Christian churches worldwide and in a post-colonial context.

Social scientists similarly are engaged in the study of Christian missions with regard, especially, to colonial contexts. Social scientists' perspectives are, however, slightly different. If historians of missions are in many cases interested in developing insight into the ways of evangelization, anthropologists are engaged in recording the cultural clashes between traditional systems and the newly introduced Christian concepts and worldview. However, social scientists can indeed benefit from historical studies of missions in that historical studies contribute to a deeper knowledge of the specific characteristics of each denomination's missions and the theoretical and practical understanding of how missionary work developed (Beidelman, 1974). For instance, Horner (1965), with his *Cross and Crucifix in Mission*, is among the few who attempted a systematic comparison among Catholic and Protestant missions at large in order to detect general recurring differences in missionary strategy. In addition, missions can be interrogated in terms of their influence on cultural transformations among traditional

groups: for example, the investigation of processes that involve creative hybridization and the formation of new identities within enlarged Christian communities (Robert, 2009).

The history of missions and sociological or anthropological research can additionally enrich each other in that the former aims to highlight the spread of missions in terms of major trends and outcomes, while the latter has the merit of highlighting in detail the contextual aspects characterizing missions in each and any of the places they happened to have been established. In other words, if the anthropological study of missions enables us to record the "movement of religious ideas from one culture to another" (Robert, 2009: 2), from a closer perspective, the history of missions can, I believe, enclose local histories into a broader context, connecting systematically the local and the global. Although sociological and anthropological disciplines have rarely focused systematically on missions, some notable exceptions, discussed in Chapter I, show clearly how the study of missions can be useful in understanding social change, for instance. This is very much the case of works by Beidelman (1982) and Comaroff and Comaroff (1986) especially, who emphasized the key role played by Christian missions to facilitate the move of African communities into a capitalist economy and sectorialized society. On the other hand, Robert (2009) points to the bias toward missions and missionaries well active among Western scholars, who sometimes ignored the locals' early response to evangelization, and their active involvement in the growth of the missions themselves. With regard to this issue, she argues "missionaries were powerless without indigenous partners who could express the gospel in their own cultural framework" (Robert, 2009: 94). Some scholars have conceptualized religious movements as appropriations and protest against European domination (Worsley, 1987), while more recently religious conversion is analyzed through the lens of the politics of identity, especially in the case of Southeast Asian countries (Tapp, 1989; Kammerer, 1990).

I would argue that a history of missions can contribute to an understanding of missions and their outcomes, either according to their specific denomination or the general historical and political context in which they operate. Christian missions, in fact, change according to the various denominations to which they belong as well as in the face of shifting geopolitical changes over the course of time.

In conclusion, by framing missions methodologically as specific complex phenomena, I propose to analyze them in the juncture among a number of events, interests, and discourses as well as in the context of their specific historical development.

The following section attempts to present both the paradigm shifts and the partial continuities in the missiology debate within the Roman Catholic Church in order to subsequently locate the two missions considered in this study in their specific historical context.

1.7 Literature Review: Missions from a Socio-Anthropological Perspective

With regard to Southeast Asia, while a number of studies have focused on the missions established in major centers and the major trends in missionary work, a historical and comprehensive analysis of Christian expansion in the area has not yet been completed. However, Keyes (1993, 1996) and Hughes (1982) have provided brief accounts of missionaries' presence in the region and have analyzed the reasons behind their failure to convert to Christianity those from among Buddhist majorities. Sociological and anthropological disciplines have rarely focused systematically on missions; however, an in-depth analysis of missions with a focus on practical missionary work in the field may contribute to the deconstruction of the perhaps excessively rigid portrayal of missionaries. Such an analysis may shed light on the reality of the encounters between a variety of missionary groups and a variety of linguistically and culturally diversified local groups, as well as the general historical and political context under which such encounters occurred (Pels, 1989). This gap in the literature has been explained by the potentially sensitive nature of such a topic, by the difficulty of conducting solid fieldwork, and by the reluctance on the part of anthropologists or sociologists to conduct archival research and to adopt a historical perspective when studying missions (Hughes, 1978; Beidelman, 1982; Kipp, 1990). An additional difficulty may be that anthropology, as a discipline, has been traditionally devoted to the study of possibly exotic "others," and researchers may have been reluctant to turn to familiar institutions and study subjects belonging to their own (Western) cultural background.

However, the end of the decolonization process, which concluded roughly by the end of the 1970s, forced anthropology to reconsider much of its foundations. In fact, the discipline itself fell under scrutiny for its colonial legacy (Stocking, 1993). The rise of a new generation of insiders in the form of post-colonial intellectuals, the attention that has been directed toward enduring forms of Western domination, and the shift toward an analysis of the West itself characterize the new wave of studies in the field of social

sciences, as summarized in *Decolonizing Anthropology: Moving Further Toward an Anthropology for Liberation* (Harrison, 1997). This volume invites anthropologists to engage with reality in a transformative and emancipatory manner. The focus on critiquing Western forms of domination serves to encourage those in the social sciences to apply their analysis to the institutions belonging to their own context. Within this new wave of post-colonial studies, a great deal of research has been conducted on colonial institutions at large, while other studies have focused on Christian missions in colonial contexts in detail.

Notable works within this new wave include that of Tonkinson (1974), who devotes a number of chapters of her book to the encounter between missionaries and Australian Aborigines living in Jigalong, highlighting both the resistance on the part of the Aborigines and the derogatary conceptualization that missionaries applied to the locals (Tonkinson, 1974). Beidelman's *Colonial Evangelism: A Socio-Historical Study of an East African Mission at the Grassroots* (1982) is also a pioneering work; it provides theoretical guidance for the anthropological analysis of missions. This research began as fieldwork conducted by the author among the Kaguru of Tanzania, with the intention of recording their traditional culture; as a result, the monograph focuses on the mission station where Beidelman resided for some months between 1957–1958 which belonged to the Church Missionary Society. Following this experience, he decided to shift his attention to the mission itself and to the missionaries, both of which he considered as key factors in understanding the social changes that had occurred. He traced the background and development of this mission, mixing archival research and anthropology. His work covers a span of time ranging from 1876 to 1958. At the core of his analysis is the mission, an institution with its own structure and goals, which he considers to be directly colonial. The book is also intended to provide theoretical guidance for the study of missions from a socio-anthropologic perspective. While, in an earlier paper, Beidelman argued that missionaries are usually represented as "all members of a general class" (1974: 239), in this work he instead highlights the relevance of the study of an individual missionary group with reference to its affiliation, ideology, social and historical background.

The theoretical background of his work is the application of Weber's bureaucracy theory to missions, which he considers colonial institutions in terms of their practical effects. He focuses specifically on the spread of pyramidal organizations and work sectorialization, characteristic of capitalist systems (Beidelman, 1982). This argument

was later proposed by Comaroff and Comaroff, who also conducted a detailed analysis of missions as colonial deputations, exploring how missions contributed to the development of capitalist systems in South Africa (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1986). A work by Huber (1987), composed after the author conducted field work between 1976–1977, is also largely historical, focusing on the development of Catholic missions in the Sepik province of Papua New Guinea.

During the 1990s, Comaroff and Comaroff produced two volumes that focus on missions in detail. In *Of Revelation and Revolution* (1991, 1997), they added a dimension to the historical account, namely an analysis of the processes of the "colonization of consciousness" (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991: IX). A significant part of the first volume focuses on what the authors refer to as historical anthropology, recording the events of the first encounter between missionaries and the Tswana people in the late 19th century. In the second volume, the interactions between the missionaries of the London Missionary Society and the Tswana in South Africa are analyzed. In recalling Foucault's microphysics (Van Dijik, 1985), the colonization of consciousness is enacted through daily routines and intrusive control over aspects of life such as bodies, work, and leisure. Thus the missionaries' approach, Kipp (1990) argues, was legitimized by their understanding of their role, which was not confined strictly to religious terms but rather encompassed a wider civilizing sense, reinforced for a considerable period of time by their sense of the cultural, if not racial superiority, of Europeans. By giving space to detailed historical accounts based on archival documents at the expense of theoretical anthropological issues and, ultimately, representing missionaries negatively, many of the works mentioned above have been subject to criticism despite the originality of their contributions (Dekar, 1984). With reference to the former criticism, the commingling between history and anthropology remained a debated issue until the occurrence of "a change in the ecology of learning that has driven historians and anthropologists, like so many migrant geese, onto one another's territories: a collapse of the natural dispersion of feeding grounds that left French to the one and Samoa to the other" (Geertz, 1990: 324). With reference to the latter criticism, one is not stretching the truth to state that missionaries have been described in negative terms in the majority of past ethnographic works. Stipe (1980) argues that certain presuppositions, for instance, the idea of traditional cultures as an "organic-unity concept" (1980: 166) or the "meaningless of religion beliefs" (1980: 167), play a role on the part of anthropologists' hostility toward

Christian missionaries at large; however, these presuppositions are somewhat tenuously linked to the field of research and are instead mainly rooted in the anthropologist's own background and context (Stipe, 1980). In contrast, Salamone (1977) argues that the hostility between missionaries and anthropologists is, instead, very much of a deep similarity: both are convinced that they have access to the truth; both work, sometimes side by side, on behalf of people they encounter. With regard to this issue, I tend to think both explanations can be considered as reasonable and that much depends on the individual scholar's position. Nevertheless, the enmity that has been demonstrated by anthropologists has led to the positive contributions of missionaries being downplayed; for example, missionaries occasionally acted as mediators between locals and colonials (Stipe, 1980). The archival material they left occasionally provides detailed accounts of the past, which can enhance anthropological knowledge. In some cases, missionaries provided detailed ethnographic accounts, such as the work by the English missionary Samuel Pollard on the Hmong in northern Yunnan; the book written by Isobel Kuhn on her experiences with the Lisu people in Northern Thailand; or the many chronicles provided by missionaries belonging to the Missions Etrangères de Paris, also MEF, in the course of their work in the central Vietnamese highlands (Pollard 1919; Kuhn 1956; Salemink 2003). Missionaries occasionally had anthropological backgrounds, as in the case of Paul Lewis, who added an expertise in anthropology to his missionary work among the Lahu and Akha in the country previously known as Burma and Thailand, with the result that his works feature a more committed academic tone (see Lewis, 1969–1970).

1.8 Literature Review: Colonialism, Christian Missions and Ethnography

Within the field of post-colonial studies, the interest in Christian missions has arisen, especially, in relation to colonialism. Missions have usually been conceptualized as fully and coherently connected with colonial power. This is the case of Beidelman (1974; 1982), who highlighted the discrepancies between the evangelical message of missions and the reality of missions' contributions in the spread of western-organized forms of work and society; of Comaroff and Comaroff (1991; 1997), who analyzed the processes contributing to consciousness' colonization; and, of Said (1978), who shed light on the processes of Western discursive domination to which missionaries contributed. These analyses of the links between missions and colonialism rose up alongside the work

of post-colonial studies and its critique of colonial experience. By the 1990s, however, new evaluations of missions arose, according to Robert (2009), that took into account the reality that a prominent proportion of Christians now live outside the West.

In this regard, I argue with Robert (2009: 2) that "the word 'mission' is often quickly reduced to western colonialism, rather than analyzed as a complex, multi-cultural historical process stretching across two millennia." What Robert (2009) is suggesting is a consideration of missions as autonomous institutions, whose stories merge with that of colonialism in modern times. Surely Christianity moved outward by taking advantage of the connectivity provided by the structures of European empires. Similarly, missionary work enhanced the transformation toward a sectorialized and pyramidal capitalist form of organization. Yet, I argue, unlike traders and colonial administrators, missionaries were driven by their own religious motivations and interests, which in some cases may have even conflicted with that of colonial enterprises. In addition, as Robert argues, in some cases "literacy, education, medical care, social services, support for individualism, and the gospel message – were tools that ultimately equipped indigenous peoples to challenge European empires on their own terms" (Robert, 2009: 51-52).

Thus researchers have begun to devote more attention to the role missionaries sometimes played as mediators in colonial contexts (Botta, 2013), as well as to the use locals made of missionaries' support and services. For instance, de Kock (1996) focused on the way discourse introduced by missionaries in South Africa got internalized and re-invented by a rising local elite. Buckhart's work on the Nahua's conversion in the sixteenth century focused on the ways in which locals adhered to Christianity under conditions of domination. Additionally, recurrent among scholars is the argument that missions provide access to modernity and to the global, as in the contributions collected by Der Veer (1996). Furthermore, works by Cannel (2006) and Villaça and Wright (2009) focus on locals' agency and processes of appropriation and adaptation within missions, which are seen as spaces of negotiation with the construction of new meanings for all actors involved.

In between the derogatory representations of missionaries as colonial agents and the redeeming one of missionaries as independent from and in conflict with colonial power, provided by ethnographic writings, a third position is traceable. Fabian (1990) proposes the model of a double order of narratives: one sustaining the economic

exploitation of land and people, and guiding the colonial enterprise, and the other theologically inherent to the role of the church itself and sustaining missionary enterprise. These two narratives, although autonomous one from the other, intertwined and overlapped in the colonial contexts, constructing European's legitimacy and the ideology of its civilizing role. The relation between the two narratives came finally to be complementary and reinforcing each other, whereas the degree of practical cooperation between the two institutions, the civil and the religious one, is framed differently according to the context. The complexity of such relations nevertheless displays a variety of cases. For instance, the case discussed by Michaud (2004) highlights the high degree of cooperation between the two, with missionaries actively working on behalf of French colonial expansion, moved by a mixture of religious motivations and nationalistic ones. Quite the opposite is the case of the Jesuit missionaries in Latin America, whose reluctance to cooperate with Portuguese colonials contributed to their expulsion from Latin America. The example of the Jesuit missions in Latin America probably remains an exceptional case as in most cases relations among missions and colonial administrations were characterized by degrees of cooperation. With regard to the specific context of British Burma in relation to Christian missions, Hall (1960) argues that the British presence in Burma was devoted especially to the development of a new trade route connecting India and China and to the exploitation of land resources, leaving space for Christian missions to develop their services especially in the remote areas.

Michaud (2007) also highlights the nature and rationale of missionaries' accounts of locals in terms of their narratives of the Other. He refers to this specific but consistent set of narratives as "colonial missionary ethnography" (Michaud, 2007). With this definition, Michaud (2007) refers to the amount of information Catholic missionaries, belonging to the MEP, provided consistently but not exclusively in support of French military and administrative expansion in Tonkin. In these cases, reports from all the categories of non-specialist ethnographers – missionaries, merchants, or colonial administrators – merged in style and narratives, as Salemink (2003) also points out. Nevertheless, missionaries' narratives can be approached, also, through the lens of the general historical and cultural environment of which they are a part. This is a perspective both Michaud (2007) and Salemink (2003) consider as they link the evolutionary ideas popular in Europe to the specific ethnographies reflecting missionaries' religious backgrounds and aims. After having been ignored for so long, the written accounts

provided by non-professional ethnographers, either missionaries or administrators, have been reconsidered in the last decades for all the information they can provide on the colonial past (Pels & Salemink, 1994), as well as on the early process of Christianization in certain areas.

1.9 Conceptual Framework

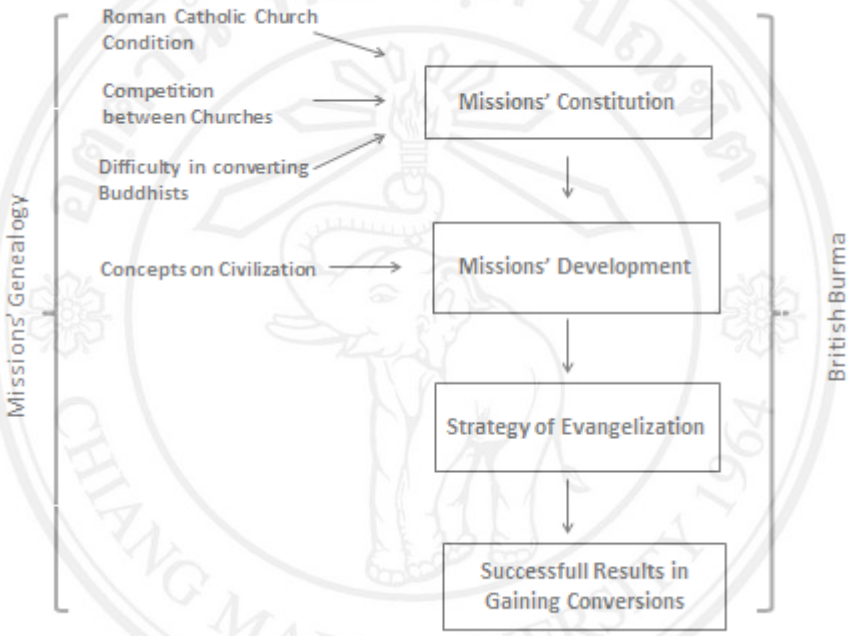

Figure 1: Conceptual framework

Minorities' encounter with Catholicism occurred under the conditions of a newly constituted British Burma and in accordance with a number of contextual concerns within the Catholic church. The entanglements between these two conditions led to the genealogy of the Eastern Burma and Divine Providence Missions. If, on the one hand, the British annexation of Burmese territories changed people's living conditions and social organization, on the other, it made the opening of missions in remote areas safer and enabled missionaries to embody the role of civilizers and mediators with the new British rulers. Furthermore, during the years considered, the Roman Caltholic Church operated within a context in which they felt threatened on a number of fronts: by the growing

secularism as well as a nationalistic wave within the Italian peninsula; by the growing presence of Baptist missionaries in the area surrounding Toungoo; and by the difficulties experienced by already established Catholic missions in the Burmese plains trying to convert Buddhists to Christianity. All of these perceived threats comprise the reasons behind the constitution of these missions among minorities in Burma.

In addition, I analyze the reasons for the manner in which missionaries proceeded to evangelize minorities, highlighting the genealogy of their evangelization strategy. Missionaries' understanding of the locals was based on Eurocentric values and evolutionary ideas characteristic of Western thought at the end of nineteen century. Their understanding was also based on the Acosta classification and the instruction for the proper methods of evangelization for varying levels of civilization. According to these general ideas and classifications, local minorities encountered in the context of these two missions were soon classified as poorly civilized. This classification implied that the method selected for evangelization was oriented toward the improvement of living conditions and to the provision of practical aid, as well as to a certain level of tolerance toward local interpretations of religious teaching.

In the face of the new socio-political conditions partaken by British Burma, the work of the missionaries was sufficiently valued by local communities as the number of conversions rose steadily and consistently throughout the span of time considered.

1.10 Thesis Outline

This thesis is organized as follows: The current chapter sets the scene for my research in terms of its significance, the background literature and the issues related to academic relevance. Chapter Two discusses methodology and the method used for the purpose of this research; it introduces the "research field" constituted by the PIME Archive in Rome. Chapter Three frames historically the socio-political context into which the two catholic missions developed, namely the British colonial expansion in southern central and northern Burma and the conditions of minorities at that time. Chapter Four enters into the heart of this study reconstructing the genealogy of both the Eastern Burma and Divine Providence missions as well as the Lombard Seminary, connecting the main events that determined the institute's foundation and the occasion which led to the

establishment of these missions. In addition, this chapter closes by providing an account of the two missions in their main developments, basic chronology, and missionaries involved. After having responded to why the Eastern Burma and Divine Providence Missions were constituted, Chapter Five focuses on how missionaries proceeded in their evangelizing task by embarking on an analysis of the multiple layers involved. The first sections focus on the way missionaries represented locals through their texts while following sections focus on the main fields where missionaries engaged their efforts.

Lastly, Chapter Six presents my conclusions, restating the problem and synthesizing the main findings with regard to the research questions presented and specifying the limits of this work, with some suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 2

Genealogy, Discourse Analysis and the Archive

This chapter discusses the wider conceptual background in which I locate my work and deals with the methodology and method I followed to answer my key research questions. I have differentiated between methodology and method, referring to the former as the theoretical grounding encompassing my research and driving its framework, and to the latter as the practical manner in which I collected and treated my data accordingly (Ramsey et al., 2010). In addition, the chapter introduces the current, primary issues debated that encompass archival research and provides some information on the PIME Archive in Rome where I conducted my research. The final sections clarify the conceptual framework that shaped my overall research itinerary and thesis outline.

2.1 Genealogy as Concept and Methodology

Given my goal of reconstructing the constitution and development of the two Catholic missions among minorities in rising colonial Burma, I have integrated suggestions from previous socio-historical works on missions discussed in the previous chapter, with conceptual insights borrowed mainly from Foucault. His legacy has had a significant influence on post-colonial studies at large, and certain approaches in the analysis of missions have adopted and applied Foucault's concepts to specific issues. For example, Comaroff and Comaroff (1991; 1997) systematically applied a microphysics' perspective to unveil the power and control that missionaries exerted in the South African colonial context through meticulously detailed embodied practices. Tonkinson (1974) focused on discourse and power to highlight the construction and legitimation of locals as subjects of both colonial and religious authorities. Foucault has had a significant impact on the social sciences, and scholars have found uses for his thoughts in both post-modern

and post-colonial studies. Scholars investigating the crisis of representation, which embraces all human sciences, could find in Foucault's work a new perspective on thediscursive construction of reality, while post-colonial studies have borrowed consistently from his reflections on power and knowledge.

Foucault borrowed the concept of genealogy from Nietzsche, with the intent of using it to replace his previous concept of archeology. An exhaustive presentation of the manner in which he interpreted the concept of genealogy can be found in *Lectures at the College de France* (2003); the three volumes of *The History of Sexuality* (1979, 1988, 1990) and *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977) primarily adopt a genealogical approach. As Bevir (2008) notes, in the works of both Nietzsche and Foucault, genealogy is viewed as a form of radical and critical historicism, unlike idealistic and developmental historicism. For instance, Foucault rejects an understanding of history as a linear development toward increasingly refined and complex systems arguing, to the contrary, that history proceeds alongside ruptures and sudden diversions and is characterized by multiplicity and contingency. As such, genealogy implies the idea that historical knowledge cannot provide predictive insights (Connor, 1992). Subscribing to such a claim once and forever is well beyond my intentions. Nevertheless, Foucault's argument fits well with my original intention of shedding new light on the issue of minorities' conversion.

Foucault's position queries, on the one hand, Hefner's (1993) argument that an unlimited inclusion of humankind into world religions is the natural effect of developmental rationality at work. On the other hand, his position also queries the argument that one's assumed identity per se is a variable associated with one's conversion to Christianity.

With regard to the former, the revitalization movement currently at work among the Akha contradicts this developmental argument, pointing to non-linear tendencies in the spread of world religions, just like the rise of new religious movements within the mainly Christian world. With reference to the latter, as the reviewed literature from the previous chapter shows, identity can either influence or not influence conversion according to contextual reasons, as pointed out by Salemink (2009).

With geneology as my methodological goal, I aimed at highlighting that minorities' encounters with Catholicism occurred because of contingent and accidental reasons

while, nevertheless, responding to specific church goals. In so doing, my research helps to deconstruct the tacit idea of a linear and natural expansion of Christian missions and of Christianity in any given context. My research also provides evidence in favor of equally contingent reasons that might determine a missions' success in terms of conversion, for example, by highlighting the practical benefits missionaries offered to minorities within the context of their specific living conditions. Bevir (2008) argues that a particularly interesting feature of genealogy consists in presenting sets of current ideas, concepts, and common sense in a denaturalized manner, while providing insight into the various factors that constituted their emergence. Similarly, I aimed to present Christian missions and the process of Christianization enacted by missionaries among minorities as a matter of interconnected causalities and choices rather than a natural development of a fluid and linear process. Moreover, the concept of genealogy points to the articulation of a multiplicity of discourses and practices.

According to Koopman (2008), this articulation is a novelty that Foucault introduced with the concept of genealogy by specifying that meanings and discourses are produced in fields of practices which include non-linguistic productions (Bastalich, 2009). Within the context of my research, such an articulation of discourses and practices shapes missionaries' strategies of evangelization, wherein missionaries' understanding of minorities and the strategies of evangelization merge coherently and reinforce each other.

One crucial additional issue the concept of genealogy and its application implies is that referred to as the subject. According to Dreyfus and Rabinow (1982), with the concept of genealogy, Foucault definitively bypassed the hermeneutic focus and interpretative approach found in the social sciences and in actor-oriented studies through "an understanding of social practices as having an intelligibility radically different from that available to the actors" (Dreyfus, Rabinow 1982: XXVII). In addition, Foucault's epistemological aim was distinct from positivist constructionist perspectives as it did not shed light on producers' goals. Furthermore, the implications of the concept of genealogy for the field of social sciences, insofar as historical processes and discourses are engaged in producing both meanings and subjectivities, mean that the subject is methodologically undermined (Bastalich, 2009).

In all Foucauldian productions, the subject, typically understood as a given reality existing in and of itself, is denied and is instead considered to be the result of power/knowledge processes. However, the strongest attack on the subject that Foucault

makes lies in his definition of genealogy: The subject is the result of power/knowledge processes to be read in their historical transformations. Because of these assumptions, combining Foucault's perspective and the focus on actors' practices and/or meaning production within the field of social research requires some argumentation. For instance, Bastalich (2009) argues that Foucault's concept of knowledge, as something emerging from historical and accidental practices rather than from the agency of active actors, calls into question the validity of interview-based research and qualitative methodologies. In doing so, Bastalich positively recognizes the discrepancy between the two perspectives, arguing rather that Foucault's peculiar position can improve the quality of qualitative methods. In contrast, Bevir (1999), with regard to the same issue, proposes a reading of Foucault that involves making a distinction between autonomy and agency. According to Bevir, Foucault, by deploying the subject, reduced the degree of his or her autonomy, not that of his or her agency. In such a reading, autonomy would refer to the possibility of experiencing things outside of their social context, and agency would mean the individual's adaptations and reactions to power/knowledge regimes.

In my research, the use of Foucault's concept of genealogy legitimizes both theoretically and methodologically the abdication from a focus on the agency of both locals and missionaries and on their individual motivations and life experiences in favor of a focus on the general contextual circumstances in which they were embedded.

2.2 Discourse and Discourse Analysis

The concept of discourse recurs in most of Foucault's productions and one that he specified in increasing detail by shifting from a predominantly linguistically oriented focus to the inclusion of all social practices in discourse (Dreyfus, Rabinow: 1982). Unlike genealogy, the concept of discourse has enjoyed extraordinary popularity in contemporary social sciences; indeed, it is so popular that a new field, referred to as discourse analysis or critical discourse analysis, has come to flourish. Its popularity, however, has rendered its applications and meanings diverse. As Keller (2012) notes, although it usually refers to Foucault's interpretation of the concept, the term discourse was used by other scholars at approximately the same time that it was first proposed by Foucault. Alfred Shutz, the primary representative of the field of social phenomenology, used the term discourses in his *Phenomenology of the Social World* (1967), and Thomas Berger and Thomas Luchmann, the founders of social constructivism, used the term in

their influential *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966). All of these authors used the term within a common interpretative perspective, focusing on the relations between individual practices and the production and circulation of meaning. Foucault's *The Archeology of Knowledge* (2002) was published in French in 1969, while another book, *Analyse automatique du discours*, was published by Michel Pecheux. For some time, Pecheux was considered the founder of the French school of discourse analysis. His approach, which was mainly linguistic and strongly influenced by Althusser and Lacan, in some ways resembles the following wave of post-colonial studies, sharing with them the same hermeneutic goal of unveiling the power mechanisms hidden behind discursive practices (see Maingueneau and Angermuller, 2007).

Foucault's concept of discourse not only differs from the perspective of the sociology of knowledge but also differs considerably from Pecheux's understanding of discourse: While Pecheux relies on linguistics, Foucault gives centrality to historiography, and his discursive perspective refuses to recognize any hermeneutic goal. Foucault's understanding of discourse is wider than that related to meanings production; rather, it is the construction of the field itself, wherein meanings can rise, decline, and link with each other to form a system, or compete for hegemony. Foucault investigated these systems with a focus on the relation discourses establish with each other, rather than in their relation with the subject. Nevertheless, as discourse is linked to power and knowledge, its use enables one to "fix" the identities of others, making it possible to eventually construct them as subjects; this interpretation is recurring in the field of post-colonial studies. Key is the distinction between different conceptualizations of discourse, which lead to basic methodological differences.

The main approaches can be currently distinguished under the broad category of Discourse Analysis: one related to the sociology of knowledge tradition, the other more connected to historiography (Stuckrad, 2013). Going further than Stukrad's differentiation, I propose a distinction can be made between approaches to discourse embedded in a Weberian legacy and focused on social actors, and approaches involved in employing Foucault's assumptions within the field of social sciences. The latter position, quite the opposite of the former, basically ignores the subject in analyzing discourse production and reproduction, but rather sheds light on the relations making one discourse possible and their historical rise, development, and decline.

The Foucauldian concept of discourse entered into post-colonial studies with Said's *Orientalism*, published in 1978 (Young, 2001). In this work Said explored how control over knowledge and the representations of others was used as a tool to maintain domination and to legitimize colonial domination. Said, failed in terms of mapping the articulations of discourse, as he presented Orientalist discourse as homogeneous (Nichols, 2010). Within the field of post-colonial studies, a debate has arisen over the proper use of Foucault. Bhabha (2004) proposed a more articulated concept of discourse characterized by heterogeneity. Spivak, in *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988), criticizes Foucault's lack of consideration of the processes of the subject and his or her subjectivity construction; this critique highlights the major impact and influence that Foucault has had on the social sciences.

The current research attempts to employ a more Foucauldian concept of discourse to highlight the set of presuppositions employed in the representation of locals, ones used to legitimate the specific evangelization strategy chosen. Such discourse emerges through repetitions detected at the level of the language as well as through the practices enacted by missionaries. Through these discursive practices, the religion of minorities came to be categorized as superstition, and their living conditions conceptualized as the outcome of poor civilization.

A genealogic perspective naturally involves archival research. Foucault writes (2003: 76) that "genealogy is gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary. It operates on a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times." According to Mahon (1992), Foucault here expresses with a color, gray, his understanding of genealogy, based on dusty documents, in contrast with the blue genealogy of English physicians, which focused on human interiority. Following Foucault's perspective, I have avoided in my research a focus on the interiority of missionaries or on their individual motivations; rather in considering these documents, I have focused on those aspects thereof that shaped their general understanding of the context in they found themselves embedded. Knowledge on the major issues concerning the Roman Catholic Church at large during the time in which the two missions were founded was achieved by consulting published books on the history of the Catholic church. The following section addresses the debate on the nature of archival research and on the characteristics of archives as a field of enquiry.

2.3 The Archive as a (De)constructed Field

Archives have been put under the spotlight, especially by Foucault and Derrida. Foucault stressed the ambiguity of archives and their purely discursive nature, suggesting that their meanings as archives go well beyond the simple collections of documents and artifacts (Manoff 2004). Derrida, in his "Archive Fever" (1996), read the archive through the lens of Freudian conflicting concepts of death drive and pleasure principle: he located the archive, and the method and technology applied to construct it, in the midst of these two forces at work in society. The crucial value of these contributions relies especially in having stimulated a rich and articulated archival discourse with an articulated multidisciplinary breadth: not only what constitutes an archive is questioned but, in addition, so too is the truth claim of archival documents (Manoff, 2004).

It is now generally accepted, within general post-modern thinking, that an archive does not tell the past the way it occurred but, rather, tells the way someone has constructed a representation of the past. Moreover, the selection and organization of material is itself a constructed discourse (Schwartz & Cook, 2009). Post-colonial and feminist studies have provided a special contribution to the analysis of the archives and, especially, British colonial archives in terms of discourse: both these fields of study have envisioned in these documents the link between power and knowledge and between the accumulation of information on subjects and the possibility of controlling them (Said,1978). As Ketelaar (2001) argues, archives are constituted by "tacit narratives," whose deconstruction can explain the genealogy of one archive and the reason of its existence. Although this was not my task, this brief discussion aims to provide a basic idea of the issues archival research poses and aims to support the validity of a discursive approach to documents collected into one archive.

Archives are not only repositories of the past offering an image of the past as it was intended to be represented but, in addition, archival research outcomes are determined by a researcher's subjective itinerary among the documents collected (Ramsey et al., 2010). Accordingly, the stories emerging from archival research are the result of processes of encounter and negotiation with the documents (Tirabassi, 2010). Before describing my encounter with the archive and the method I used to develop my research, the next section provides information on the PIME Archive in Rome.

2.4 The PIME Archive

My work is based on archival research I conducted mainly in the Archivio Storico PIME, the PIME Historical Archive, in Rome. In addition, I visited the PIME Archive in Milan where I had access to the Photos Archive and to the library. The very first archive collection was set up alongside the creation of the Lombard Seminary in Saronno (Milan) in 1850, thanks to the initiative of Monsignor Giuseppe Marinoni[1]. In 1951, the head office was moved to Rome, a move that resulted in the loss of some boxes…The current venue in Rome was opened in 1970.

The Archive collects documents from PIME missions throughout the world. In 1931, Fr. Giovan Battista Tragella, a member of PIME, was entrusted to organize the archive for the first time according to scientific standards. During the 1990s, a library was added to the archive; it primarily collects books written by missionaries and members of PIME and published by the same institution. In addition, the Archive began collecting editions of the PIME journal *Mondo e Missione,* once named *Le Missioni Cattoliche*, as well as those of other missionary journals. The PIME Archive in Rome also collects small quantities of objects that either once belonged to missionaries or were donated by them.

Older documents, such as those referring to the missions I investigated, are organized according to the missions to which they refer, and the material is usually organized in bound volumes. More recent documents, due to the increased mobility of missionaries between missions, are usually organized by missionaries' names and collected in boxes. The total number of bound volumes is around 493, while there are 1,628 boxes; however, the collection of materials is ongoing. The main historical works based in the PIME Archive documents are the five volumes of *Il Pontificio Istituto delle Missioni Estere e le sue Missioni* by Fr. Gerardo Brambilla, edited between 1940 and 1944; the comprehensive work by Fr. Giovanni Battista Tragella, *Le Missioni Estere di Milano nel quadro degli avvenimenti contemporanei,* organized in three volumes and published between 1910 and 1963; and the account by Fr. Piero Gheddo, *PIME 1850–2000. 150 anni di missione*, published in 2000. Students from Catholic universities in Italy and Switzerland have consulted documents housed in the archive while conducting research for their theses. The PIME Photographic Archive, which is based in Milan, houses an impressive number of photos and slides, with the oldest dating back to the

[1] The following information about the PIME Archive is based on Donegana (2010–2012).

1860s. Part of this material is still in the process of being catalogued, and all of the archive is intended to be digitalized.

2.5 Data Collection and Data Analysis

The present research incorporates a mainly qualitative design, and it was developed through archival research I conducted in the PIME Historical Archive in Rome. My first visit to the Archive in Rome was preceded by an email, in which, according to Archive regulations, I had to specify the reasons for my consultation and my academic affiliation. Thereafter, I could freely consult the material I required, and the three persons in charge of the Archive consultation, who succeeded one another over the course of three years, provided me with help and suggestions when necessary.

At this stage, I found myself to be an "accidental historian" (Koh, 2014) within a field usually populated by "insiders," namely missionaries, priests, and seminarists, or by lay people involved in certain voluntary activities associated with the non-governmental organizations that are today linked to the PIME. In addition, I had to learn how to do archival research by attempting to do it. As usually happens, I entered into the Archive with some broad research questions in my mind, which at that time focused on the Akha group specifically, and I was especially interested in understanding the missionaries' own understanding of and approach to Akha traditional religion.

Through the first finding aid provided by the archivist, and with my questions in mind, I begun consulting correspondence and reports published in *Le Missioni Cattoliche* and books written by missionaries themselves and by PIME members who provided historical accounts of these missions. It is, however, now generally accepted, or openly recommended, to let the documents encountered shape research questions and shape the main research directions (Ramsey et al., 2010), and this actually happened in the case of my research. This first set of material consulted showed two key pieces of evidence: First, that the missionaries under consideration focused very little on ethnic classifications and their specificity to the extent that the nomenclature they employed results in some cases confusing when compared with the contemporary ones used, for instance, by American Baptist missionaries. Secondly, their observations on traditional religious practices were scarce and cursory. Thus I found myself forced to reframe the overall direction of my research, and in order to do so, "I let the sources speak to me and take me to further

information" (Masters, 2010: 162). The readings I had at this stage were nevertheless fascinating, and some recurrent patterns and categories, similar to the case discussed by Masters (2010), were emerging in the description of minorities at large.

At this stage, I was also photographing all relevant papers I could find that referred to the mission in the area of Kentung, and I was creating my personal digitalized file. I then sketched some key recurrent categories through which minorities, their living conditions, habits, and religious practices were described, and I subsequently wondered why such a perception and representation of locals was enacted, where it originated, and what purpose it would fulfill. In addition, I began to develop a picture of the main areas of intervention on which missionary work focused. The material I was collecting, I began to read recursively (Ramsey et al., 2010) to fill each of these categories with evidence and references. Papers titles did not always provide exhaustive information on the content of each paper, and so in addition, I developed cards with a basic summary of the content of the papers that I judged to be relevant in relation to the key categories I would use to analyze texts.

By considering the nature of these archival documents, in terms of their purpose and audience, I reached the conclusion that this first set of published material could be analyzed through the lens of discourse analysis and could provide some insights on the missionaries' approach to minorities in terms of legitimizing missionary work. In so doing, I approached these papers written by missionaries from the field as primary sources, interrogating the documents' rhetorical situation and purpose, and treating them as discursive artifacts in which multiple stories are reflected (Wortham & Reyes, 2015). When conducting discourse analysis, determining why a document was created is particularly relevant; in addition, in the case of published records, their expressive value is redundant as these publications were issued for a number of reasons, such as that of appealing to possible donors, as evidenced also by Hayami, (2018). Consequently, appealing to an audience of donors may have influenced the language employed and the narratives featured in these records. So I interpreted texts in order to identify their "expressive value" (Foucault, 2002: 6). The relevance of the issues was determined by the frequency with which they appeared in the documents or, in other words, the relevance that missionaries attributed to them.

During my first years of research, my bibliographic research as well as papers published in the pages of *Le Missioni Cattoliche,* led me to the conclusion that three main

factors influenced the decision to open these remote missionary stations: The condition of the Roman Catholic church in the years considered; the surprising failure of attempts to evangelize among Buddhist majorities within the Burmese territory; and the previous reign and competition with Baptist missions, with the desire to contain their spread. In terms of genealogy, these three issues, although unrelated to each other, all contributed to the constitution of the two missions, demonstrating the conjunction of contingent reasons in their development.

In the case of published books, I approached them as primary sources when written by missionaries themselves and based on their own experience. I also used books as secondary sources to better contextualize documents I was reading. At a later stage in my writing, the secondary sources consulted were enlarged to include the wider context of a rising colonial Burma so as to understand the conditions of minorities at the time of the Catholic missionaries' arrival and the early decades of the missions' development.

The reading of the papers of *Le Missioni Cattoliche* and of secondary sources determined, in addition, the limitations of my work, both in spatial and temporal terms. My early goal was that of focusing on the mission developed in the area surrounding Kentung, where the Akha live. The material consulted, however, proved the organic and nevertheless accidental link between the Eastern Burma Mission, finally established in Toungoo, and the subsequent Divine Providence Mission, established in Kentung some decades later. As such, focusing only on the latter would have been artificially limited as the two missions were intended to be one, as will be further discussed in Chapter Four.

Similarly, the span of time I ultimately decided to consider ranges from 1868, when missionaries reached Toungoo, to 1939 when World War II seriously disrupted the operations of these stations. Secondary sources mention this disruption repeatedly as do primary sources, which the end of World War II subsequently confirmed. The overall process of consultating this first set of documents and of outlining my research project took me roughly one year.

Fortunately, Fr. Sergianni, the person responsible for the archive at that stage, and his archival assistant were developing new finding aids. At one point, they proposed that I consult their new finding aid, and a very large amount of unpublished documents was collected. Up until then, the material I consulted had shed light mainly on the rhetorical representation of the missions' work. These documents, along with the purpose and audience for which these documents were created, did not reveal with enough insight the

daily practical work of missionaries but, rather, revealed their rhetorical and redundant representation. At that point, I could acknowledge the way missionaries depicted the local population and the missions' work "on stage" in order to gain benevolence and support from their audience. However, I expected the new unpublished material would tell me something about the practical work simultaneously occurring at the back of that same stage. In a sense, this second set of material I accessed enabled me to construct a link between the more practical, yet filtered, narration of missionaries' activities and their discourse representation shaped for a wider and specific audience comprised of Italian Catholic civil society at large.

The finding aid collected this new set of materials organized in boxes and constructed according to a number of criteria: either missions or individual missionaries; pontificates; and the years in which the documents were acquired by the archive. Documents I consulted were organized in bound volumes encompassing eclectic materials: reports from the missions sent to the apostolic vicariate in charge or to the Seminary Central Office in Italy; yearly statistical data; some newspaper articles mentioning facts relevant to the missions; and maps of the missions. Documents were either typed or handwritten, and in this latter case I must admit some documents took me several days to decode, and some parts have still remained obscure.

Among the material contained in the finding aid, I chose to consult the documents collected in Volumes 32, Toungoo, Taunggyi, referred to as the Eastern Burma Mission, and Volume 33, Kentung Ordinariato, 1912–1972. For the consultation of this new set of documents, approached as primary sources, I followed the same method with which I had already experimented, by creating a personal digital archive, by detecting emerging trends, and by reading documents recursively. Accordingly, in some cases, I created summary cards for documents I considered to be of special relevance, so that I could go back and find them easily. I spent about one year consulting this new set of material, and of course my consultation with it has not been exhaustive but rather fragmentary and partial, as archival research usually is (Ramsey et al., 2010).

This new set of documents, having a function and audience different from the papers published in the PIME journal, proved to have a very different rhetoric. Consisting mainly of reports for inside the institution and for circulation to church members, they display a more concise and synthetic style. And they provide a rather valuable amount of detailed information on the developments of the mission stations in terms of the numbers

of locals converted or assisted, an accurate account of missionaries' movements within the territories inscribed into the two missions, and a frank account of every-day missionary activities. I have used these unpublished documents to basically extrapolate a picture of the missionaries' work and its management. Through my research, I finally narrowed my focus to relevant areas of missionary intervention, such as education and healthcare, giving them consistency in my work, and thereby providing a clearer picture of missionaries' strategies in the field.

It has been mentioned that archival research is never exhaustive, and the material collected is usually more than one researcher can handle for the purpose of one research project. If during the course of research some aspects are left aside or downplayed, there is, however, what Tirabassi (2010) refers to as a principle of closure. This represents the moment in which, despite documents multiplying the direction of one's research, an "exit strategy" has to be planned (Tirabassi, 2010: 176), reconstructing one's one-meaning path amidst the material consulted. Far from being exhaustive, I ended my consultation of material after two years with the clear feeling that the time I spent in developing my research has produced "more possibilities than conclusions" (Masters, 2010: 167).

2.6 Positionality

Post-modern thinking at large has not only questioned objectivity and truth, due to the constructed nature of archives, but has also problematized the relation and interaction between the archive and the researcher. Increasingly, researchers are assumed to be an active component of their own research; their personal interests orient the research through the selection of the research questions, and their interactions with the documents shape the research outcomes. Interrogating documents in an archive enables a "more intimate understanding of history at the personal level," as Koh (2014) notes, given the proximity of working with archival objects. Nevertheless, it challenges a researcher's assumptions, opinions, and feelings, influencing a researcher's reading, understanding, selections and omissions. At this level, archival research shares the same challenges any encounter poses, for example, the perspective that when doing qualitative research, the researcher is "a filter and a lens" *(*Gaillet, 2010: 37*)*, revealing "the complexities inherent in humanistic studies" (Gaillet, 2010: 37).

For the purpose of my doctoral research, I consulted documents that reflect the specific historical values and worldview of one missionary group that have, since then,

changed in their basic assumptions. This considered, I begun these readings expecting to find some of the writings disturbing, and this occurred in some cases. There were times I lingered for weeks considering whether to include certain information I perceived as sensitive or especially disturbing, wondering in addition how I was supposed to present this information in the context of my research. The most striking case of this kind is the case of missionaries writing about the common habit to which they referred as ransoming children, subsequently housing them in the orphanages. Although this practice is also mentioned in published papers, I stopped for days to consider whether to include or omit this issue, wondering how eventually to present it.

Archival research, and confronting the issues within written documents, gave me the time to elaborate my own reticence and reflexively elaborate on it through a process longer than the one a researcher must activate in the course of one living interview. I realized this is one specific opportunity archival research provides: the opportunity of recursively considering how to approach an issue one perceives as sensitive or problematic. After some time, I came to the decision I had to include this topic of ransoming children in my work. With regard to how I would treat it, I basically decided to present the issue in a neutral manner, as I reached the conclusion that more in-depth knowledge of this phenomenon and of its context should be acquired beyond archival documents. Along with this case, I faced similar minor crises in the course of my research, and I tried to solve each one by specifying the general historical context, helping to frame the issue ethically and contextually. What on the contrary I did not expect, and was surprised by, was to have sympathy for the sincere and tireless enthusiasm some of these men have shown through their writings while describing their daily life in remote places fully immersed in local communities' everyday life.

CHAPTER 3

Minorities and Catholic Missions in British Burma

This chapter introduces the historical context into which the two missions of Eastern Burma and Divine Providence were embedded, constituting the meso-contextual factors encompassing minorities' conversion. The first section provides a brief glimpse into the constitution of British Burma and its main characteristics in terms of its political, social, and economic organization, while the following two sections analyze the conditions of minorities before and after the British annexation of the territories where they live. The last section focuses on the relation between the British administration and Christian missions.

3.1 The Constitution of British Burma

Hall (1960) tends to represent the process leading to the constitution of British Burma as the consequence of accidental events that forced, so to say, the British to extend their territorial sovereignty outside the territories of eastern British India in order to guarantee their sole commercial interests. Their aim, in fact, consisted of opening new trade routes connecting India and China. The earliest English explorations within the territory today known as Myanmar go back to 1591. British interest in the country was stimulated in those years by the growing value of Portuguese commercial affairs in the area. According to Hall (1960), many of the following events, which led to the progressive British territorial annexations of Burma, were made for both the purpose of this same commercial objective and the will to contain the expanding presence of other European potencies in the area, including the Portuguese in the sixteenth century and the French later on, during the nineteenth century. After those initial explorations, British interest remained low: the Burmese territories were not part of the main commercial routes while, in addition, the Burmese empire was considered strong enough that the English did not

wish to risk a head-on collision. Diplomatic relations were entertained between British India and the Burmese Empire to regulate border relations. At the beginning of nineteenth century, however, the expansive policy of King Bodawpaya and the friendly relations of the King and his court toward the French stimulated English worries. Bodawpaya was a member of the ruling Konbaung Dynasty and the last dynasty of autonomous Burma to occupy the territories of Assam and Manipur.

The tacit sustainment by the British of local anti-Burmese rebellions and the British occupation of Shalpuri Island in September 1823 led to the First Anglo-Burmese war. After initial defeats, in 1824 the British unexpectedly occupied Rangoon, by successfully confronting Burmese troops in Rangoon, Danabyu and Arakan. The war's end was ratified by the Yandabo Treaty in 1826. The treaty contained very disadvantageous conditions for the Burmese. They had to give up the territories of Arakan, Assam, Manipur and Tenasserim (including the city of Toungoo) on the coast and to ensure the apayment of a burdening indemnity to the British. For some decades, the situation remained stable enough while the English, now having a reasonable portion of Burmese territories, looked north for a connection with China. The British were by now definitely interested in the growing tek business in Upper Burma. According to Hall, however, they were not so interested in new military campaigns. The occasion for a further campaign of territorial annexation was nevertheless provided by Burmese King Thibaw. He refused to comply with the Treaty subscribed to by his predecessor and entertained intense relations with the French, in an anti-British way. For their part, the British responded in 1852 with a rapid military campaign, occupying Pegu and Prome. The Second Anglo-Burmese War lasted one year and ended in January 1853 with a British unilateral declaration of the above-mentioned territorial annexation.

In 1862, the Province of British Burma was formed by the unification of Pegy, Arakan and Tenasserim. According to Hall (1960), the sole aim of the British was to secure trade routes through Upper Burma and to eventually acquire new goods, such as teak. A new conflict escalated some years later as a consequence of a fine imposed by the Burmese on the Bombay Company for extracting teak, but no treaty between the two sides could be found to resolve the issue. On November 1885, the British occupied Mandalay and imprisoned King Thibaw; the annexation of Upper Burma was declared on January 1886. From 1897 to 1937, the territory was administratively organized as a

major British Indian Province while after that, it was governed separately. The annexation of Upper Burma involved a long period of revolts against the British governing authorities. These revolts drove the English to ensure their widespread presence along the territories under their control through the creation of many posts, with officials reporting on rebel villages or villages supporting revolts.

Hall (1960) argues that the British organized the territories under their jurisdiction, maintaining certain recent reforms introduced by King Mindon Min. The King had, in fact, introduced a system of fixed taxation, calculated on a per village basis, which was based on the wealth of each village This system of taxation modernized the pre-existing system, which had previously assigned territories to Burmese crown representatives, giving them the freedom to establish the amount of taxes to be collected. The British maintained a structure similar to the new system, organizing territorial unities composed of one or more villages, and entrusting village headmen with the collection of revenue. Nevertheless, Aung-Thwin, (1985) specifies the difference in management between the lowlands and highlands by the British. In the plains, the provinces were assigned to a British Deputy commissioner to govern them, assisted by British police officers and a police force. In the case of hill people, however, in many cases local authorities were left in their position if considered reliable and able to maintain the previous custom of collecting a revenue for lowland rulers. In terms of religion, the British, on the one hand, left religious space for Buddhism; their policy, on the other hand, introduced a Western juridical system, depriving Buddhist ranks of their traditional authority over communities that extended well beyond purely religious matters.

Despite a certain continuity Hall (1960) glimpses between the old and new administrative organization and despite the religious tolerance recognized, he nevertheless adds that the new administrative organization under the British implied deep changes in the organization of people's everyday life. This was especially the case with respect to the management and resolution of conflicts between individuals and communities: the local King's representatives and Buddhist monks' who had managed conflicts and community relations in the past were replaced by courts and court judges applying the British India penal code. In addition, the deployment of Buddhist orders and their subsequent deterioration affected the education system traditionally provided by

monasteries that, according to Hall (1960), had ensured a high level of literacy, at least in the lowlands.

Before the British arrived, education was traditionally entrusted to monasteries, as Hall (1960) has highlighted. After their arrival, the British opened a few schools to ensure the availability of English-speaking local personnel and the development of higher levels of education that culminated with the opening of the University of Rangoon. However, the British mainly preferred to sustain indirectly the schools opened voluntarily by Christian missions present in the territory, mainly Baptist and Catholic; the British made this position official with the Education Code of 1891. This code established an inspecting and regulative role for the British on missions' schools as well as a system of granting funds to ensure some economic support. It is worth mentioning that the archival research I conducted shows a similar kind of policy applied to the field of health care.

The general economic assets of the territory also changed dramatically. Before British Burma, most of the agricultural activity was oriented toward self-sufficiency and local exchanges, especially between communities in the plains and mountains (Hall, 1950). With the constitution of British Burma, rice cultivation improved massively and was increasingly exported to India. In addition, land resources were extracted especially in Upper Burma with the opening of mines for the extraction of silver, as well as petroleum in central Burma. Plains' communities, whose land had been expropriated by new rulers, were poorly advantaged in terms of the new possibilities offered by exports. Especially in first decades, local Burmese were replaced by workers from India, either in the fields or mines, and in construction and administration, fueling resentment among the population.

Having given a brief overview of the process which led to the loss of Burma's independence and the rise of British Burma and its main characteristics, the following section will focus in more detail on the conditions of minorities in the areas considered, both before and after the constitution of British Burma.

3.2 Minorities before and after British Burma's Constitution

"Burman, Shan and Mon chronicles rarely mention uplanders," Renard (1987: 265) comments; nevertheless, this omission reflects a certain degree of disdain toward people

living far from the centers of power or without any connection to it. The influential work by Leach (1964) and Keyes (1979) proved that the concept of ethnicity, as well as of minorities and majorities in Pre-British Burma, was substantially different from the one imported by Westerns. Ethnic identities within Burmese territories consisted of a fluidity and reversibility in the majorities/minorities' dialectic in relation, especially, to the contingencies of inhabiting a given environment and to the inclusion into a kingdom. Although highlanders were basically disdained because of their living conditions, their conditions could nevertheless be quickly overturned by sudden political changes. As Lieberman (1978) points out, the high political instability and the succession of kingdoms created a condition of constant migration for which the passage from the status of majority lowlander to that of minority/highlander, and vice versa, through processes of assimilation was quite common. Some groups are known to have been involved in kingdoms, such as the Karen or Kachin and Kayan; others, at some point in time, have founded a kingdom, such as the Padaung or Kachin (Renard: 1987). This considered, the definition of what either a majority or minority was, was not linked to racial considerations but rather was based on "access to power" (Renard 1987: 258). Groups included in the sphere of influence of a given kingdom were subject to the payment of revenue, such as cash, agricultural, or jungle products. And a certain amount of goods were exchanged between the valleys and the highlands, with the exclusion eventually of the groups settled in the more remote mountainous areas. Renard (1987) additionally observes that the dichotomy perceived between lowlanders and highlanders did not necessarily imply a great divide in economic terms.

From a general perspective, an additional divide linked to that of power was that of religious affiliation to Buddhism: non-Buddhist groups were generally considered less civilized (Renard, 1987), according to parameters not very different from that expressed by missionaries and Westerners in general. For example, non-Buddhist groups were evaluated based on their perceived level of civilization, according to parameters such as literacy, architecture, and state-type organization. When the British began to penetrate into Burmese territories, they found good allies among some of these non-Burmese groups. Groups who were more exposed to the aggressive policy of the Kings of the Burmese Empire saw in the British newcomers a defense against interference from the Burmese kingdom. The Karen and Kachin are among the groups who displayed this tactic

early, according to Hall (1960), and the British, for their part, exploited the situation to their advantage.

Yet this alliance between ethnic groups and the British was not a once and forever form of cooperation. On the contrary, officials of British Burma faced for decades revolts against their authority, which engaged them in a long process of so-called pacification. This pacification process was, in fact, perceived by Catholic missionaries as a valuable outcome of the British annexation of Burmese territories.

3.3 Catholic Missionaries and British Colonials Relations

As already mentioned, relations between missions and colonial administrations have often been represented in terms of full cooperation and sharing of goals. The case presented by Michaud (2004; 2007) shows how far this unity of purpose could go, with missionaries actively sustaining the growth of French control in Upper Tonkin through the provision of information and ethnographic accounts. Relations, however, vary according to the contexts and according to the nature of the actors involved.

With regard to the case of Catholic missions in southern central and northern Burma, the archival material I consulted confirms Hall's (1950) considerations of the British policy in Burma in relation to the presence of Christian missions. Documents confirm, on the one hand, the cooperation between British officials and missionaries for matters of pacification and basic service provision; they also confirm, on the other, the general British policy of delegating the task of developing an educational system to missionaries, either Baptist or Catholic, through the establishment of a system of grants, recognizing and monitoring valuable schools. Missionaries retained the role of mediators and of civilizers, while the British mainly engaged in the exploitation of local resources along with their goal of trading. Although in this case the colonial and the evangelization projects have a distinct origin and the British authorities and Italian missionaries were basically foreigners to one another, their goals and interests enforced each other on the field.

The two Catholic missions of Eastern Burma and Divine Providence Missions in fact took advantage of growing British control within the Burmese territory. The Eastern Burma Mission was established in Toungoo in 1868 after the town was already annexed

to British India in 1852 (Hall, 1950). The Divine Providence Mission established its main station in Kentung in 1912 after a number of unsuccessful attempts and well after the British annexation of Upper Burma in 1886. For instance, in a case reported by Catholic missionaries regarding the territories of northern Toungoo, inhabited by the Red Karen, and the area of northern Kentung, inhabited by the Wa living north of Kentung, the end of inter-village wars meant the territories were safer for the establishment of missions. In addition, because the British Empire was mainly concerned with commerce, they built a road in 1886 to connect Taunggyi with Kentung. After that, Catholic missionaries were finally able to open in 1912 a new mission station in Kentung.

Nevertheless, the role of mediators played by Catholic missionaries between the locals and the British traces back to the Second Anglo-Burmese War. At that time, Fr. Abbona, an Italian missionary of the Oblates of Turin, negotiated peace agreements between the Amarapura court and the British (Hall, 1950). Moreover, when the new territories of Lower and Upper Burma were annexed in 1852 and 1886 respectively, the basis for further collaborations between the British and the missions had already been laid. For instance, the Catholic chaplain for the Irish members of the British troops, McCormick, was already based in Toungoo at the time the first group of Italian Catholic missionaries arrived in 1868. He actively supported the newly arrived Catholic missionaries, taking them in their journeys around the town. Later missionaries took advantage of the knowledge the British had acquired of the territories and of their contacts with remote villages.

Archival research also shows that in some cases, the British took advantage of Catholic missionaries' work, particularly in ending the inter-village wars. For example, the British took advantage of the Catholic missionaries' local catechist connections within local communities. These connections enabled the British to have contact with local chiefs, with the result that local chiefs accepted British control, putting an end to inter-village wars and agreeing to pay a revenue to the new rulers (Brambilla, 1942; Gheddo, 2007). In one case, it is reported that Fr. Tornatore mediated between the British administrators and some Karen villages in the Yadò district who rebelled against the English presence. The British, in fact, had resolved to set fire to the rebel villages as punishment for the revolts. As a result of Fr. Tornatore's mediation, the British ended their retaliation against rebel villages and the revolts ended (Gheddo, 2007). In other

cases, Catholic missionaries acted as representatives for locals' interests in front of the colonial government and local authorities, such as in the case of the severe famine that occurred between 1927 and 1930. Catholic missionaries insistently called for the authorities' attention and support on the desperate conditions of local communities. As a result of their insistence, rice supplements were provided to communities affected by this calamity (Brambilla, 1942; Gheddo, 2007).

It has been mentioned previously that Catholic missionaries and local British administrators cooperated in the fields of education and medical aid. Chapter Five analyzes in detail these two areas of missionary intervention. The British retained for themselves the task of developing a higher-level education center, which culminated in the opening of Rangoon University in 1920. Yet the British largely left the task of developing primary education structures to the two groups of missionaries active within Burmese territory, with the mission schools replacing the declining Buddhist monasteries in the spread of literacy. For non-Buddhist minorities living in remote areas, mission schools represented an opportunity to enter into an educational system for the first time.

A similar model was repeated at the level of health management, based on a substantial British disengagement offset by monitoring, cooperation, and support policies. Few medical structures were opened in the main centers, with the exception in Rangoon of the Rangoon General Hospital in 1899. For the rest of the territory, the British cooperated with existing local structures and with the missions. For instance, in the Kentung Hospital managed by the local Prince, British doctors served and were assisted by experienced nuns from the Divine Providence mission (Gheddo, 2007). With similar cooperation agreements, one governmental English doctor agreed to pay regular visits to the Kentung leprosy asylum; it was opened by the Lombard Seminary missionaries, but they were unable themselves to employ any specialized doctor of their own (Bonetta, 1923).

In conclusion, it is worth mentioning the relations among the British, Catholics and Baptists: the British, despite some grumbling by Catholic missionaries who were less linked to local officials than the Baptists, took for themselves a neutral and mediating role with respect to the two denominations. For example, in some cases the British intervened to temper the rivalry between the two missionary groups. In one instance, Fr. Portaluppi

(1912) writes about the attitude of the Baptists at the time the Catholic missionaries arrived in Kentung. On this occasion, the Baptists convinced the local Prince not to sell land to the newly arrived Catholic missionaries. As a result, the missionaries belonging to the Lombard Seminary could not, for some time, find a place to establish their residency and their mission. Only after a local British officer mediated with the local Prince, guaranteeing the good intentions of the Catholic missionaries, did the Prince finally decide to sell the missionaries some land.

In Upper Burma, especially, it is reasonable to argue that degrees of cooperation involved not only missionaries and British officials but also included local chiefs. These chiefs for the most part were left in their positions, making valuable agreements with both British authorities and missionaries especially in the delivery of services for their local population, such as in education or healthcare. The wider global geo-political context eventually broke down this cooperation; with the beginning of World War II, as Britain and Italy were deployed on opposite sides, some Italian missionaries were arrested and imprisoned in British detention camps in India.

3.4 Conclusion

In the context of southern central and north eastern colonial Burma, the relation between the British colonial administration and the missions displays a certain degree of autonomy from each other. This, however, is counterbalanced by the cooperation and separation of duties, according each to their own interests. The case of the two missions I considered for the purpose of my research explicate, from my perspective, Fabian's (1990) argument of the double, partially autonomous narratives that exist in the case of Christian missions in colonial contexts; however, having such autonomy does not exclude these groups from also having a high level of cooperation. In addition, this case displays the dynamics of a relation different, for example, from the ones described by Michaud and referred to as the Catholic MEP missionaries in Vietnam. In that case, the missions were more directly engaged in the French project in Upper Tonkin with what Michaud defines as mixture of religious commitment and nationalism. This latter dimension is manifest to a far lesser extent in the case of the Lombard Seminary missionaries as they were not aligned under the same national flag as that of the colonial agents, but rather they shared eventually a sense of European superiority.

The British, mainly interested in Burmese resources and in the development of trade routes to connect India and China, left areas of intervention, such as education and health care, to the Christian missions at large while retaining for themselves political authority. For their part, the mission stations were advantaged by the British presence, especially in terms of their increased safety. In spreading education and promoting health care, together with the introduction of new economic activities for the benefit of communities, missionaries acted as civilizers; when defending community interests, as well as dissolving conflicts with the new colonial rulers, they acted, in addition, as mediators. These positions taken by the missionaries probably made them appealing to minority communities. But before analyzing in detail the missionaries' strategies in the field, the next chapter engages with the genealogy of the two missions, analyzing the key reasons which led to their foundation among minorities in Burma.

CHAPTER 4

Genealogy of the Eastern Burma and Divine Providence Missions

This chapter proposes a genealogy of the two missions considered, by highlighting the multiple reasons which led to their constitution. The first section introduces the Lombard Seminary for Foreign Missions, to which the missions considered in this study were entrusted. The following sections discuss each of the three main events encompassing the setup of the two missions: the apostolic effervescence characterizing the Roman Catholic Church by the end of nineteenth century; the competition with Christian churches of other denominations; and the discouraging conversion results among Buddhist majorities in pre-existing Catholic missions. In addition, Sections 4 and 5 provide information on the constitution of the Eastern Burma and Divine Providence Missions.

4.1 The Lombard Seminary for Foreign Missions

As previously mentioned, missions are a constitutive feature of Christianity (Robert, 2009). Their geographic distribution is, however, anything but natural; rather, it is the result of strategic choices as well as political convenience (Johnson, 1967). These choices are influenced by the specific characteristics of orders and by the general historical context (Michaud, 2007). During colonial times, Christian missions contributed to the European control of colonies, but the case of the Lombard Seminary for Foreign Mission is quite different. I argue, in fact, that it was created and operated to respond to interests and concerns of the Roman Catholic Church, and of the Italian Catholic Church especially, while it was actively involved in specific national colonial interests to a lesser extent. The Lombard Seminary for Foreign Mission was founded in 1850 in Saronno (Milan) by Mons. Angelo Francesco Ramazzotti, the superior-general of the Oblate Missionaries of Rho and appointed as Bishop of Pavia by the Austrian crown. At that

time, this northern region of Italy was constituted as the Lombardo-Venetian Kingdom, a piece of the Austrian Empire. In 1926, well after the unification of Italy, the Lombard Seminary for Foreign Missions was unified with a similar institution of the Pontificio Seminario Romano dei Santi Apostoli Pietro e Paolo per le Missioni Estere, Roman Pontifical Seminary of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul for Foreign Missions, founded in 1871 in Rome. With their unification, they acquired the new name of the Pontificio Istituto Missioni Estere, Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions or PIME.

Mons. Ramazzotti was familiar with the missionaries of the MEP, and this familiarity shaped the idea of creating a similar order within the Italian peninsula. This idea merged favorably with the interests of Pope Pius IX himself who wished to create a missionary order for the Italian clergy. The order was created on the model of the MEP, and for the first decades of its activity, the order regularly reported to the Propaganda Fide office based in Lyon, France. Nevertheless, similar institutes were set up in main Catholic centers in Europe during the course of the nineteenth century. It was a time of effervescence for the Church but also of concern for the growing secular thinking and anti-clericalism spreading through European societies, with rising and direct conflict between secular and religious power within the Italian context, as will be better analyzed in the following section. Under these unfavorable general and local conditions, Mons. Ramazzotti's intention was for the Lombard Seminary to bring a new apostolic sentiment to the Italian clergy, an effort necessary to reaffirm religious authority upon a civil society at large.

The Lombard Seminary was open to both clergy members, expected to be recommended to the Seminary by the local Bishops, and to lay people, expected to dedicate their life for the benefit of the missions. Candidate missionaries were required to study in the Seminary until their leave to the assigned destination. In the Seminary, they were taught theology, English, and French languages; they were also trained at confronting Protestant and Muslim doctrines and provided with basic knowledge in medicine and pharmacology (Scurati, 1873; Tragella, 1958). Similar to what Michaud (2007) refers to in the case of the Catholic missionaries belonging to the MEP, Lombard Seminary missionaries did not receive any ethnographic training; they had neither geographical nor anthropological knowledge of the context to which they were assigned. The number of students in the Seminary constantly remained lower than the expectations

and needs. The provision of candidate missionaries, through the cooperation between bishops and dioceses, could rarely satisfy the number of missionaries required abroad because of the dramatic decrease in the number of religious vocations as a result of growing secularism in Italian society.

In terms of its founding, the Lombard Seminary was economically supported mainly by the Propaganda Fide Office of Lyon and by the Austrian Crown, with whom Mons. Ramazzotti, in his position as Bishop of Pavia, cooperated directly. Individual donations were also crucial for the missions and stimulated constantly through the Seminary journal, *Le Missioni Cattoliche*. The Lombard Seminary was able to open mission stations in Oceania in 1852, in India and Bangladesh in 1855, in Hong Kong in 1858,[1] and then in former Burma in 1868.

The Lombard Seminary journal *Le Missioni Cattoliche* provided regular reports and accounts from the missions, presenting missionaries' efforts and successes in distant and challenging contexts. It published its first edition in 1872 as the Italian translation of the French *Les Missions Catholiques*, published in Lyon by Propaganda Fide. Little by little, the translations of the French missionaries' correspondence were replaced by those of the Italian missionaries of the Lombard Seminary. Through its pages, missionaries became for the first time public figures, their heroic enterprises reaching a great number of readers in Italy. Readers were actively involved through repeated appeals for donations to contribute to the missions' development at large. In the case of the two missions in Burma, missionaries in the field asked repeatedly for economic support for the construction of local chapels and churches, for the sustainment of the missions and their main structures, as well as for their development. The support required was both practical and spiritual. For instance, in one appeal, added anonymously as a preface to the correspondence of Fr. Lombardini employed by the Divine Providence Mission, one can find these heartfelt words:

> "The Lord wants us to cooperate with the missionaries, whom without our support would see vanish much of their efforts. This is, especially in this case, our duty…. If, after having read the following report which brings under our eyes samples of the zeal and sacrifice brought up to heroism, the Lord will inspire us to do something for the

[1] See the PIME website: www.pime.org

benefit of this holy enterprise, let us listen to His voice and we will surely share the merits with the missionaries who for it sacrifice so much" (Preface, to Lombardini 1915: 113).

Father Peano, engaged in the Eastern Burma Mission, in a concerned report written in 1919, declares he can no longer pay catechists to buy either medicines necessary to contain an epidemic fever or rice to replenish his depleted supplies. He adds that he had to place many of the orphans housed in the town orphanage with rich families who could provide sustenance for them. For all of these reasons, he asks for urgent economic help from reader (Peano, 1919). Similarly, Portaluppi repeatedly appeals for donations for the purpose of building a small church in Mong Ping where he resided, a church that can be finally built thanks to donations received (Portaluppi, 1918; 1919).

Nevertheless, the support required was also spiritual, as this appeal by Sister Mantonati (1919: 37), working for the Eastern Burma Mission, shows: "The conversion of these people depends also on the prayers good Christians of Italy can do, hence I recommend strongly to the good Christians to pray. Let us all get engaged in this noble enterprise." Active audience involvement was maintained thanks to the constant updates on the missions' progress achieved with their foundlings. It was also maintained thanks to letters written, such as in the case of one written by little girls housed in the Kentung orphanage and directed to their patrons: "Thanks to your generosity we now, after having being torn from the shadows, live in an environment of light and love, where and we enjoy saying, that even rice is not lacking. Could God accord you hundredfold the good you did for us" (Le orfanelle di Maria Bambina in Kentung, 1919: 343).

Thanks to the journal and to the acceptance of lay missionaries, the Lombard Seminary displayed the double task of evangelizing non-Christians and through this enterprise, they fed Christian feelings within Catholic Italian communities. Mission stations abroad, because of their intrusive foreignness and the benefits offered, have been defined as "cultural landmarks" (Johnson, 1967: 170). I would also argue that missions, in addition, can act similarly to redraw cultural landmarks at a domestic level and according to the necessities of the moment. In this case, the Lombard Seminary for Foreign Missions was created also to strengthen the Catholic Church's legitimacy. Furthermore, it was created to refresh the sentiment of Christian communities within the Italian peninsula through their active spiritual and practical involvement in the missions'

growth and by involving Church hierarchies in the apostolic task of constituting churches into non-Christian territories. The following section provides an account of the specific threat the Catholic Church was dealing with in Italy throughout the nineteenth century. It was a conflict in which the Roman Catholic Church ended up with a renewed organization and position within the Italian context as well as globally

4.2 The Roman Catholic Church and the Italian Reign

In the history of Europe, recurring waves of missionary fervor periodically rose up in response to a variety of circumstances – such as the Arab conquest of Jerusalem; the discovery of the Americas; the Protestant Reformation; and the secularism pursued by the French Revolution (Robert, 2009). All of these circumstances represented a threat to the authority of the Roman Catholic Church, a threat responded to with a surge of new missionary activity. In fact, the Roman Catholic Church repeatedly reasserted its apostolic and universal vocation as well as its moral authority in this way (Robert, 2009).

The Lombard Seminary was constituted at just such a threatening moment for the Church. The French Revolution had left a long-lasting legacy of secularism and anti-clericalism. These oppositional forces stimulated, as a consequence, a reaction of the Catholic Church throughout Europe in terms of a new activism promoted for both the clergy and broader society, direct involvement of lay people, and the inclusion of religious women into Church activity for first time. In the Italian context, this general religious ferment was additionally stimulated by the political transition toward the unification of a number of autonomous and semi-autonomous regions or regions under the dominance reigns and duchies. This political transition in fact questioned the Pontifical State, which encompassed the central territories of the peninsula.

Waves of patriotism and nationalism arose with the beginning of the nineteenth century, especially in the northern reigns and duchies under Austrian control. This ultimately led to the political unification of Italy in 1861 through the dissolution of the pre-existing reigns and duchies, which occurred through either peaceful agreements or battles. The process began in the Northern territories and proceeded toward the center and the south, conquering Papal territories and southern ones belonging to the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. Unification was officially proclaimed in 1861. At this stage, the Papal State had already lost through armed resistance, two-thirds of its territories, remaining

limited to more or less the territories corresponding to the current administrative region of Lazio in the western central section of the Italian peninsula. However, the conflict reached its climax when the new Italian government announced its intention to establish its capital in Rome. The annexation of the city of Rome, conquered in 1870 and made official in 1871 by Parliament, meant the final disappearance of any territorial reality for the Roman Catholic Church, and with that, an end to pontifical temporal power or secular authority. Pope Pius IX declared himself a political prisoner of the Italian government, and systematically excommunicated the Italian King Vittorio Emanuele II and his ministers.

The years following the annexation were characterized by the conflict between intransigents and liberals, the former claiming to defend the Pope's temporal power, the latter favoring a clear divide between civil and religious authority, which, according to some, would be of benefit to the Church itself. These opposing factions were represented both in civil society, in the recently formed Parliament, as well as among the Catholic clergy. Although the conflict was prolonged, a long-term process of reconfiguration, with the Church assuming authority in an exclusively spiritual and moral domain, was underway, especially since the appointing of Pope Leo XIII, who proved less intransigent than Pope Pius IX.

The threat experienced by the Church in Italy in much of the nineteenth century paralleled that of the French Church during and immediately after the French Revolution. The reaction was also similar, including, among other things, a revitalization of apostolic feeling: once again the calling to "the first Christianity" was key to defending the Church's legitimacy (Aubert, Beckmann, Corish, Lill, 1977). In reconstructing a new legitimacy, the Roman Catholic Church moved increasingly toward centralization, in order to control the conduct of the clergy and to manage activities within and outside Italy, aiming to reinvigorate the Church's image in civil society. In order to contain the spread of secularism, associations of lay members were created. A new emphasis on the universalist mandate of the Roman Catholic Church was a key element in this reconfiguration process, and missions in the non-Christian context became crucial as practical manifestations of this universalism (Melloni, 2011).

The Lombard Seminary for Foreign Missions was set up under these complex circumstances and was one such manifestation of the Church's response. Its foundation was actively promoted by Pope Pius IX, and it was the intention that the Lombard

Seminary should work under the direct supervision of the Pope himself and according to Propaganda Fide's instructions. Its founder Mons. Ramazzotti and his successor Fr. Marinoni and many of its members were all located in the wing opposite to the Unitarian project and in favor of the maintenance of Papal territorial authority. Nevertheless, this Seminary embodied some of the main elements characterizing the Church's reformation at that time and the spirit animating similar Catholic orders elsewhere in Europe. In the vein of a new, active Catholicism promoted within civil society, the Seminary was also open to non-ordained missionaries. Similarly, the Seminary had the intention of working with a network of dioceses in Northern Italy, aiming to refresh links between a languishing clergy and a local population who, in a worrisome way, were taking distance from the Church. This general context is the background to much of the Lombard Seminary activity in the first decades of its existence. To a certain extent, this context also encompasses the two missions in Burma in conjunction with some additional factors influencing the genealogy of these two missions: the desire to contain the spread of Baptism and the poor conversion results among Buddhists by the MEP missionaries based in Mandalay. The following sections explore these two issues in more detail.

4.3 Contested Spaces and the Competition between Churches

Beidelman (1974) points to the relevance that competition between churches of various denominations has in the practical development of missions. He argues that contextually this issue is usually neglected in studies concerning specific missions. Nevertheless, this issue is relevant in many ways: competition, in fact, enhances the number and quality of services each denomination provides in order to gain followers, as shown by the work of Lankina and Getachew (2013) in the case of education services in India.

In the case of Burma, despite the presence of other denominations, the most consistent missionary presence was that of the Catholic Church and the American Baptist Church. Regarding the latter, the mission in Burma was their first mission abroad, and the Baptist missionaries' commitment was equal to that of Catholic missionaries. In 1813, the American Baptists Adorinam and Ann Judson established a mission in Rangoon, followed by a second Baptist couple in 1823. However, few conversions were secured

among Buddhists, and by the early 1830s, the two missionary couples began to dedicate their energies to the evangelization of the Karen, in light of the encouraging response toward evangelization shown by the few Karen people encountered in Rangoon. In 1831, the two couples moved northwards to Amherst and Moulmein. Thanks to the growing number of missionaries, one Baptist station was opened in Toungoo in 1853, and one in Kentung in 1901 (Wa, Sowards & Sowards, 1963).

The presence of the Catholic Church in the region can be traced back to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. During that time, Portuguese merchants established small trading colonies in Mergui, Martaban, Pegu, Syriam, and Bassei, and the presence of priests was required for conducting services. Dominicans, Franciscans, and Jesuits thus began the first sporadic attempts at evangelization, in the south of the country. From 1648, the newly created Propaganda Fide, developed with the purpose of managing missions abroad, tried to establish missions in the region. Missions' conditions however were precarious due to the recurrent wars between local Kings and later, because of the Anglo–Burmese wars (Gheddo, 2007). With the Mission Étrangères de Paris, The Society of Foreign Missions of Paris, or MEP, entrusted to lead the mission into Ava and Pegu territories in 1856, Catholic missionary work in Burmese territory can be said to have begun in earnest, under the guidance of Monsignor Bigandet – today considered the founding father of the Roman Catholic Church in Myanmar. (Gheddo, 2007).

In 1863, Fr. Paolo Abbona[2], an Italian priest of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary of Turin based in Amarapura, informs with a letter Propaganda Fide on the growing presence of Baptist missionaries among people living in the territories of Northern Toungoo. Such a presence, writes the Father, could hardly be matched by the MEP. Although this area was virtually encompassed into the vast territory of the Apostolic Vicariate of the Northern Burma Mission, entrusted to the French organization and based in Mandalay, there was a chronic lack of MEP missionaries. It was for this reason a decision was made to deploy Italian missionaries from the new Seminary to these territories (Tragella, 1958). As mentioned earlier, the Eastern Burma Mission was intended to have its main center in

[2] Father Paolo Abbona is a distinctive missionary figure. From 1841 to 1873, he worked at the court of Amapura kings, dedicating himself to astronomy, geography, and medical studies, in addition to his evangelical work. He also worked on the translation of scientific texts and diplomatic letters for the court. At the outbreak of the Second Anglo-Burmese conflict (1852-1854), he was instructed by the King of Amapura to mediate with the British for the achievement of a peace agreement (Abbona Coverlizza & Cardinali, 2013).

Kentung, but it wasn't until 1912 that the Catholic missionaries were finally able to open a station there. Meanwhile, competition in the field between the two denominations began in the territories surrounding Toungoo, where the Catholic station was opened in 1868.

A clear picture of the relations between Christian churches of different denomination is provided by the case of Kentung. Here, a third church – the Presbyterian – joined in the competition for hegemony. Since 1893, around the same time the Baptist missionaries arrived in town, Presbyterian missionaries, working for the so-called Laos Mission, had been visiting the area. In 1904, two Presbyterian couples, the Dodds and the Cornells, reached Kentung from San Francisco for the opening of a mission station. This led to a dispute between the Baptists and the Presbyterians, explained in some detail by Herbert Swanson (1982). By 1910, the Presbyterian Church, in agreement with the Baptists, had definitively recognized the sole presence of a Baptist mission in Kentung but, in return, had secured the exclusive expansion of the Presbyterian Church in Yunnan (Swanson, 1982).

No similar agreement was ever reached between the Baptists and Catholics, divided as they were by various doctrinal issues. In the context of Northern Burma, competition between these two churches played out through each discrediting the other with local people and authorities alike, as well as by trying to 'poach' from each other's villages (Gheddo, 2007).

The published papers and reports produced by the Lombard Seminary missionaries reveal the constant effort they made to outdo Baptist missions in terms of services provided. Even the publication of small books for the collection of prayers respond to this logic, as Bonetta writes in a report from the Kentung-based mission, commenting that the first edition of a prayers collection was provided in the Shan language. The urgency for the publication was motivated by the fact that the Baptists had already printed a book, of which "they show off in front of our Christians, and certainly not for our benefit" (Bonetta, 1917: 357). Similarly, Baptists compete with Catholics through a renovated activism, Mons. Bonetta writes: "The many conversions from Protestantism [to Catholicism] determine an awakening of activism on the Protestant side, and they now open two new dispensaries and a leprosy center" (Bonetta 1936: 143). Schools are one additional key tool to attract and contend for followers: Mons. Bonetta can joyfully announce the opening of the school in Kentung by commenting, "Shan and Burmese, of

Buddhist faith ..they send their children to [our] missionary school, as we look more like their monks, not having a wife, unlike protestant missionaries who rather look more like commercial agents" (Bonetta, 1912b: 586). In the same year, Fr. Lombardini, in Kentung with Mons. Bonetta, describes the Baptist reaction to the Catholic missionaries' presence: "The spirit of darkness, embodied in the Baptist sect, has engaged in a deep fight with us, by multiplying their schools, their teachers, the foundlings, and the charity work, to contrast with us" (Lombardini, 1912: 322).

The competition is not only played out at the level of services provided but also through the local's direct involvement as catechists. Fr. Lombardini's letter, in fact, goes on as follows: "...at the time of our arrival, of 80 boys in the school, 40 have been suddenly sent up to reside into the villages… with a consistent reward" (Lombardini, 1912: 322). For this reason, not only do school dispensaries and churches need to be established quickly, but also a greater number of young locals have to be instructed at a basic level to move into the villages. In some cases, catechists are left to guard areas where the establishment of mission stations are not yet possible. In doing so, they prepare the terrain for the missionaries' next arrival and ensure the Baptists will not preceed them, as in the case of the territories north of Kentung, inhabitated by Lahu and Wa, where Mons. Bonetta after a small journey plans to send catechists (Bonetta, 1912).

The competition between churches involves mainly slander. Fr. Portaluppi, according to his published account on their first arrival in Kentung, is confronted with unexpected hostility and difficulty faced in finding a place to stay. He writes as follows:

> "Baptists are already established here, and up until now they have been the only ones and have done a lot of proselytizing. Five years ago, Presbyterians also showed up. They were successfully working in Siam, however, the Baptists did everything they could to force them to leave. It was natural they, having heard about us coming, would do everything they could to put us in a difficult position…. One day they gathered their followers for a meeting, and they talked about us. They pictured us with the most dreary colors, and they compelled them to not house us in their villages. … They said we steal souls, we eat children's flesh, and we bring bad omens. People believed all of this, so they tried to hinder our stay by all means" (Portaluppi 1912: 256).

The rest of Fr. Portaluppi's published letter sheds light on another tactic used by both churches in this competition: how they relied on favors and on the manipulation of both the local and British authorities:

> "The Baptists even went to the Sawba to forbid him to accept us under his rule, however, because of our repeated requests, he asked for information about us from Mr. Gordon [the British officer]. So this gentleman had to say the truth about us, and he reassured the Prince about our integrity and our good purposes. This was enough for the Sawba, and he decided to allow his subjects to sell us some land" (Portaluppi, 1912, 256).

Similarly, Catholic missionaries years later finally obtain permission from British authorities to enter into so-called Wa territories north of Kentung only after an Irish Catholic is appointed as commissioner for the Shan States (Manghisi, 1938). Nevertheless, in this fight to gain followers, successful conversions are presented on the pages of *Le Missioni Cattoliche*, as the published letter by Fr. Pastori (1912: 213), working for the Eastern Burma Mission, proves with his title: "A new triumph of the faith. Padaung village converts from heresy. The baptism of 149 people."

In the face of these defamatory campaigns, at least as the Catholic missionaries represented the situation, the Catholics retaliated with asserting their moral high ground in comparison to the Baptists and their superiority in terms of dedication to others through charity, as well as through the constant help and support they offered people. Furthermore, moral superiority was reclaimed by the Catholic missionaries through their show of unity, while the Baptists were said to be engaged in frequent doctrinal debates, even involving locals in these arguments (Brambilla, 1942). In addition, Catholic missionaries chose to establish their residency in remote villages, while Baptists tended to remain in the main centers, according to Catholic missionaries' records.

If the intense competition between churches usually contributed to the improvement of medical and educational aid provided, in this case, I argue it determined the very foundation of the Catholic missions themselves: their expansive directions, as well as the strategy used in the field, which aimed to gain followers within a territory where Baptists

were already established. The aim to contain the establishment of Baptist missions in Burmese territories is one more element which, together with that discussed in the previous section, embodies the genealogy of both the Eastern and the Divine Providence Missions. The following section presents the third element constituting this genealogy, providing the reason for the general shift toward converting minorities. This shift occurred by the end of nineteenth century among churches of all denominations working in mainland southern-east Asian territories.

4.4 Difficulty in Converting Buddhists

The Christian presence in major Buddhist South-East Asian countries can be traced back to around the mid-sixteenth century. Systematic efforts to gain converts increased in the seventeenth and nineteenth century, sometimes in the face of hostility from local princes (Keyes, 1993). Missionaries, however, came to realize that the conversion of Buddhists to Christianity would be anything but easy, while on the other hand non-Buddhist minorities showed far more encouraging results. This situation poses the question of why Buddhists did not convert whereas minorities to the contrary did. Max Weber (1963) made a distinction between traditional and world religions, arguing the latter display a higher level of coherence and rationality, and because of this, they would be more appealing when compared to traditional ones. Hefner (1993: 19), on the other hand, adds the institutional link world religions usually construct by arguing: "The most distinctive feature of the world religions…is something both doctrinal and socio-institutional." The specific case of a Buddhist–Christian confrontation could be conceptualized as the confrontation between two world religions of a different kind.

Hughes (1982; 1985), with regard to the Buddhists' conversion to Protestant Christianity in Thailand, refers to the different socio-institutional patterns the two religions embrace, which on the one hand would make basic Christian concepts definitely foreign to Thai people. Keyes (1993), on the other hand, addresses directly the issue of why the Thai did not convert to Christianity. He explains such resistance by proposing both the Weberian argument and Hefner's (1993) additional institutional one. In terms of the institutional argument, Keyes refers to the long-lasting direct links between Buddhist orders and dynasties that were characteristic of Theravada Buddhist societies since at least

the thirteenth century. In modern times, with the rise of the nation-states, Buddhism became a major constituent of national identity, and in so doing, maintained a link with political authority.

However, Keyes (1993; 2016) also discusses the universalist and abstract nature shared by "historical religions," such as Buddhism or Christianity, which better adapt to changing living conditions when compared with localized, animistic religions. Such a difference could provide a reason for the different rates of conversion that missionaries observed among Buddhists and non-Buddhist populations in mainland Southeast Asia. Although providing a reason for this difference is beyond the scope of this research, what is nevertheless relevant is that the argument proposed by Hefner (1993) is the one commonly referred to by Catholic missionaries in their writings.

By the late nineteenth century, in the context of the mission entrusted to the MEP encompassing northern Burmese territories, results in terms of conversions looked rather poor; this situation is reiterated by the Apostolic Vicar of the northern Burma Mission, Fr. Bourdon, who comments with some frustration: "The state of the Mission, it has to be said, is not exactly rosy" (Bourdon, 1874: 98). According to Fr. Bourdon, the Buddhists remained obstinately attached to their religion, though showing respect toward Catholic missionaries and appreciating discussion (Bourdon, 1874). Fr. Campagnoli, a PIME missionary working for the Divine Providence Mission, on the matter of why the Buddhist Shan did not convert in big numbers, commented: "We introduced ourselves as a structured Church with our temples and our priests, but Buddhists already had all this" (in Gheddo 2007: 350). A major source of frustration for the Catholic missionaries was their conviction that Buddhism and Catholicism did share some traits, without this leading necessarily to conversion (Bourdon, 1874).

After the failure to convert both the Burmese and Shan people, churches of all denominations shifted their efforts toward minorities, an activity supported by the progress of British troops. Fr. Biffi, Apostolic Vicariate for the Eastern Burma Mission, wrote in 1872: "The great difficulty in converting the Burmese has directed the efforts of missionaries toward the Karen people. There, the soil is less ungrateful and goes on yielding good fruits" (in Brambilla, 1942: 56). Missionaries explained this different attitude among non-Buddhist minorities in terms of their lack of a religious system: "It is not difficult with the help of God to convert these people, as they do not have any religious

system," writes Fr. Conti in the same year, 1872 (in Brambilla, 1942: 57). To the missionaries, in fact, all the religious practices attributed to minorities were labeled as superstitions, and as such, in need of eradication in order to open up the people to conversion.

For a long time, Catholic missions within today's Myanmar territory entertained good relations with local princes and their courts, yet they could not gain followers. The "discovery," then, of non-Buddhist groups living at the periphery, for example, the Karen, with the possibility of gaining conversions among them, led to a general re-organization of mission goals and targets. This re-organization, I argue, influenced the spread of Christianity among minorities, which was also favored by the progressive establishment of British control in the northern territories. The difficulty in converting Buddhists, the critical condition experienced by the Roman Catholic Church within Italy and Europe at large, and the spread of missions other than Catholic Christian denominations constitute the genealogy of the Eastern Burma and Divine Providence Missions. The following two sections present a brief synthesis of key moments and figures relevant in the establishment of these two missions.

4.5 The Constitution of the Eastern Burma Mission

In Propaganda Fide's original instructions, the final destination of the Lombard Seminary missionaries was to be Kentung in the north east of the Burmese territory, also referred to as Upper Burma. En route, they would spend only a little time in Toungoo where they would acquire some knowledge on the context and on the Burmese language. However, Kentung soon proved to be too difficult to reach given its distant location, the geographic characteristics of the territory, mainly mountainous, and the lack of adequate roads connecting the two towns; thus the mission in Kentung would not be established until 1912. As it was, the Eastern Burma Mission developed in Toungoo and its surroundings, rather than in Kentung, with the arrival of the first three Lombard Seminary missionaries who reached Toungoo in 1868. At that time, Toungoo was included in the vast territory of the Apostolic Vicariate of central Burma, assigned to the MEP and based in Mandalay under the guidance of Mons. Bigandet, Apostolic Vicar and later the first Bishop of Burma. Toungoo was at the periphery of the Vicariate territory, and the scarce number of MEP missionaries could barely cover it. Because of this, soon after the Italian

missionaries arrived, Mons. Bigandet and the Propaganda Fide agreed to leave the area to the Italian missionaries, fresh on arrival with their zeal and apostolic enthusiasm. British troops were already established in Toungoo ever since the end of the Second Anglo–Burmese War in 1852.

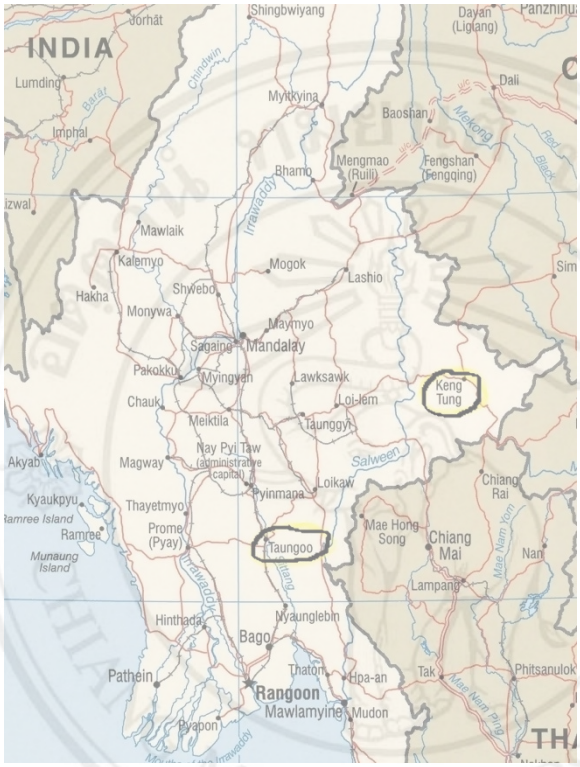

Figure 4.1: Map of Myanmar **Error! No text of specified style in document.**:1

Source: https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/burma.html

The towns of Toungoo and Kentung are circled.

On the 9th December 1867, Fr. Eugenio Biffi (1829-1896), Fr. Tancredi Conti (1842-1922), Fr. Sebastiano Carbone (1832-1872), and Fr. Rocco Tornatore (d. 1908), embarked on a journey from Venice to Rangoon. Fr. Biffi had already experienced missionary work in Colombia, where he operated from 1856 to 1862, and because of this experience, he took charge as the Apostolic Prefect for the new mission opening in Burma. In 1882, he had to leave Burma, having been assigned as the Bishop of Cartagena, an office he held until his death (Gheddo, 2007). For Fr. Biffi, a Cause of Beatification was opened in 2012. The rest of the missionaries were freshly trained at the Lombard Seminary.

To the newborn Seminary, Propaganda Fide, in 1867, entrusted evangelization of the territory that:

> "…from the eastern side of the Salween runs to the Mekong river, on the north is delimited by the Chinese province of Yunnan, and on the eastern side by the Mekong, to the south by the Chiang Mai Reign at around 20° northern latitude, and by the Karen tribe settlements, bordered within the same vicariate, and which, finally, on the western side, is delimited by the same, and by the Salween river. To such a mission, we assign as a shelter center the territory of the city of Toungoo, in the Pegu region." Pope Pius IX, Letter of 19th July,1870 (in Brambilla, 1942: 20- 21).

It was intended that this mission would be developed along the eastern bank of the Salween river and the Yunnan and Siam borders, siding with the territory of the Vicariate of Northern Burma, already entrusted to the MEP and having its main center in Mandalay. This newly assigned territory on the northeastern side of the MEP mission represented a general expansion of the Roman Catholic Church's presence in Burmese territory. The territories assigned to the Lombard Seminary were hitherto poorly known and showed to all intent and purposes the characteristics of a new frontier, while the rest of the territory of Burma had already been organized into two Apostolic Vicariates: Northern and Southern, both entrusted to the MEP.

The new mission in the northeastern territories was intended to be referred to as the Eastern Burma Mission. In Pope Pius IX instructions, the mission's boundaries were deliberately left vague as it was anticipated that they would be better defined in cooperation with the MEP, once the missionaries were in the field. At the time of the missionaries' arrival, the 6th March 1868, the town of Toungoo had about 15.000 inhabitants. These included a few Europeans and many Indians, some of whom had followed British troops already established in town and some of whom were long-term immigrants. Toungoo was, in fact, the last outpost of British troops at the time. As such, it was initially intended to be a logistical center for accessing Kentung, the assigned center for the new mission according to the Propaganda Fide instructions. Baptist missionaries from the Boston Society had already been in the area of Toungoo for about 15 years,

while more recently, Anglican missionaries had also arrived; all worked mainly among the Karen. Toungoo was originally intended to be part of the Southern Vicariate assigned to the Foreign Missions of Paris; Bishop Bigandet soon decided, however, to leave the city to the newly arrived Italian missionaries. Fr. Biffi, appointed Apostolic Vicar of the new mission, established his residency in Toungoo, with the intention of it being a logistics center – an aim shared by Fr. Tancredi Conti (Brambilla,1942; Tragella, 1959).

The mission was intended to bring the Gospel to communities living in the mountainous areas, where people apparently responded better to evangelization than the Buddhists. The rest of the missionaries therefore, after a brief intensive study of English, Burmese, and Karen, soon moved out of the town to establish themselves in surrounding villages. An early station was opened in 1868 in Leikthò, a Karen village 31 miles northeast of Toungoo. Fr. Tornatore and Fr. Carbone reached the village after a two-day walk to establish their residency. Villages at the time were usually small, comprising 8-10 families, although occasionally some were larger with 40-50 families (Brambilla, 1942). At the time of the station's opening, Leikhtò was made up of 12 families (Gheddo, 2007). Here, the two missionaries developed a basic written Karen vocabulary. They also prepared and provided medicines, educated the villagers in basic Catholic concepts, and constantly visited surrounding villages. To enhance the villagers' economic conditions, some new developments were introduced, which included the following: mulberry tree plantations, silkworm farming, animal husbandry, quinine trees, and coffee, with a view to sustaining both the mission and the communities (Brambilla, 1942).

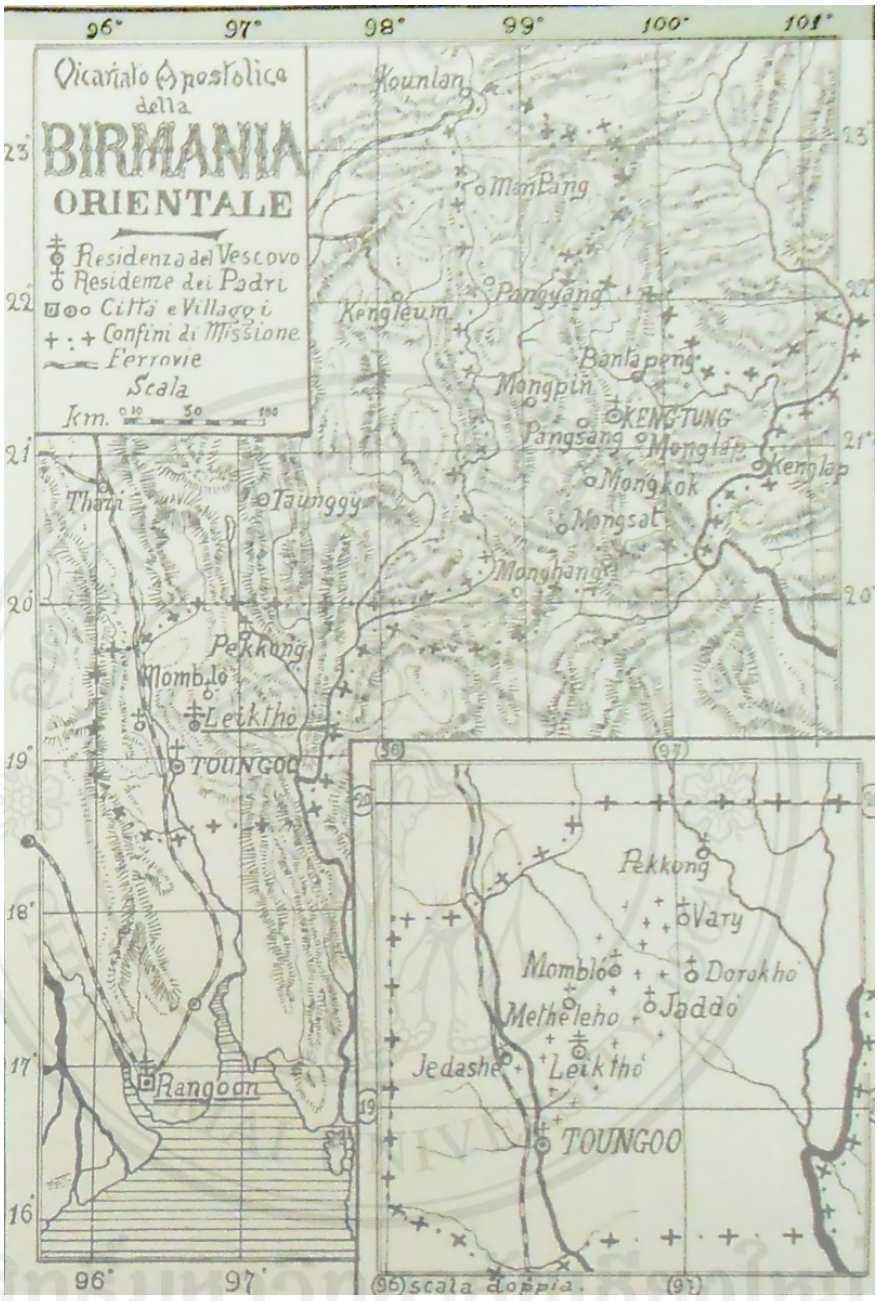

Figure 4.2: The Apostolic Vicariate of Eastern Burma in 1915.
Source: *Le Missioni Cattoliche* 1915: 111

The results of conversion among the Karen people were more than encouraging. By 1873, within just five years of the station's opening, 26 Karen villages were Catholic. In contrast, conversions in Toungoo were poor in number. Missionaries, meanwhile, moved northeast, toward their assigned destination of Kentung. In so doing, they entered the territory of the so-called Red Karen, described as wild and at permanent war among each

other. According to Fr. Biffi's yearly report, a total of 100 Karen villages in an area of 60 square miles had converted by 1880. In the same year, the mission could count among its staff 56 local catechists, most of whom were trained in the Toungoo orphanage, seven missionaries, three European catechists, and four nuns (Brambilla, 1942).

In the last two decades of the nineteenth century especially, the mission multiplied in terms of the number of stations. This was thanks to the arrival of additional missionaries from Italy and to donations from Europe, as well as to British control extending to the territories of northern Toungoo in 1889, which slowly put an end to inter-village wars. Red Karen and Padaung areas now became more accessible and seemed to respond better to the missionaries (Peano, 1918; Gheddo, 2007). In this phase, it was not uncommon for villages to shift from Baptist to Catholic, reflecting the galvanizing competition between the two missionary groups. This process was not free of friction among locals, and tensions sometimes led to the splitting apart of villages and to the founding of new ones (Peano, 1918; Brambilla, 1942). In 1897, Luca Nelè, the first local Karen from the area surrounding Leikthò, was finally ordained as a priest, after several other candidates either had died or became ill due to various diseases.

The number of conversions continued to increase during the first decades of the twentieth century. Despite a serious lack of resources from Europe, due to World War I, new stations were opened, and missionaries were now able to reach even the most isolated Karen communities north along the Sittang river and northeast of Toungoo. A 1919 report, published 50 years after the mission's founding, records the number of Catholics as 21.352, spanning a total of 245 Catholic villages. Missionaries numbered 18, while nuns were 16, one of which was local, and catechists were 259 (Sagrada, 1919). In 1939, just before the beginning of World War II, Catholics numbered 28.930, with 3.955 catechumens, while the number of Protestants numbered 21.000. The mission had 19 main stations, 36 missionaries, 8 local priests and 283 catechists. Elementary schools numbered forty-eight, with 2.018 boys and 1.475 girls. There were nine secondary schools with a total of 381 students; five high schools, with a total of 152 students; and seven vocational schools. There were twenty-eight orphanages, housing a total of 1240 children. Two hospitals and thirteen dispensaries were set up, while one typography was settled in Toungoo (Lanfranconi, 1939).

As already mentioned, the Eastern Burma Mission developed in Toungoo and its surroundings because of unexpected difficulties in reaching its original destination,

Kentung. Although the mission had a limited number of missionaries, it would grow steadily, consistently gaining followers mainly among the Karen. As will be discussed in the following chapter, evangelization proceeded through the provision of basic services, the development of new activities and cultivations, and the pacification of inter-village wars. The missions' advancement was certainly favored by the expansion of British control and, as numbers show, relied on a consistent number of local catechists and the early development of a local clergy. With regard to the issue of competition with Baptists, who reached Toungoo earlier, the number of followers for each of the churches in 1939 shows the Catholic strategy of establishing stations within villages, together with the services and support provided, proved to be successful. The number of Catholic followers surpassed slightly that of the Baptists. This strategy is then repeated in the context of the Divine Providence Mission when Catholic missionaries can finally open a station in Kentung.

4.6 Going Beyond the Salween: The Constitution of the Divine Providence Mission

Divine Providence Mission was name as such because of the intervention from Providence which, in the missionaries' opinion, only made possible the opening of such a difficult mission. During the time of the Eastern Burma Mission's growth, expeditions were being carried out to reach the original mission's destination of Kentung, which became a British protectorate in 1885. The first of these expeditions took place in 1871 when Fr. Biffi and Fr. Tornatore decided to move toward the Salween River's western bank, in a journey involving several days' walk. At that time, there were no roads linking Toungoo and Kentung. That first journey stopped before reaching the Salween as it resulted in too long and difficult an expedition. After that, expeditions were repeated yearly with the aim of establishing a first contact with villages and of making the area safe for missionaries. The Salween came to represent a sort of mythical boundary: an unknown and perilous frontier. Even today among the PIME missionaries, the saying 'to cross the Salween' survives, which means to embark on an especially difficult task, or "to go bravely towards a frontier" (Evans, 2012: 179).

Finally, in 1894, a new expedition was able to reach the Salween's banks, and in 1896, Fr. Tornatore, Fr. Villa, and Fr. Cazzulani crossed the river and reached Kentung. The town was recognizably a perfect center for the establishment of a station, yet it was clear to the missionaries this opening could not be achieved in the short term because of its distance from the main Eastern Burma Mission center.

Years later, thanks to a substantial as well as unexpected donation from a donor, in the person of a rich Italian woman, the opening of the station in Kentung became a reality. Because of this fortuitous situation, this section of the mission – which according to the original instructions of Propaganda Fide was meant to be the sole destination of the Eastern Burma Mission – was named "Divine Providence Mission." For the first decade, the Divine Providence Mission was administered as a branch of the Eastern Burma Mission, and in 1927, it became an apostolic Vicariate itself. A pre-existing Baptist station in Kentung tried to stop the opening of the new Catholic station. But the records show the Italian missionaries were, in some insistences, favored by the local Prince, who showed a degree of benevolence and with whom the missionaries had established good relations and a level of cooperation ("Il primo ventennio della missione di Kentung", 1932.). Fr. Francesco Portaluppi (1884- 1971), Fr. Erminio Bonetta (1881-1949), and Fr. Leone Lombardini (1909-1922), were all assigned to the new station and reached Kentung on 29th January 1912.

This is how Fr. Bonetta describes the city ten years after their arrival:

> "In general, they are all farmers, rice growers. You cannot find shepherds in the strict sense; however, everyone owns a certain amount of livestock, to which they dedicate very little care. Special handicrafts are not found, with the exception of rifles' manufacturing. Their tools for farming and house construction, weaving, and in general everything they need, is self-produced. Of late, civilization has introduced the habit of trading goods at market. Until recently, and as is still the case in places far from markets, everyone has needed to be self-sufficient and to produce everything themselves, without relying on others.
>
> There is trade in opium, cotton, and iron, though in small amounts. Trading is with China, and especially Siam, and within Burma themselves to a lesser extent.

> The Buddhist population is stable; the rest of the population, and the people of the mountains in particular, move according to their need for new land. Immigration is very consistent, from China, from whence the Wa and Lahu come. The reason for this is the fact that the British government here is safe; there are no serious criminal cases, banditry is unknown, and taxes are not exorbitant" (Bonetta, 1925: 321).

With regard to the ethnic composition of the area, he adds later: "The most common races are the Akha, Lahu and Shan. You can find animists, Hindus, Muslims, and Buddhists, and Protestant and Catholic Christians." (Bonetta, 1925: 323). Mons. Bonetta establishes his residency in Kentung, and on 19th March 1912, Fr. Portaluppi moves into Mong Ping village on the border of the so-called Wa State and establishes his residency there. The groups most responsive to evangelization seemed to be the Lahu and the Akha, and it was on these groups the missionaries increasingly focused their efforts ("Il primo ventennio della missione di Kentung", 1932). In fact, the first village to convert entirely was a recently founded Lahu village near Kentung (Bonetta, 1913a).

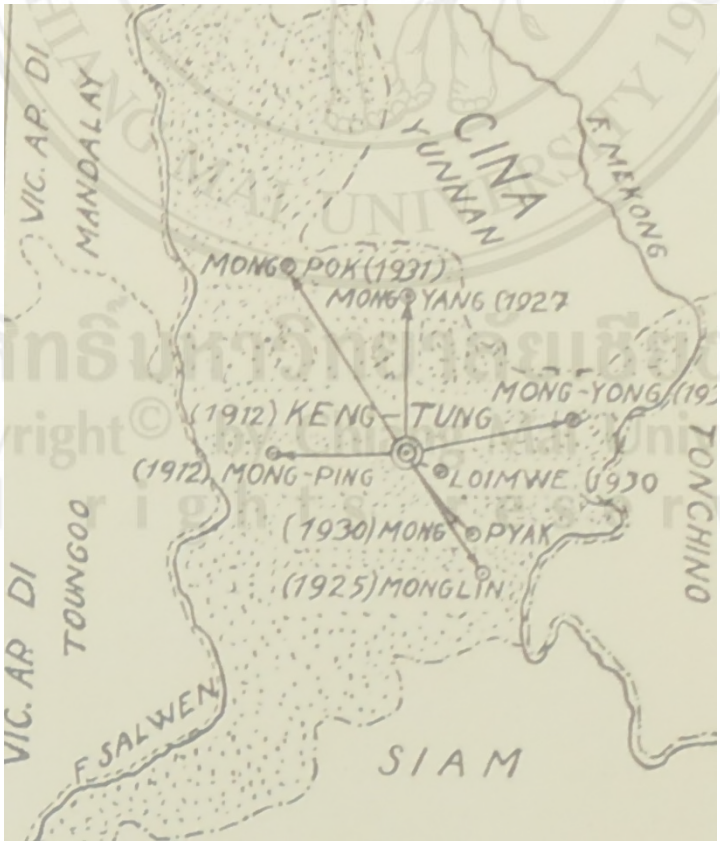

Figure 4.3: Main stations in The Apostolic Prefecture of Kengtung in 1932

Source *Le Missioni Cattoliche*, 1932: 423

The tactic employed by the missionaries here was very similar to that applied in Toungoo. The main town station acted as a logistical center, as well as a service center offering education and healthcare. Other stations were opened in key villages, usually those most strategic in terms of accessing other villages in the area. The results proved modest but encouraging to the missionaries over that first year: converted people by the end of 1912 numbered 12, while these numbers were doubled by the end of 1913, with the addition of two dispensaries as well as two schools and two orphanages being opened (Bonetta, 1914). As the number of missionaries remained limited to three, the catechists were key. Early on, these catechists were mainly from among the Karen, from the villages within Eastern Burma Mission, but by 1915 the new mission included one local Akha catechist (Lombardini, 1915). To provide support for the missionaries, in 1916 five nuns, members of the Holy Child Mary order, reached Kentung to establish a school and orphanage for girls (Gheddo, 2007). According to a 1917 report, just five years after the mission's founding, eleven villages in total had been converted: seven in the area surrounding Kentung, and four around Mong Ping: of these, six were Lahu villages and five Akha (Bonetta, 1917). In the 1920s, the mission boosted its visibility especially in its center of Kentung through the construction of a cathedral and the development of a leprosy asylum just outside the town. In addition, thanks to the arrival of further missionaries from Italy, new stations were opened in 1924 in Mong Lin, 93 miles southeast of Kentung, where Fr. Clemente Vismara had begun his missionary work.

In 1930, the number of Catholics within the Divine Providence Mission territory was 1.831, growing to 2.301 in 1931. Most of the baptisms recorded involved adults: these increased in number constantly and consistently, reaching 774 in 1932. Only a very few families were mentioned by Mons. Bonetta (1932) as having returned to their previous religious practices. Local catechists numbered 78, added to which were 32 teachers working in the mission schools. Missionaries now numbered 11, helped by 15 nuns (Bonetta, 1932). The new stations that opened increased the number of conversions among the Lahu, Akha, and Shan; those conversions north of Kentung constituted, in Mons. Bonetta's (1934) words, an outpost to the territories inhabited by the Wa, who were considered especially wild, being headhunters, and which appealed to the apostolic fervor of the missionaries. For the first few decades, however, Catholic missionaries were

not allowed to set up stations in Wa territories as they were considered too dangerous (Bonetta, 1934). Competition with the Baptists, who were similarly moving northwards, pushed the Catholic missionaries toward enhancing their presence within these territories. It was only in 1938, once British rule had been established in the area and after complex negotiations with the local Prince, that a single station was opened in Wa territory, which had already been reached by Baptist missionaries (Manghisi, 1938). By the end of the 1930s, the mission seemed to be flourishing. In the final report before the beginning of World War II, referring to 1938-1939, Catholics now numbered 6.113, with 6.969 catechumens, surpassing the number of Baptist converts, which Catholic missionaries estimated to be around 5.000 (Bonetta, 1939).

In conclusion, through the experience gained in the context of the Eastern Burma Mission at Toungoo, Catholic missionaries proceeded into new territory applying a similar strategy. This strategy consisted of providing material help and services in the field of education and medical aid, as well as economic support, along with the decision to establish stations in the villages. The involvement of locals was key to facilitating missionaries work, especially the basic instruction of catechists and the early formation of a local clergy, as will be discussed in the following chapter.

4.7 Conclusion

As already mentioned, Foucault's genealogy proposes an approach to history that questions the emergence of historical facts by tracing out the multiplicity of discourses and their ruptures and struggle. Bevir (2008) highlights the denaturalizing perspective Foucault suggests in the understanding of historical facts. With regard to this issue, I argue that minorities' evangelization was anything but natural as each mission is the result of a number of choices made under certain circumstances. In this vein, some works in the field of socio-anthropological investigation, already mentioned, have contributed to the denaturalization of missions by articulating a mission's link with power and knowledge in the context of colonial domination, to which they are usually assumed as fully organic (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1986,1991, 1997; Huber, 1987). Nevertheless, these works in genealogic terms fail to grasp each mission in relation to their specific denomination's agenda, through the insights of a missionary group's characteristics and the varying moods of their relations with a colonial administration.

In contrast, Beidelman (1974) highlights the relevance of studying missionary groups according to their affiliation, specific ideology, social background, and their relations with the specific church histories to which they belong, in addition to the focus on the relation with colonial institutions when these occur. Beidelman's (1974) suggestion to surpass a flat conceptualization of missions that criticizes and commonly represents missionaries as "all members of a general class" (1974: 239) can be combined, I argue, with Foucault's program to discard "a subject which is either transcendental in relation to the field of events or runs in its empty sameness throughout the course of history" (Foucault, 1980: 117). Following this suggestion, I localized the Catholic missions considered not only in their geographically and anthropologically contextual field, as the ethnographic accounts mentioned above do, but also through the lens of the general cultural background of both the missionary institution considered and its church, which led to the decision of establishing these two missions.

In an effort to provide an account of the emergence of both the Eastern Burma and the Divine Providence Missions through the lens of a genealogic perspective, I highlighted partially unrelated contingencies, namely the condition of the Roman Catholic Church by the end of the nineteenth century, the competition between churches of various denominations, and the difficulty of converting Buddhists. If the Lombard Seminary for Foreign Missions had the task of contributing to the spread of Catholicism among non-Christians, it jointly had the task of revitalizing Catholic sentiment within the newly constituted Kingdom of Italy, beset by worrying anti-clerical feeling and secularism. The missions were one tool used by the Church to refresh its image, through the lens of authentic apostolic dedication. Missions needed to be distant enough to affirm their apostolic value, and at the same time, secure results, in order to materialize the Catholic Church's universalist nature. The poor conversion results by all Christian missionaries within Buddhist communities, among which Catholic missions were established far earlier and systematically by the first decades of the eighteenth century, determined a shift toward non-Buddhist populations and a rupture, I argue, within their evangelic strategy and goals. Non-Buddhist minorities, in fact, remained the preferential target for evangelization, given the need of missionaries to find new fields of evangelization within which to profitably apply their apostolic enthusiasm.

As an additional contingency, the corresponding move northwards of the British army made territories safer for the opening of both Baptist and Catholic stations in

peripheral areas, where the two churches competed for villages to convert. In conclusion, competition itself forced missions on both sides eventually to constantly reframe their movements within the territory, as well as their strategy of evangelization to appeal to people through empowering services and discrediting their antagonists. The following chapter examines more deeply the Catholic missionaries' strategies, used in the context of the two missions to successfully root Catholicism within the former Burmese territory.

CHAPTER 5

Missionaries' Discourse and Missionary Practice in The Field

This chapter presents and analyzes the data gained through archival research and referred to as the Eastern Burma and Divine Providence Missions. The first section aims to trace the missionaries' discourse and their understanding of local minorities encountered, especially in relation to the two categories of religion and civilization. The following sections provide an overview of the missionaries' evangelization work, highlighting the specific strategy applied by missionaries that consisted of the provision of practical help and the development of stable basic services. In addition, information is also provided on the relevant involvement of locals in the rapid spread of Catholicism among minorities. The last section focuses on the response of minorities to missionaries' work, as understood through the reading of missionaries' documents.

5.1 Classification of Humanity and Catholic Missionary Paradigms

Bosch (2011) first applied Kuhn's (1996) concept of "paradigm shifts" to highlight major shifts occurring on both a theoretical and practical level within missions' development throughout the centuries. In the first centuries, Christianity spread due to its direct links with political authorities; for instance, it became the official religion of the Roman Empire. During the middle ages, the spread of Christianity in the European peripheral areas relied mainly on mendicant orders, while the crusades were animated by the principle of "contra gentes," referring mainly to the fight against Islam. In modern times, spreading alongside colonial expansion, evangelization developed the principle and method of "tabula rasa" (blank slate), which aims for a clear break with local traditions and beliefs (Sangkeun, 2004). By the end of the sixteenth century, the Jesuit missionary Josè Acosta, with his "*De Procuranda Indorum salute"* written in 1588, gave for the first time a systematic organization to missionary work and defined a

methodological guideline. Acosta organized humanity hierarchically and divided it intothree major groups: The first group included the European population, Chinese, Japanese, and Indians. This group was recognized with full rationality embodied in political and religious institutions. The second group embraced Mexicans and Peruvians, to which a certain degree of rationality was recognized. The third group was comprised of "wilds," for which neither rules and social organization for living nor any form of religion was recognized. The method of evangelization needed to be framed differently depending on where a group placed in the hierarchy with the aim of enabling groups to move up toward the first level of full rationality. Thus, the position of people within one of these groups would imply the evangelizing approach, as well as the amount of local culture that could be maintained within the new Christian society being built. When 'civilized' people were able to engage with theological issues and the contents of the Bible, the theoretical principles of Christian philosophy were also provided, as well as translations of the Bible to facilitate direct access (Cuturi, 2004; Sangkeun, 2004). People living at lower levels of civilization needed more practical guidance toward faith. Missionaries were, in this sense, civilizers as well as evangelizers.

For this purpose, Jesuits in what is today Paraguay, Argentina, and Brazil developed the reductions model. Reductions may be defined as large inter-ethnic villages created with the aim of building permanent settlements for nomadic people. Beyond the direct control of colonial rulers, these villages were administrated by missionaries (Cuturi, 2004). In the villages, preference was given to one language – usually the best-known – and economic activities were developed to the extent that reductions almost became self-sufficient. Daily activities were intermediated by prayers and services, and people were also taught through theatre and music. The fight against idolatry consisted in the common practice of destroying objects during public ceremonies. Such ceremonies also included processions, the sprinkling of a cleansed place with sacred water, and the replacement of idols with crosses and the images of saints (Henkel, 1997). This model became a paradigm of evangelization, eventually replicated in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia.

A shift both at a theoretical and practical level of missions' principles occurs in the postcolonial age, and the principle of mission *ad gentes* (Dulles, 1991) drives toward a strategy of accommodation between the Christian faith and local traditions. Officially announced in the course of the second Vatican Council, such a principle drives current missions and characterizes the new methodology of evangelization inspired by a de-Westernization of Christianity. As Dulles (1991) points out, paradigm shifts do not occur

all at once so that different models can co-exist for some time. To a certain extent, I argue, this is also true for the two missions considered in this study.

At the time the Eastern Burma and Divine Providence Missions were founded, the movement outward from Christian Europe implied the idea of a movement out of the Christian European center toward the periphery to teach and to convert. Linked to colonial expansion, evangelization was also pictured and referred to as a conquest (see Portaluppi, 1912). Missionaries acted in peripheral areas as civilization's carriers, according to the pre-existing "tabula rasa" paradigm of evangelization. However, when faced with organized reigns and crowns and with a structured religious hierarchy, they attempted to engage in a theological debate. Buddhist lowlanders were faced with an approach inspired more by the latter principle, which only resulted in some tolerance gained toward the missionaries' presence. The evangelization of minorities in southern central and northeastern Burma was definitely inspired by the former model. In this vein, the development of basic education and hospital services and the development of new work activities and technical skills were at the core of the missionaries' strategy and intended to raise the general level of civilization. In addition, similar to the strategy taken by Jesuit missionaries in Latin America, attempts were made to create sedentary communities and to increase inter-ethnic relations through the promotion of one lingua franca or more (Maspoli, 1927). With regard to the understanding of religious local practices, the missionaries of the Lombard Seminary defined these largely as superstitions, while in some cases referring to the related definition of people without religion.

Because of the arch of time considered, the two missions in Burma were, on the one hand, largely embodied conceptually within the general missionary paradigm of the tabula rasa. However, on the other hand, the missionaries increasingly anticipated a conceptual shift, developed later and made official by the Second Vatican Council (1963-1965) based on the acceptance of an indigenization process. Dismissing the direct use of violence to impose conversion (a principle applied during the sixteenth century and in missions in Latin America), I argue that missionaries were now faced with the necessity of negotiating and appealing to conversion through partial acceptance of local adaptations to the new faith and through, especially, the offering of practical aid. Similarly, the creation of a local clergy, considered key in the context of the two missions analyzed, was in line with the growing movement toward a more de-centralized, de-Westernized

church, a move that was finally established by the Roman Catholic Church in 1919.[1] As mentioned previously, during the Second Vatican Council (1963-1965) adjustment strategies were introduced officially, giving greater consideration to local cultures and thus affirming the universal nature of Christianity and the embodiment of the Gospel in all cultures. From that moment on, much of the debate in the missiology field has been aimed at rebalancing the relation between the centralized organization of Catholicism and the local churches worldwide. Since the Second Vatican Council, the debate has moved on further: if the term enculturation was proposed in 1977 to define this approach, more recently that of inter-culturation has been proposed in replacement, in order to better address the dimension of encounter and dialogue involved in the process of evangelization (Burrows, 2007).

In the arch of time considered, however, the seeds of this change were still partially implicit. The predominant direction evangelization took was that of the tabula rasa principle to which evolutionist ideas, common within European societies at large by the end of the nineteenth century, were added and intertwined. This section has presented the evangelization model by which missionaries were more or less consciously inspired. The next section will discuss the discourse of missionaries emerging from written documents and published papers in the context of the Eastern Burma and Divine Providence Missions.

5.2 Missionaries' Discourse on Religion and Civilization

Michaud (2007) has highlighted the contribution missionaries' ethnographies provide in terms of knowledge of past events, as well as their idiosyncrasies in relation to the historical, political, and ideological context which encompass them. Although sporadic, these sorts of ethnographic accounts were provided by some missionary figures in the context of the Upper Tonkin Missions, entrusted to the MEP. In part stimulated by the colonialist agenda, in part the result of genuine personal missionary interests and aspirations, they to a certain extent, Michaud (2007) concludes, display in some cases an academic shape, although intertwined with theological assumption or prejudices typical of their time. In terms of ethnographic writing, the Lombard Seminary missionaries very

[1] This new disposition is pronounced in 1919 by Pope Benedict XV, with the "Encyclical Maximum."

rarely offered detailed ethnographic records when compared to their MEP counterparts. This appears to be for a number of reasons. Different from their French counterparts, the Italian missionaries, on the one hand, did not have a direct link and interest in British colonial expansion, and therefore, did not need to stimulate the development of detailed accounts for the benefit of colonial troops and administrations. On the other hand, they did not have an Italian anthropological tradition, similar to ones emerging in other European countries and in the United States, to draw from for their ethnographic descriptions.

In addition to the contextual differences between these two Catholic missionary groups, there was the general refusal of any scientific training for candidate missionaries, a symptom of the generally uneasy relation between science and faith that Michaud (2007) also highlights for the case of the MEP missionaries.

Under these conditions, the Lombard Seminary missionaries' writings remain for the most part anecdotal; the writings are devoted either to account for the bishops' advancements in the missions or to stimulate donations among donors through the pages of *Le Missioni Cattoliche*. The missionaries in their writings do not appear to be substantially interested in the production of knowledge per se, such as in the accumulation of information on local communities. Rather, most of the published writings are in the form of travelogues and interested more in highlighting the daily difficulties of the missionaries, their dedication to the mission, and their success in gaining conversions. Descriptions remain sporadic and usually do not go into depth but, rather, are sometimes affected by evolutionist prejudices or genuine yet paternalistic endearment.

Nevertheless, Fr. Clemente Vismara (1897-1988; beatified: June 26, 2011), surely the most prolific of writers from the Divine Providence Mission, published some books in the course of his 65 years among minorities in northern Myanmar and some of his collections of papers and letters have been published posthumously. Among the ones he published while living, it is worth mentioning *Agguato nella foresta,* Trap in the Forest (1966), adapted in English by Edward Evans with the title: *Father Stephen Wong: First Native Martyr of Burma* (2006). This book is dedicated to the memory of Fr. Stephen Wong, the first local priest of the Divine Providence Mission. Despite the pleasantness of his writing style and his ability to depict small pictures of daily life, he rarely gets close to a detached ethnographic account; the narration and representations of personal experiences and personal understanding of events remain dominant.

For the arch of time comprised between 1867 and 1939, the only exception in terms of ethnographic writings are some accounts by Fr. Portaluppi provided on the Lahu and published in sections in the pages of *Le Missioni Cattoliche* in 1927. In these writings, Fr. Portaluppi, in a number of sections organized in a classical ethnographic shape, provides information on the origin of this group. He locates the Lahu's origin in Tibet, with basic sub-group classification, language, and main cultural traits, such as feasts and celebrations, and describes their religion and after-life beliefs. With regard to religion, Fr. Portaluppi refers to a Supreme Being whose belief, he explains, facilitates the Lahu's conversion to Christianity.

Apart from Fr. Portaluppi's work, however, it is not possible to define the Lombard Seminary missionaries' writings as either ethnography or proto-ethnography. Rather, it is possible to trace the missionaries' discourse on minorities: a discourse coherently connected with the strategies of evangelization chosen to successfully gain conversion among minorities. The Lombard Seminary missionaries shared for the most part the idea that minorities had a low level of civilization and did not have a religious system. These two conclusions were linked together in the missionaries' understanding. The idea of people without religion was not new. It traces back some centuries, as a comment in Columbus' Journal shows, referring to groups encountered among the Bahamas Islands: "It seemed to me they did not have any religion" (Columbus 1906). Such an understanding was then systematized into the Acosta hierarchical classification and linked to the three levels of civilization in order to frame the missionaries' evangelization approach.

In the context of the Eastern Burma and Divine Providence Missions, the Lombard Seminary Italian missionaries followed this same understanding of different levels of civilization, substantially confirming the Acosta categorization. Subsequently, I propose that the Lombard Seminary missionaries in southern central and northeastern Burma oriented their evangelical work according to what I refer to as the Latin American paradigm. The most striking realization of this paradigm consisted in the reductions set up by Jesuits, with the aim to enhance general living conditions. The Latin American paradigm, I argue, constitutes the condition for the emergence of the discourse encompassing minorities encountered in southern central and northeast Burma, as well as the related evangelic method applied.

With regard to the religious field, Fr. Tornatore, a member of the very first group of Lombard Seminary missionaries reaching the Eastern Burma Mission, describes what

motivates his work among the Karen: "All human beings although with modest intellectual ability should be able to understand the misery of people living without the limitation of rules and religion, and at least for the love toward human beings, they should appreciate the good missions do for poor wilds" (Tornatore, in Biffi 1877: 89). Lacking any religion, locals live in constant fear of spirits: "terrible and yearning to eat humans" (Portaluppi, 1923: 104). Superstition's eradication was considered key both for enhancing the level of civilization and for constructing the proper conditions for conversion. On the one hand, missionaries believed superstition's eradication would contribute to a renewed relation among people and the environment, by defusing recurrent accusations of witchcraft and spells. On the other hand, they believed its eradication, would create the possibility for a more rational use of resources, such as deforesting areas of forest for the aim either of cultivation or of setting up mission stations (Portaluppi, 1923). In addition, missionaries believed conversion had the advantage of relieving families from the burden of spirit offerings, as Kammerer (1996) and Hayami (1996) also point out in the case of both the Akha and Karen. Similarly, the spread of medicines and medical aid was intended by missionaries to stop the burden of turning to healers and providing them with offerings. Medicine was also expected to play a key role in stopping the belief in spirits, traditionally considered responsible for diseases.

With regard to how the Lombard Seminary missionaries traced the condition of savagery, it is embodied in a number of specific traits which, I argue, resemble the ones highlighted by Jesuit missionaries in the Latin American context. Nomadic life, linguistic diversity, lack of stable religious and political institutions, a permanent condition of inter-village wars, cruel practices, and nudity were all identified as key obstacles to evangelization among communities in Latin America (see Cunninghame, 1924). With the aim of reducing nomadism, multilingualism, and inter-village wars and of reshaping locals' morality, the Jesuits in Latin America developed, in contrast, the reductions, as presented in section 5.1. The reductions were big inter-ethnic stable villages under missionaries' rule and partially autonomous from Colonial Spanish control. Through the development of economic activities and the introduction of new crops (Crocitti, 2002), through education and art (Bailey, 1999), and through the succession of daily prayers (Cunninghame, 1924), missionaries intended to both civilize and elevate spiritually local communities. In the context of minorities living in southern central and northeastern Burma, similar traits were detected among locals. A general condition of savagery was depicted in a similar vein with the subsequent activation of a paradigm of evangelization

aimed to increase the general living conditions. This goal was seen as a step necessary for spiritual growth.

In this new Asian context, with far poorer means and men as compared to the earlier Jesuit missions, the Lombard Seminary missionaries similarly aimed to provide a contrast between a nomadic lifestyle and new forms of economic activity. For the purpose of building up permanent villages, land was bought suitable for wet rice cultivation, as well as for the development of other crop cultivation or economic activities, such as coffee and quinine cultivation, silkworm, pig and chicken rearing, and the cultivation of a number of vegetables grown for household consumption (Vismara, 1966; Gheddo, 2007). With regard to linguistic diversity encountered, Fr. Portaluppi (1925) describes this diversity as a new "small Babel," and education included the development of multi-linguistic competence through education and schools.

The missionaries often refer to the permanent conflict between villages. For instance, Fr. Nasuelli provides this picture of the Karen living in the areas surrounding Toungoo:

> "The (White) Karen, before becoming Christians, they used to kill each other. Villages were constantly at war with each other; people from one village would reach another village at night and once there, they assaulted the houses, killed all the men they could catch;…they used to steal everything they could and then they used to go back to their villages bringing with them the children and women who had survived" (Nasuelli, in Gheddo 2007: 38)

Similarly, the Wa north of Kentung are described as being in constant and violent conflict with each other, being "fully fully wild, thieves, murderers, head hunters for their yearly sacrifices" (Bonetta, 1927: 229-230). In contrast, conversion is usually credited for bringing stable peace to inter-village relations as well as inter-family relations (Gheddo, 2007). While nudity is a recurrent motif in the construction of Latin America's indigenous savagery (Botta 2013), it is only occasionally mentioned in the Southeast Asian context, mainly referring to Akha women for which their traditional clothing is described as being "a little bit indecent" (Maspoli, 1927: 155). In contrast, the little girls – mostly Akha – upon entering the Kentung orphanage are said to be finally dressing up (Maspoli, 1927).

Additional narratives of severe poverty, of recurrent famine and hunger, and of widespread sickness shaped the discourse on locals' savagery, which nevertheless

legitimized the missionaries' practice of not avoiding material help as a tool to gain conversions. In this vein, I argue, the Lombard Seminary missionaries acted as both civilizers and evangelizers, no differently from what happened centuries earlier among minorities in Latin America. Given that material and spiritual poverty were linked conceptually in the missionaries' discourse, like two sides of the same coin, the enhancement of a community's living conditions was a project coherent with that of evangelization.

Having presented the motifs shaping missionaries' discourse on minorities in southern central and northeastern Burma, I will present in the next section more detail of the link between such representation and the evangelization strategy displayed in the field.

5.3 How Evangelical Work Works

As previously argued, the Lombard Seminary missionaries developed a strategy of evangelization based on the provision of aid and services so as to develop a higher level of civilization, a condition necessary for conversion. This section specifies the way this practical strategy of intervention, with respect to a more doctrinal or spiritual teaching, was legitimized by missionaries.

In many cases, scholars tend to consider the spread of Westernized forms of economy within areas of Christian missions as the result of the link between missions and colonialism, and it is certainly true this occurred (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1986). As mentioned, the Lombard Seminary missionaries developed, within mission stations, new economic activities and improved agriculture; in addition, they provided economic support to families and dispensed services. With regard to this issue, I argue missionaries legitimized their choices through their aim of improving evangelization rather than an aim of general capitalist development *per se*. In this vein I agree with Porter (2004) who, in his study on Protestant missions in the context of the British Empire, highlights, in addition to the connections, the disjunctions between missions and empire through the recognition of autonomous interests for both institutions. I also agree with Fabian (1990) who proposes the existence of two orders of narratives for each of the institutions, which eventually overlap under conditions of colonial domination. In another vein, this overlap is conceptualized by Comaroff (1985) as the paradoxical condition of Christian missions within colonial contexts. With regard to the missionaries' work in the context of the two missions considered, this paradox is solved, I argue, through the discursive legitimation

of their evangelic strategy. This strategy was oriented to the practical enhancement of living conditions through the introduction of a Western economic work organization, as well as of an educational and medical system. Going further, such legitimation also included the common practice of gaining sympathy among first-encountered communities through the free dispensation of gifts and the general acceptance of conversions driven by practical interests. As noted previously, Tapp (1989) highlights the weight that poor living conditions had in determining so-called "rice bowl conversions" among minorities (Tapp, 1989: 70).

With regard to the general economic and social support provided by the missionaries, Mons. Bonetta in a letter to Fr. Tragella, who is gaining information to publish a small volume on the mission stationed in Kentung, describes as follows the evangelization strategy once in the field: "for the aim of evangelization we use methods implying both preaching and help of a material, and thereafter, spiritual nature" (Bonetta, 1937c: 373). The material support is here clearly posed as a preliminary condition for spiritual conversion and coherently articulated with such an aim. Under the category of material help, Mons. Bonetta further mentions schools and orphanages, support in dealing with the authorities, medicines, hospitality in cases of need, some economic support in cases of calamity and scarcity, and the development of new economic initiatives (Bonetta, 1937c). In another earlier writing, he comments: "New souls will be gained not with the preaching of words, rather with that which is more significant, work" (Bonetta, 1923: 336).

The missionaries' work consisted in the early stages, especially, of exploring mountains and visiting villages and selecting the most proper ones for the establishment of a mission station. Usually one or two missionaries established a station and organized some basic economic activities, making the station as self- sufficient as possible and providing, as well, basic education and aid services. The very first contact with communities was matched with the offering of gifts, which Mauss (1954) in his contributions has defined in terms of its relational entanglement. These gifts consisted especially *of* medicines, usually prepared by the missionaries themselves. These medicines were particularly effective in acting as a common pass to enter villages. In contrast to the Baptists who used to sell medicines,[2] Catholic missionaries report they provide medicines for free, to the extent that this habit soon becomes one of the most

[2] This, at least, according to Lombard Seminary's missionary records.

powerful means to gain consideration, sympathy, safety – and followers, as this passage by Fr. Tancredi points out:

> "The free dispensation of medicines goes on regularly, and costs rise with the increasing number of Christians: non-Christians too benefit from it – charity, in fact, though requiring organization, means we cannot avoid considering pagans and Protestants, and that we should extend toward them clemency when in need; rather, this is a way to propagate our religion. Once we have given medicines to sick people, they no longer seek help from superstitions, and they come to know the futility of witch practices and the deception of the sorcerers…. Sometimes caravans going to sell buffalos or horses on the European markets, stay over in Leikthò; in cases where they have many injured or sick people, they stop to ask for medicines and stay in Leikthò for two or three days, and once healed, catch up with the rest of the caravan. Because of this, we do not fear too much the rebels and bandits" (in Brambilla, 1942: 104-105).

The free dispensation is, however, not limited to the provision of medicines but includes food too, and especially rice. Recurrent famines, caused by rats ruining crops or untimely rains, are repeatedly recorded by the missionaries. Such examples include the year 1888 in the mountains surrounding Toungoo, the years between 1919 and 1924 in the same area, and the years from 1927 to 1930 in Kentung. In such events, missionaries used their funds to buy rice for the villagers who were facing critical conditions. They also interceded with the British and local administrators to support communities, collected funds within the Catholic world, and provided shelter to people moving from the villages to the main town centers as a result of the famine (Brambilla, 1942; Gheddo, 2007).

Similarly, Tapp (1989) refers to the same critical conditions found by missionaries among Hmong communities in Southern China. Conversions proceeded on a village-basis rather than an individual basis, along decision-making lines usually involving the village chief and elders. In some cases, waves of mass-conversions occurred at critical moments, such as with famines or epidemics. Under such circumstances, missionaries are well aware that villages sometimes converted in order to have access to certain benefits:

> "People know that by converting they will have access to the missionary's medicines; they know they will have a catechist who will keep in his house medicines for them; they know they will have the relief of healing (or at least of treatment) without having to spend. While if they remain pagan, they have to ask for the help of sorcerers, and pay for sacrifices, and both these things are expensive" (Bonetta, 1937: 373).

Baptisms and conversions are recorded as rising before and/or after treatments are offered. In addition, those who received aid contribute to the missionaries' popularity, eventually making donations which encouraged further conversions.

Missionaries, nevertheless, accepted that conversions motivated by interests other than spiritual were necessary. They considered conversions based on purely spiritual motivations were unobtainable under living conditions with severe deprivation. In this vein, Fr. Vismara, commenting on the chronic scarcity of food, writes: "It happens to me to think one rice field is more valuable than a church" (in Gheddo, 1993). Gaining conversions through the offering of either money, medicines, or any kind of help provided by missionaries, I argue, even if judged as dubious, is nevertheless constantly legitimized by missionaries: everything that could contribute to better living conditions would ultimately contribute to the spread of conversions. In addition, it confirms Horner's (1965) argument of Catholic missions' strategies at large. He characterizes this strategy, at the early stages of a missions' founding, as the aim to create a general Catholic environment, which onto later they can construct more mature Catholics.

One other feature developed by the missionaries was that of promoting big celebrations with the aim of gathering people together in one place. This was another tactic used to gain new converts. Christmas and Easter celebrations took place mainly in larger towns where people from the surrounding villages would gather, and then another celebration was held in the mountains. This was called the Mountains' Festival, a big, inter-ethnic three-day gathering which welcomed both Christians and non-Christians alike. This festival took place each year in a different village. First celebrated in 1873, it was developed along the lines of a similar celebration already held by the Baptists in the area (Gheddo, 2007). During the three-day events, meetings were organized to discuss common problems, to comment upon new translations of minorities' languages, and to

present theatrical representations of Biblical events to teach basic Christian concepts and to impress the audience, too. One purpose of these events was the carrying out of a large number of baptisms, confessions, and communions (Brambilla, 1942).

In conclusion, with regard to the relations between religious missions and the development of a capitalist economy and Western institutions at large, I argue that the Lombard Seminary missionaries legitimized discursively the material help they provided as having a spiritual basis. On why minorities converted, I argue with Tapp (1989) that if the perspective of better living conditions influenced the choice to convert, this choice cannot be limited to this understanding. Rather, this choice should be focused through the lens of a more general process of inclusion into a wider social context, a process that occurred through the development of technical skills and the reframing inter-ethnic relations, as big gatherings would suggest. The next section presents an additional key element in the strategy of evangelization that the Lombard Seminary missionaries achieved in the field, which consisted of training local personnel.

5.4 Local Catechists

Missions abroad are often approached as spaces of encounter between Western missionaries and locals, and space is given to natives' active involvement in the process of evangelization. Within the geographical area of southern central Burma, Hayami (2018) focuses on the early involvement of the Karen people in the spread of the Baptist church. Hayami provides evidence that the early, consistent adhesion and zeal of Karen converts contributed to the spread of the new faith by providing a consistent number of local catechists who supported the work of a limited number of foreign missionaries. A similar situation was also experienced by Catholic missionaries belonging to the Lombard Seminary soon after the constitution of the Eastern Burma Mission. Missionaries remained limited in number to three until 1870, while additional personnel was sent from Italy in slender numbers in subsequent years. The newly arrived Catholic missionaries needed to find support from locals, and the Karen seemed to respond well to evangelization. Their active involvement was to be the key for both the Baptist and Catholic missions: local catechists enhanced the Catholic mission's territorial presence, having in addition the advantage of knowing the languages as well as the territory. This feature facilitated missionaries' encounters with locals and contributed to people's trust toward them.

According to a letter by Fr. Biffi, dated 16 April 1868 and mailed to the Lyon office of Propaganda Fide, barely five weeks after the opening of the Eastern Burma Mission, the very first local Karen catechists are acquired by the mission. They are former Baptist catechists unsatisfied with their former church (in Gheddo, 2007: 20). Local catechist numbers rise steadily, and they are recorded to be 20 in 1872, mainly Karen with some Burmese and one Shan. A 1919 report records 259 catechists (Sagrada, 1919), while in 1939, they reach the number of 283 (Gheddo, 2007). With regard to the Divine Providence Mission, of which the earliest stations were opened in Kentung and Mong Ping in 1912, this mission also includes some Karen catechists from the older Eastern Burma Mission. Nevertheless, in 1915 the new mission includes one Akha catechist working in his home-village (Lombardini, 1915). As mentioned previously, in 1932, twenty years after mission's constitution, local catechists number 78 (Bonetta, 1932), and they reach a number of 107 in 1939 (Bonetta, 1939).

Catechists were instructed on the basics of Christian doctrine and on the Bible, along with a basic general education and singing classes. According to the published documents and unpublished mission reports, most of the catechists were children previously housed in the missions' orphanages and attending mission schools. Their religious education included the practice of accompanying missionaries during their visits to the villages. Once trained, they were expected to establish themselves in one village, according to either the decision or approval of a missionary, and travel in the surrounding area. For this, they received a modest pay. Regular meetings and retreats ensured a constant link between the group of catechists and the missionaries. At an early stage in the constitution of the two missions, catechists in some cases worked as teachers as well. The quality of education and specialization increased gradually over the course of years and led to the opening of schools for catechists with regular four years of classes. In 1928, one school of this kind was opened in Kentung and dedicated to the education of girls as catechists, while two schools for boys were opened, one in Yedashé, north of Toungoo, in 1928, as well as in Loimwe, near Kentung, in 1932.

Fr. Biffi (1919: 95), the Apostolic Vicar for the Eastern Burma Mission, describes the catechists' assignments:

> "[he has to provide] religious education, has to be mindful of Christians' good behavior, keeping them from the dangers of going astray, to gather them in the morning and in the evening for common

prayers. He has to avoid scandals, to support the weak, and to avoid evil acts."

Mons. Bonetta (1917: 359) similarly writes:

> "The work of catechists, whose task is that of moving from one village to another to make people know of us and our mission, is fruitful, as it helps remove prejudice toward us and maintains our contact with the people. Thanks to them we have made many friends and have got to know many people, such that we could gain new villages"

In addition to these main duties and responsibilities, catechists eventually managed small dispensaries in the villages where they were established, providing basic medical aid. Furthermore, they apparently played, together with the Catholic missionaries, the role of mediators between villages and the rising British authority. Brambilla (1942) highlights the weight catechists had in winning over villages reluctant to be encompassed within British control and in facilitating negotiations, acting as translators between the different sides. In conclusion, the training of local personnel, be they catechists, teachers or clergy members, was among the earliest objectives to which the two missions responded. The missions certainly found crucial support from the local Karen, especially, but not limited to them. The following section deals with a second crucial feature missionaries enacted: the offering of medical aid.

5.5 Medicines and Hospitals

Medical aid was a key factor in appealing to the locals' trust. Such relevance is highlighted by scholars in many different colonial contexts, for instance, Comaroff and Comaroff (1997), Beidelman (1982), and Hardiman, (2006), and yet they combine that insight with a critical analyses of the missions' original goal of evangelization. In this work, I highlight the strategy missionaries used to legitimize this method, which enabled missionaries to be in contact with a consistent part of the population.

In the Lombard Seminary, missionaries acquired a basic knowledge of medicine and pharmacology. As mentioned earlier, they usually prepared medicines themselves, using local herbs and basic components shipped from Italy (Portaluppi, 1925). Medicines received periodically included the following: boric and sulfuric ointment; quinine; iodine tincture; permanganate; santonin; male fern; sodium bicarbonate; Epsom salts; magnesia; laudanum; and castor oil (Scurati, 1873; Vismara, 1997; Gheddo, 2007). The health conditions of the locals that the missionaries found in the context of the Eastern Burma Mission and Divine Providence Missions seemed critical, especially among minority people. Fr. Bonetta (1937b) writes: "Typhus fever and malaria are found everywhere, and you cannot find one person who does not have a dilated spleen or enlarged liver." Leprosy, smallpox, and cholera were also widespread (Gheddo, 2007). According to the missionaries and nuns, the spread of disease was exacerbated by poor hygiene and the lack of preventive care; when an epidemic occurred, people tended to leave their village and seek sanctuary in the forest, leaving behind the sick (Gheddo, 2007).

The two missions did not have their own hospitals in a strict sense; however, the Sisters of the Holy Child Mary were required to work in government hospitals in Mawchi as well as in Kentung (Brambilla, 1942). In the case of Kentung's mission, two so-called hospitals, perhaps better defined as convalescence homes, were opened by the missionaries, one in Mong Lin, and the other in Mong Yang, during the 1930s. Here, patients were cared for by the Sisters of Holy Child Mary. However, for many years they did not have access to a doctor and could not receive surgical interventions (Bonetta, 1939).

The usual healthcare provided by the missionaries was offered in two ways: by missionaries traveling from one village to another or through the dispensaries, located in each station opened. Distribution of pills and unguents was common, as well as the giving of injections and tooth extractions performed during periodic visits (Gheddo, 2007). Fr. Bonetta (1934a) describes one journey he made to Mong Sat; he writes that he traveled with 600 vaccines for smallpox provided by a government doctor, as the government's own aim of providing vaccination coverage could not be reached. Fr. Vismara writes:

> "We used to do so many injections, to give ether, iron, quinine, camphor oil, and we used to provide so much Epsom salts, the master remedy of remedies. Two cases of Epsom salts were insufficient for one year; two thousand quinine pills were just about enough for three months." (Vismara, 1932: 526).

When possible, villages were provided with a dispensary, managed by the resident missionary himself, or by the nuns or a catechist. Archival reports show the number of consultations given are rather impressive and rise consistently: between 1929 and 1930, the 19 dispensaries of the Eastern Burma Mission record 10.524 examinations, and this is doubled the following year (1931-1932) with 21.250 (Sagrada, 1930, 1932). Consultations recorded in 1939 total 55.669 (Brambilla, 1942). Numbers are even higher for the Divine Providence Mission: in 1932-1933, the 12 opened dispensaries count 14.672 consultations (Bonetta, 1933). The 1939 report states the total number of consultations provided during the year in the 17 Divine Providence Mission's dispensaries had reached 161.323 (Bonetta, 1939).

Some decades after their founding, the two missions were also provided with a leprosy asylum. In the context of health care, leprosy asylums deserve some words of their own. As Hardiman (2006: 33) points out, leprosy was seen in "strongly biblical terms," the care for lepers being "the ultimate test of a missionary's commitment to his vocation." According to Fr. Bonetta, such an activity is an act of necessary charity, driven by the example of Jesus Himself: "Our Lord [Jesus] led by example. Wasn't it He who so loved the poor lepers?" (Bonetta, 1923: 335).

It is worth mentioning Hardiman's (2006: 33) definition of leprosy asylums. He views these asylums as "Christian social engineering," in that such institutions were, in fact, closed communities devoted to self-sufficiency and to the development of good Christians. Having made a case for the social engineering argument, Hardiman (2006) argues, with reference to the case of India, that the great number of lepers there live as total outcasts. Fr. Bonetta (1923) writes of a great number of lepers in Kentung, living on the streets, begging in the bazaar when possible, and shunned by their families. The local Prince had in fact tried, before the missionaries' arrival, to take the initiative with this problem by constructing an accommodation for lepers out of town. However, no assistance was provided, and the project failed. Leprosy was not limited to the main towns but was widespread; the two asylums could not provide assistance for all those in need (Bonetta, 1934a).

The mission's leprosy asylum in Kentung was set up just outside the town in 1923, despite the mission's economic hardship. It was built on the initiative of Fr. Bonetta and due to the cooperation of the local Prince who provided the land and funds necessary to build a new common accommodation. Similarly, the Eastern Burma Mission's asylum in Loilem opened in 1938, just out of town, under the supervision of Fr. Perego and due

again to the cooperation of the local Prince who also donated land (Gheddo, 2007). In both cases, the care of lepers was entrusted to the Sisters of Holy Child Mary who were established in Toungoo and Kentung, some of whom were already experienced in the care of lepers from their work in asylums in India. One government doctor also agreed to visit the Kentung asylum periodically, for the mission itself could not provide a doctor (Bonetta, 1923). Common treatments for leprosy included chaulmoogra pills, prepared by the missionaries, and chaulmoogra oil, both of which were known to be quite effective (Farronato, 1925). Both centers, set up outside of town, were oriented to the formation of a self-sufficient community through the development of basic economic activities providing food, while a basic Christian education was provided (Bonetta, 1924). In its first year, the Kentung leprosy asylum hosted 20 lepers, while there were about 50 in the one in Loilem (Il primo ventennio della missione di Kentung, 1932; Gheddo, 2007). In 1939, the number of hosted lepers was 167 in the Kentung asylum and 75 in Loilem (Brambilla, 1942).

The records of the Catholic missionaries show that medical aid seemed to be a relevant part of their activities. Yet the competition with Baptists, developing similar services, made clear the differences between them in terms of the quality of services provided. The two missions in Burma represent, as an example, the debate rising within the Roman Catholic Church at large, at the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1925, according to World Missionary Atlas data, doctors working in Protestant missions around the world numbered 1.769, while those working for Catholic missions globally barely reached 20 ("The Medical Missionary Problem", 1930). Catholic universities, unlike Protestant ones, did not provide medical studies with the aim of training doctor-priests to work in the missions, nor did they produce civil doctors willing to work in Catholic missions. In most cases, missionaries were provided with the basic concepts of pharmacology, and the rest was left to the individual's initiative. The limitations of such a position, both in terms of services provided and in terms of missionary mortality rates, is becoming increasingly evident and is now debated ("The Medical Missionary Problem", 1930).

In 1925, Fr. Portaluppi (1925) lays down his own position regarding the need for doctors and medical knowledge for missionaires on the pages of *Le Missioni Cattoliche*. With a degree of frustration, he argues that Catholic missions have to face the expectations of locals, on the one hand, and the higher level of qualification among

Protestant doctors, on the other. What Catholic missionaries can do in the face of this is very little, Fr. Portaluppi (1925: 359) argues:

> "In all the missions there is not one doctor, or hospital or a real dispensary; all the medical aid people need is provided by the missionary, the sum total of his knowledge being of some drugs and what he's experienced in the field. It is easy to understand what this is reduced to: pills. Purgatives or quinine, no surgery or diagnosis, nor any rational treatment."

For all of these reasons, he concludes:

> "the missionary, in places less in contact with civilization, is forced to act as a doctor in order to evangelize, to the extent that it is a mistake not to provide for his work as a skilled doctor." (Portaluppi, 1925: 359).

Based on the case of the two missions analyzed here, and of others faced with concurrent services developed by other Christian denominations, over the next few decades the Roman Catholic Church rethought its position. This process culminated with the founding of a Catholic doctors' association in 1944. The chosen approach was that of having lay doctors work eventually in missions rather than that of having missionaries study medicine. Fr. Colombo, Chief of Kentung Leprosy Asylum, who decided to become a doctor, remained the exception.

In conclusion, in the context of the Eastern Burma and Divine Providence Missions, the basic medical services provided were considered necessary because of the severe conditions found. In addition, medical aid soon proved to be the most powerful tool to gain followers and to enlarge contacts, as the number of yearly consultations in dispensaries show. Competition with Baptist missions confirms the positive effects, as proposed by Mgadla (2014), namely that services provided were enhanced through competition. Thus, as Mgadla (2014) conceptualizes, competition aims to construct spheres of influence within missionary territory.

This similarly happened for educational institutions, as will be discussed in the following section. These institutions were considered as an opportunity, as well, for the rapid spread of Catholicism.

5.6 Education and Orphanages

Christian missions of various denominations have always paid great attention to education and the introduction of educational institutions, and this was especially so in colonial times. The creation of schools by missions was often welcomed by local governments, which were not able, in some cases, to provide schooling to cover the whole population (Horner, 1965). This was the case regarding the Catholic missionaries' schools developed in the context of the Eastern Burma and Divine Providence Missions, according to their own writings. The educational structures over the years met with approval and appreciation from both the local Princes and the British rulers. Missionary schools, in fact, followed government programs (Bonetta, 1937). In the main centers, both primary and secondary education were provided in Burmese and in English, and students were either Burmese, Shan, or a member of a minority group. In the villages, primary education was provided as soon as a station opened and included language teaching and technical education. Promising students were sent to school in the towns to continue with higher education.

On arrival in Toungoo, the Italian missionaries took charge of the existing school previously run by the Paris Foreign Mission Society. In 1880, Fr. Biffi's report lists three schools, with a total of seven teachers and three orphanages within the Eastern Burma Mission territory (Brambilla, 1942). Two schools were in Toungoo, one of which was an Anglo-Burmese version of an international school where the majority of students were foreigners; the other was a Karen-Burmese school, dedicated mostly to children living in the orphanage but also open to children from minorities in general (Maspoli, 1927). In this latter school, students learned both the Karen and Burmese languages, math, geography, and music, and received a basic Christian education. A third school was set up in Leikthò and, as was often the case in the early stages of a new station, it was one with an orphanage. Teachers working in the village schools were usually Karen, who were educated in Toungoo. In addition, there was one school dedicated to girls' education at the convent of the French order of the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition. Education

was a further field of competition between the churches: Fr. Biffi writes that following the establishment of the Catholic schools, Baptists and Anglicans opened their own. In addition to the above, there was also a government school (Brambilla, 1942).

When a new station opened in Kentung in 1912, this scheme was replicated with the opening of one school and one orphanage in town, and then in Mong Ping a few months later. In town, there was already one government school and one orphanage run by the Baptists. In the new Catholic school in Kentung, the education followed government programs; the languages used were English, Burmese, and Shan, and religious education was also added. Student numbers rose from 35 in 1912 to 55 the following year (Bonetta, 1914). According to the missionaries' writings, this school was recognized for the quality of the education it provided, which was reflected in the attendance as some of the prince's siblings and various monks were students (Bonetta, 1932a). In 1916, the first group of nuns from the Holy Child Mary order reached Kentung, and the education of girls was entrusted to them. The girls cared for in the orphanage studied for three and four years. The few who excelled were encouraged to go further in their education, while the rest continued with vocational training, to which was added one hour's lesson per day in Shan, Lahu, and Akha. In the vocational school, girls learned embroidery, knitting, and dressmaking. For some years, the Prince's daughters attended this school (Maspoli, 1927).

During the 1930s, the quality of education improved, and education became better organized. Two teacher-training schools were opened, enrolling in a few years more than 1.000 students, and some of the village schools became officially recognized as schools by the government, while secondary and high schools were also opened (Brambilla, 1942). By 1939, in Toungoo's mission, elementary schools number forty-eight, with 2.018 boys and 1.475 girls; secondary schools number nine, with 203 boys and 178 girls; there are five high schools, with a total of 80 boys and 72 girls; and seven vocational schools, with 14 boys and 98 girls (Gheddo, 2007). In the same year in the Divine Providence Mission, elementary schools number twenty-five, with 732 boys and 383 girls; and secondary and high schools number three, with a total of 290 students (Bonetta, 1939). Even more surprising are the numbers related to orphanages.

"The orphanages: these constitute the very battle horse of the Kentung mission" writes Fr. Bonetta (1932a: 423). The Father goes on to explain the orphanage is not just an orphanage but, rather, a school and a laboratory for the cultivation of catechists. The orphanages provided extraordinary numbers of catechists, as already discussed. During

the early decades especially, the boundaries between the school and the orphanage were fluid, and the teaching was not limited to Christian doctrine.

Children in the orphanages in Toungoo could acquire technical skills in areas such as carpentry, bookbinding, and lithography. When a printing press center was opened in Toungoo in 1881, the orphans were trained for this, too. This is how Fr. Bonetta (1937: 377) describes the everyday living organization in the orphanages:

> "The timetable is more or less the one we have in our boarding schools if not in our seminaries [in Italy] There is the advantage that the ones educated here have really learned about Christian life; they know it well. They have lived a domestic life with the priest; they have even been able to study with the priest, so they can really appreciate his work. The same can be said regarding the nuns. Such orphanages provide us with catechists, which we need so badly; we would not have them without these schools, where besides religion, (*children*) study (*local*) languages too."

The learning of various languages, as facilitated by the missionaries, was appreciated by minority families. Language was seen as a tool for social advancement, as was the teaching of professional skills. The children cared for in the orphanages were consistently, for the most part, from minority groups. In the Divine Providence Mission's first year, in their two orphanages at Kentung and Mong Ping, the combined number of orphans rise from 26 to 47 (Bonetta, 1914). In the orphanage for boys in Toungoo, the number of children cared for in 1880, four years after the mission's founding, is 80 – all Karen, with the exception of three Burmese children. In the girls' orphanage, in the same year, there are 43 girls, nine of whom are Burmese, the rest all Karen (Brambilla, 1942). In 1919, in the Eastern Burma Mission's report, and 50 years after the founding of the mission, orphanages total 21, with 772 children (Sagrada, 1919). In 1939, the total number of orphans in the Eastern Burma Mission is comprised of 765 boys and 475 girls, allocated across 28 orphanages; while in the Divine Providence Mission, the numbers are 281 boys and 269 girls across 19 orphanages (Gheddo, 2007; Bonetta, 1939).

In many cases, children were gathered by the local catechists when traveling from one village to another (Bonetta, 1917). Also common was the practice of families entrusting their children to the missionaries' care, hoping for the possibility of better

opportunities for them. Another practice seemed to be that of ransoming children. One brief early account of this practice is provided by Fr. Conti, the apostolic prefect of the Eastern Burma Mission from 1881 to 1886:

> "It often happens among the pagans that a father in need takes on a debt with another person and pawns or even sells his own son or daughter, whom the creditor takes on as a servant, for housekeeping or working in the fields. In most cases, the families cannot afford to get the child back; the missionary, if they can, then pays this ransom and brings the child to the orphanage, from whence he or she usually departs as a catechist to some village… The same happens in cases of fights between villagers, where children are taken and sold, or held as hostages until a ransom is paid." (Brambilla, 1942: 89-90).

The Catholic missionaries' habit of ransoming children is also referred to by Fr. Vismara (1928) some decade later, and it is similarly reported within other Catholic missionary contexts (Martin 2009).

With regard to this dubious practice, it is possible to observe once again the logic encompassing both its justification and its more practical aims: the practice was justified as saving as many children's souls as possible; practically, it meant having a good number of catechists and people in general who would maintain a strong connection with the missions, having acquired a solid Christian model of life. The practice of children used for economic exchanges, as practiced by locals, was nevertheless interpreted by the missionaries in a biased way. In their writings, they suggest it disappeared with the spread of Catholicism, implying a rise in the level of civilization and living standards. In this vein, Fr. Conti adds a comment to the above-mentioned passage: "As we advance, such disgraceful habits disappear, and among our Christian villages which are now more than 100, it does no longer exist" (Brambilla, 1942: 90).

In conclusion, considerations similar to the ones applied to medical aid can be applied to the field of education, too. During the early decades, schools were limited for the most part to primary classes and to teaching conducted by local teachers who themselves had only a basic level of education. It is perhaps appropriate to mention here the observations of Decorme (1916) in the context of Catholic education in Mexico in colonial times. Decorme distinguishes between moral and intellectual education, the

former representing the main goal of the church and the missionaries: "to form the heart and to accustom the will to follow the dictates of reason, by conquering any natural vicious inclinations; in a word, it aims to make a man good, honest, virtuous, social and civilized" (Decorme, 1916: 168)

Referring again to Horner (1965), schools during the early decades were more about creating a general Catholic environment. However, as with health care, competition with other Christian schools, both locally and globally, increasingly imposed on the Roman Catholic Church the need to refresh its position. In 1926, Pope Pio XI, in the encyclical "*Rerum Ecclesiae,*" encouraged missionaries to develop at the local level both a higher education and a technical one, to work toward the formation of a local clergy, and to provide a specialized education for catechists. This goal was fulfilled during the 1930s, in the context analyzed here, with the creation of schools for catechism and a seminary in Toungoo (in 1934), as well as a novitiate in Kentung. Over the years, schools provided increasingly more skilled education, enabling minorities to enter into the wider national context. In this sense, schools, as well as hospitals and dispensaries, attracted high numbers of children who could contribute to the spread of Catholicism over the long term.

Having analyzed the field of practical support provided to communities, I will discuss in the following sections the evangelic strategy with regard to the specific field of religion. I highlight the negotiation processes between Catholicism and local religious practices, as well as the missionaries' opposition to superstition, all of which were pursued for the benefit of expanding the Catholic communities.

5.7 Maintaining the Practice, Replacing the Meaning

To accommodate Christianity within local cultural contexts is today a main concern for churches of various denominations. This concern is framed according to the category of enculturation, which Nthambury explains as the "incarnation" of Christian content into local cultural contexts (Nthambury, 1989). Nowadays, it is usually agreed that Christianity should move increasingly toward indigenization, since it has lost its features of a European-Western religion. The process of indigenization involves both doctrine and liturgy, and, as mentioned, an attempt to maintain a balance between orthodoxy and adaptation.

At the turn of the nineteenth century and first decades of the twentieth, the missionaries' approach, however, proceeded more through the introduction of a foreign

doctrine and a set of rituals to replace local ones. Although such an approach is common among Christian churches of various denominations, in the case of the Catholic missionaries considered here, they proceeded in their work, in many cases, by overlapping Catholic symbols upon previous local rituals. In so doing, they were aware that locals sometimes misrepresented basic Catholic Christian notions and, I argue, they nonetheless accepted this option as a step necessary to ensure the locals' acceptance of the new religion. Ideally, evangelization required a clear break with past beliefs, which in some cases was strictly maintained, and aimed for a global renewal. In reality, however, mixtures and overlaying were eventually common and not limited to the two missions considered or to minorities. Nevertheless, Philip Hughes and Steve Taylor, with the aim of improving the quality of Christian teaching, researched the Thai reception of Christianity. They highlighted the main misrepresentations of Christian doctrine resulting from the influence of key Buddhist concepts (Hughes, 1985; Taylor, 2001).

In a similar vein, with regard to animist groups, Charles Keyes comments:

> "As with Northern Thai who earlier converted to Protestant Christianity, tribal people have sometimes found in the Christian God a spiritual being whose power is greater than any local spirit and one whose domain encompasses a world far beyond the hill and valleys in which they live" (Keyes: 1993).

Hayami (1996), with regard to the Karen minority, reaches a similar conclusion. Misrepresentations, or adjustments, are often ascribed to locals, and missionaries biased their missionary colleagues to accept those misrepresentations (Hughes, 1985, Taylor, 2001). In the case of the Eastern Burma and Divine Providence Missions, however, missionaries' reports and writings show a certain flexibility with respect to norms, either doctrinal or ritual, and, again, this attitude is motivated by the necessity of ensuring the spread of Catholicism amidst communities not yet ready to receive the Christian faith as it is.

With regard to the case of the Akha's conversion to Christianity in Thailand, Kammerer (1990) applies what she refers to as the replacement model, which explains conversion's implications amidst a new and old faith. Kammerer (1990) argues that a replacement occurs where the old religious/cultural system is replaced with the new Christian one, although admitting a certain degree of syncretism is nevertheless

unavoidable. With regard to this issue, I argue, the Catholic missionaries affiliated with the Lombard Seminary, although aiming to replace the old faith and rituals with new Catholic ones, nevertheless used local rituals as a medium for Christianization; they did so by replacing rituals encompassing relevant moments for the communities with similar Catholic ones.

For instance, in the settlement of a new village and its spatial organization, ceremonies encompassing fields and water sources took place; and, in the case of Akha villages, ceremonies involved the placement and value of the village gates. With regard to the latter, Deborah Tooker, who long researched among the Akha in Thailand, describes as follows the ritual of one new village establishment:

> "Before a village is established, a post (…) is implanted in the ground on the spot where the Akha wish to establish the new village. This post is left for one night and is examined the next day. If it has been undisturbed, the present site is a good site for the village. The Dzoema's (Village Founder-Leader) house is built immediately after the village marking procedure, which would make this location the center of the village" (Tooker, 1988: 67).

Father Vismara (1966), in a later book written to commemorate the figure of Father Stephan, the first indigenous priest of the Divine Providence Mission, describes a similar occasion:

> "In order to set up a new village, he [Father Stephan] used to discuss prior to that with the people of majority age; it was for them to make a decision; the place had to be of their liking, no matter how uncomfortable it was for him. Once they had reached an agreement as best as they could... (*Father Stephan*), followed by the people of majority age, would reach the place where the village would be set up … one of them would cut a hardwood tree to make a cross with it. Father Stephan would wear his surplice and stole, the head of the village would fix the cross into the ground. The Father would bless the place, give a short preaching and wish all well, good health, and a lot of rice. In the place where the cross was fixed (in the middle of the forthcoming village) a church was to be raised" (Vismara, 1966: 80).

In spatial terms, it is possible to see, in this case, that a church replaces the Village-Founder Leader's house as the village's core, while one priest's blessing ensures the area is safe for the forthcoming village.

In the case of the Akha village gates, these structures signaled the borders of a village and are mainly intended to avoid spirits from entering into the village by marking "the division between the village as domain of people and domestic animals and the forest as domain of spirits and wild animals" (Kammerer, 1986: 62). In addition, the gates are described as usually being surmounted with symbols: "defensive symbols like swords, guns, and helicopters (since the CIA became active in the area), and with 'frightening gate couple,' are there to keep harmful outside forces away" (Gesau, 1983: 272). At the annual renewal ceremony for the gate, Gesau refers to the Village Founder-Leader who mentions that the gate "should guard the village against 'hawk and wildcat, illness and sickness, leprosy and epilepsy, vampires and werewolves, thieves and dacoit" (Gesau, 1983: 272). A similar occasion involving a Catholic Akha village is described again by Fr. Vismara as follows:

> "Village boundaries were marked by two rudimentary and rough gates, [consisting of] three trunks nailed together and surmounted by a cross. In the minds of these good and simple highlanders, still catechumens, the blessing did not have exactly the meaning of God's blessing, but rather of a prohibition for evil spirits from entering into the villages and giving death to people. In the case of these spirits who wanted to enter into the village, they would have found the crosses on the two gates and would have just gone elsewhere. Thanks to the blessing, tigers, leopards, wolves etc. would have no longer come to kill the livestock" (Vismara, 1966: 80-81).

Fr. Vismara adds to this description with the comment: "The blessing more than God's help was rather a lucky charm, something necessary to live well and to live in peace" (Vismara, 1966: 81). In so doing, I argue, Fr. Vismara well exemplifies the strategy of replacing traditional rituals and symbols with new Catholic ones, without a general conceptual or doctrinal replacement having necessarily occurred. If in fact the village gates are surmounted by crosses, as newly acquired Catholic villages, they nevertheless seem to maintain the same function as symbols used in the past, with new Christian symbols now intended to frighten spirits. Similarly, spirit houses, posted in the

fields, were replaced with crosses; the annual rituals and offerings traditionally performed by the Village-Founder Leader in the fields or nearby water sources were replaced by the priest's blessing. Following the same logic, missionaries in the course of the missions' growth overlaid Catholic Christian celebrations upon traditional ones. One such example was the traditional Akha Swinging Festival. It was traditionally held during the rainy season to ensure a rich harvest but was now encompassed within the Catholic Assumption of Mary Feast and celebrated the 15 of August (Fr. Corti, General Secretary of PIME, personal communication March 12, 2018) in the Akha villages of northern Thailand, where PIME missionaries founded missions during '70s.

Scholars have often highlighted the more tolerant attitude Catholic missions showed toward local practices and their attitude toward developing syncretic adjustments at the level of the ritual, especially (see Tapp, 1989; Baird, 2009). With regard to this point, Tapp (1989) argues that Catholicism was more successful among the Hmong because of the strategy followed by missionaries, which consisted of "building upon the beliefs of the people they are seeking to convert" (Tapp, 1989: 87). Regarding this point, I argue, if archival research confirmed to a certain extent such a common understanding, that understanding by Catholic missionaries nevertheless included the logic that such an attitude constituted by the engagement with local rituals and practices was a medium toward Catholicism. The limit breached by such a process was to a certain extent evident to the missionaries themselves yet, nevertheless, tolerated as a necessary step toward the development of a full Christian life.

This missionary attitude should be understood by taking into consideration their own discourses used to legitimize the general evangelization strategy chosen.

Fr. Vismara, commenting on the understanding of Catholic symbols on Akha village gates, writes: "I think no one will be surprised by this imperfect mentality; are not the well-being and the living-in-peace useful to becoming good Catholics?" (Vismara 1966: 81). Misrepresentations, favored eventually by the overlay of the new on the old rituals, were accepted under this light; the replacement of traditional symbols and rituals with Catholic ones as a way to access the new faith were justified by the cultural level ascribed to the locals. Yet, if accommodations were, in this vein, intended as a step toward the creation of mature Catholic communities, no space was given to a number of local beliefs. The missionaries' attitude in this regard, at least according to their writings, appeared to be far less tolerant.

The following section will highlight the practices which, categorized under the label of superstition, were intended to be fully eradicated and replaced in a more total sense.

5.8 Contrasting the Devil

The strategic and hegemonic use of the discourse on religion and its counterparts, superstition or idolatry, has been analyzed in detail by Bernand and Gruzinsky (1988) with regard to early Spanish missionaries and colonizers in Latin America in their interactions with the locals. In this context, they argue that categorizing local practices as superstition functioned as a way to legitimize the eradication of practices falling under such a label. Henkel (1997) well describes the missionaries' fierce fight against spirit and ancestor worship in Latin America, as well as against wizards and sorcerers and their authority within communities as the depositories of these rituals.

The Lombard Seminary missionaries in southern central and northeastern Burma, on the one hand, showed some degree of tolerance toward certain local adaptations of the new Christian faith. On the other hand, they acted in a intolerant way with regard to local spirit offerings, ancestor worshipping and local ritual leaders. Similar to what Henkel (1997) refers to in the Latin American context, spirit and ancestor altars were usually required to be dismantled and burned during the course of public ceremonies involving the two missions considered for this research. This is how Fr. Bonetta (1911) in *La storia di una conquista,* The History of a Conquest, published in *Le Missioni Cattoliche*, describes such an occasion in Kascan village in the area surrounding Toungoo. Many people from nearby villages are said to have rushed to attend the ceremony:

> "I enter into the first house. Here, I find a bamboo with some food inside for the spirits; there [I find] an ear of corn skewered with one stick: it is an offering to the devils. Here, a small basket similar to the one used for chickens to brood: it is the favorite place for the Devil to dwell; there he can take some rest without bothering anyone. Nearby is a small pile of sacrificed chicken bones, evidence of thousands of sorceries. All is taken by the catechist, ruined and thrown down the mountain, while around, people begin to shoot frantically. I then move to the wizard's house. 'Where are the devil's means'- I ask- 'I don't know. There are some, but … I cannot look for them, I'm scared

everything is shaking.' It is not difficult to find them. There are so many, you may fill with many baskets. Some look ridiculous, some really are disgusting. And the wizard, that ugly big-headed man, with his hair ruffled as the hair of a hungry wolf, puckered in all his appearance; you may not say more boorish or evil: it was him who was absolutely against the idea of having a catechist; him who opposed me at the time of my first visit. But his supremacy has faded now. Coming closer, he says to me: 'I wasn't happy with you when you came here, but what can I say? I'm stubborn, punch me on my shoulder, on my head, whenever you want … now I understand there is no one better then you Kale (Europeans)" (Bonetta, 2011: 56).

In this case, it is possible to read that altars both in houses and in village fields had to be destroyed. Only after that would a missionary bless the village, the houses, and baptize villagers. Also common was the perfusion with holy water of places previously devoted to "superstitious practices" and the substitution of objects related to these practices with cruxes or saints' images.

As archival research proved, the Lombard Seminary missionaries never made a distinction between spirit and ancestor offerings; rather, they grouped them all under the category of devil worship. In contrast, Henkel (1997) argues that Jesuits in Latin America made a distinction between the two practices, where ancestor worshipping systems were found to be especially resistant to missionaries' efforts to eradicate them. This assumption is confirmed in the context of mainland South East Asia by the current revival of the Akha ancestor worshipping system, as analyzed by Morton (2013). In the context of the Eastern Burma and Divine Providence Missions, the misrecognition of ancestor worshipping was eventually explained by the poor training provided to missionaries. They would reach their missionary field without any specific knowledge of the context, as well as a lack of any ethnographic interest. Nevertheless, the partial acceptance of certain traditional practices and the strenuous opposition to others confirms, from my perspective, the discursive nature of the categories of religion and superstition, while showing the hegemonic use of such categorical organization.

The following section summarizes the multiple strategies the missionaries followed in their aim of evangelization, as seen through the lens of their discourses that legitimized their methods.

5.9 Minorities' Response

Missionaries' writings provide a glimpse of minorities' attitudes toward conversion. It is a fact that minorities responded better to missionaries' expectations in terms of conversion then did Buddhists. This situation applied in general when comparing missions established among Buddhist to new stations opened in areas inhabited by non-Buddhists. Conversions among minorities were gained quite quickly, and they are described as usually occurring on a village level, rather than on an individual basis, along decision-making lines usually involving the village chief and elders. In critical moments, such as famine or epidemics, waves of mass-conversions are recorded. Similarly, baptisms and conversions are recorded as rising before and/or after medical treatment is offered. In addition, the high numbers of local catechists proves the generally positive acceptance missionaries found among some of the groups.

Exceptions to this positive acceptance are found among those groups displaying a higher degree of territorial autonomy, such the Red Karen and the Wa, who nevertheless accepted missionaries within their territories soon after falling under British control. Under these conditions, missionaries ensured their acceptance by negotiating with the new rulers, as happened in the case previously mentioned of the Karen villages in Yadò district. The Karen rebelled against the British presence, and as punishment for these revolts, their villages were threatened with burning. Fr. Tornatore's mediation convinced the British to give up any retaliation against rebel villages, and this action ended the revolts (Gheddo, 2007). Not only did Catholic missionaries act as representatives for locals' interests in front of the colonial government and local authorities, they in addition provided access to new knowledge and skills, necessary within the new political and economic context of British Burma. Hefner (1993) himself argues that through the acquisition of new technical skills, of literacy, and of access to modern medicine, minorities negotiated their gradual inclusion into the wider changing social and economic context, an opinion shared also by Tapp (1989). Tapp (1989) additionally explains Hmong's conversion in mainland South East Asia with the new socio-economic opportunities offered by Christian missions, under conditions of either dramatic social changes produced by colonial domination or conditions of social and economic marginalization.

In addition, missionaries, as well as later scholars, have sometimes attempted to explain minorities' varying attitudes toward conversion by referring to cultural specificities. For instance, with the exception of the Red Karen, missionaries considered Karen as one of the groups who responded better to evangelization. As mentioned, the American Baptist missionaries early on met Karen who, differently from Buddhists, showed an interest toward Christianity and conversion. By the early 1830s, the Baptists began to dedicate their energies toward the evangelization of the Karen and were soon supported by a consistent number of local catechists as shown by Hayami (2018). This was similarly confirmed by this research in the case of Catholic missionaries. To explain the Karen's willingness to convert, Baptist missionaries, as well as Catholics, refer to stories traced among the Karen about a lost book, eventually brought back by the Europeans (Wa, Soward and Sowards, 1963).

Different from the Karen, the Akha were sometimes pictured as resistant to conversion, an opinion only partially confirmed by the Catholic missionaries. One early comment about the Akha's attitude toward Christianity is contained in a colonial report where they are defined as resistant to conversion (Lowis, 1919). A similar opinion is shared by Paul Lewis (1970) who worked among the Akha in northern former Burma and in Thailand; this is reported by scholars, as well. For instance, Kammerer (1990) explained why the Akha seemed to resist conversion to Christianity, pointing to the link between the Akha system of beliefs and overall culture and their identity as a group. Nowadays, there are activists among the Akha who are critical toward Christianization.

With regard to the archival sources I consulted, this general assumption about the Akha's resistence is poorly confirmed. Catholic missionaries reached Kentung in 1912 with the intention of establishing mission stations above the one based in Kentung. Fr. Portaluppi, who established a station in Mong Ping in 1912, is eventually the first Catholic missionary working in this area among both the Lahu and Akha and residing among them. Although the Akha are sometimes regarded by Catholic missionaries as being more "tenacious in their beliefs and superstitious practices," as Fr Cambiaso (1919) defines them, they nevertheless from the beginning give hope that the Catholic faith will take root among them. Gheddo (2007), in his chronicle of PIME missions in former Burma, comments that the Akha "mass-conversion" to Christianity during '50s was due, especially, to the systematic development of rice fields. Those fields were managed by missionaries for the benefit of Akha communities living at high altitude. Better road

connections making villages more accessible was another factor contributing to this phenomenon.

Nevertheless, early numbers record the presence of Akha children in the orphanages and schools. This demonstrates, I argue, that Catholic missionaries had credit among the Akha well before the '50s. Villages begun to convert in the early years after the missionaries' arrival and due to their eventual strategy of moving along the mountains to reach villages and provide aid. In this case, Catholic missionaries gained locals' trust providing support to communities dispersed in small villages and devoid of any territorial sovereignty.

In conclusion, with regard to the specific field of religion, although some practices were banned, such as ancestor and spirit offerings, other adaptations were reasonably made. In this sense, the shift from a traditional to a new faith would not have occurred dramatically. This space of ambiguity enabled communities to negotiate between older and newer beliefs and practices in a way that conversion was not finally rejected.

5.10 Conclusion

Missions, when falling under socio-anthropological scrutiny, have been conceptualized in light of their entanglements with colonial regimes (Michaud, 2007) and through the lens of a spreading capitalist system (Beidelman, 1984; Comaroff and Comaroff, 1986; Huber, 1988). More recently, other features of Christian missions have been highlighted in a more positive light, such as their role as mediators between locals and colonial rulers, and through that role, the possibility of equipping locals to deal with colonial authority (Burkhart, 1989; Botta, 2013).

Italian missionaries of the Lombard Seminary, in their understanding of locals within the new Southeast Asian context, replicated consistently an ideology based on Eurocentric themes and a specific pyramidal organization of humanity. As such, minorities were represented on a discursive level as poorly developed and poorly civilized. Minorities were represented alternatively as wild and savage or good-hearted and simple minded, as too violent or too submissive. It was a discursive alternation between bias, nostalgia, and genuine sympathy, confirming vividly Bhabha's (1983) argument on the ambivalence shaping hegemonic discourses on others.

A low level of civilization among minorities was a consistent theme in the writings of missonaries. Missonaries discursively represented this understanding through a number of different elements: through the nomadic lifestyle of minorities, their linguistic diversity, their small-sized villages, the chronic inter-village wars, the scarcity of goods, and through their apparent lack of a religious system. As a result of this understanding, I argue that the choice of a specific strategy of evangelization was oriented first toward the general enhancement of communities' living conditions.

Such an approach was not new but was first developed by Jesuit missionaries in the context of Latin America. This was a very different approach from the one taken, for instance, in the context of the Chinese courts, where missionaries engaged in doctrinal confrontation and the study of Chinese texts. A similar distinction can be made between Catholic missions working in either Rangoon or Mandalay with an approach based on a confrontation with Buddhism and the more practical approach chosen for minorities living in peripheral areas.

In the new context of the Eastern Burma and Divine Providence Missions, the Lombard Seminary missionaries acted as civilizers in order to construct conditions necessary for a full Christian life. As a result, the evangelization project went hand-in-hand with one focused on the development of better living conditions for minorities. With regard to this point, I have argued that missionaries solved discursively the paradox of their daily work: their strategy was driven mainly through the development of services and the gaining of souls through benefits offered, and they configured such support as a way to gain the living conditions necessary for a Christian life. Providing practical help to communities was, in fact, an explicit goal and tool, and, as such, involved different elements: economic support at critical moments; the development of technical skills, such as carpentry, typography, and brick production; and support for health care and education.

This practical kind of work proved to be successful in gaining a good number of followers, with villages converting one after the other in the face of benefits glimpsed. With regard to this point, Tapp (1989) points out that the so-called "rice-bowl conversions" should be conceptualized through the lens of a complex intertwining of what we define as spiritual and material interests. Nevertheless, missionaries' activities contributed to a new asset for minorities within majority-minorities relations, by providing minorities with economic support, as well as basic education and mediation with authorities.

With regard to the more specific field of religion, it has been argued that missionaries, on the one hand, included some local practices into the process of conversion to Christianity to facilitate conversion itself. On the other hand, they were firmly opposed to other practices. With regard to the former, some practices were maintained and restyled into a more Catholic fashion. The limits of such a method were acknowledged by missionaries yet, nevertheless, were legitimized by their discourse on the locals' simple mindedness. I argue, also, that this method partially dissolves the concept of replacement as proposed by Kammerer (1990). Kammerer (1990) supposes, in the conversion to Christianity, a substantial shift from one comprehensive cultural system to another, a shift balanced with a bit of adaptation and dialogue between the old and the newly introduced tradition. Nevertheless, I argue that Kammerer's (1990) understanding is based mainly on the observation of conversion to Protestant Christianity, often noted as being less tolerant than its Catholic counterpart (Tapp, 1989; Baird, 2009). Yet tolerance, as an alternative, has been conceptualized in this research as a specific strategy of evangelization.

In contrast, the practices opposed by missionaries related basically to offerings, either toward spirits or ancestors. These practices were perceived and defined as Devil worship and had to be removed. Bernand and Gruzinky (1988), but also Asad (1993), have explained in detail the discourse of religion and related categories as a means of power and control over others, shaped as subjects. They, in addition, provide a glimpse into the discursive nature of the categories of religion or of superstition as the result of a specific Western history. With regard to this point, Minamiki (1985) analyzes the long debate within the Catholic Church regarding Chinese rites. Minamiki highlights how rituals perceived as being in deep contrast with Christian faith resulted more from missionaries' understanding of those rituals rather than based on some substantial characteristic deeply irreconcilable with the Christian faith.

Although Minamiki (1985) does not refer to the concept of discourse on the field of religion, it can be reasonably argued that the selection of what could be retained and what had to be opposed, in the case he presents, relied more on the missionaries' discourse on the religion and practices of others rather than with the qualities belonging to the non-Christian practices per se. Similarly, I argue that the selection the Lombard Seminary missionaries made regarding what could be tolerated and what was to be firmly rejected had little to do with the reality of the practices in their contextual meaning and their value from the locals' perspective. To the locals' perspective, the Catholic missionaries paid

very little attention; rather, they focused on a discursive construction of others' superstitious practices among which the presence of Devil worship was, in some cases, directly called into question.

Overall, the practice of Italian Catholic missionaries in the field largely confirms Horner's (1965) conclusion that the distinctive Catholic strategy of evangelization was based on a rapid creation of a general Catholic environment. This environment was to be constructed through all means, into which a subsequent more mature Catholic community could take root. In the decades preceding the onset of World War II, which effectively halted the spread of Catholicism in the area, the numbers of conversions rose steadily and consistently in the region.

With regard to the minorities' response, I have mentioned that among archival documents consulted, when read through the lines, suggest rather a mainly socio-political argument regarding groups' attitudes toward a conversion to Christianity. They suggest rather a mainly socio-political argument. For instance, Catholic missionaries record the Karen, encountered by missionaries near Toungoo, converted enthusiastically. In contrast, the Red Karen living north of Toungoo and the Wa living north of Kentung did not convert for quite a long time. These two groups seemingly share some common characteristics related mainly to their socio-political organization. At the time of missionaries' arrival, they were both organized in big semi-sedentary villages, controlling a good portion of territory under one common chief. Both groups denied missionaries access into their territories or somehow pushed them to leave, and this continued until their fall to British control in 1886. Only after a partial loss of autonomy did they then consider a conversion to Christianity, and only then could Catholic missionaries establish stations among them safely and with the approval of the local chief. In the case of evangelization among the Red Karen, Catholic missionaries record that it begins in 1892 (Gheddo, 2007), more than 20 years after the missionaries' arrival in Toungoo. Evangelization among the Wa begins in the second half of 1930s, due to the mediation of an Irish Catholic appointed as commissioner for the Shan States, who intercedes with the local Wa Prince to grant access to Catholic missionaries (Manghisi, 1938).

In conclusion, apart from specific cultural traits sometimes recalled toexplain conversions, the Lombard Seminary missionaries prove that the willingness to convert and to accept missionaries' presence at large was influenced by the general socio-political conditions experienced by each group. Among groups with higher rates of autonomy, the

new creed was less appealing, at least until the rise of British Burma changed the balance of power within the region.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusions

This study has traced the genealogy of the constitution and development of two Catholic missions among minorities in southern central and northeastern colonial Burma through an analysis of the general historical, political, and ideological conditions that led to their foundation and that characterized their work. The general research question proposed aimed to analyze to what extent the Roman Catholic Church determined the spread of Catholicism among minorities in central and northern British Burma. To achieve this goal I took into account why and how the Italian Catholic missionaries belonging to the Lombard Seminary and PIME constituted and developed the Eastern Burma and Divine Providence Missions.

This was done with the general aim of depicting the conditions into which the process of minorities' conversion to Catholicism began in the area considered. In order to highlight the macro contextual level, of the Roman Catholic Church that led to the founding of these two missions have been analyzed. At the level of meso-contextual factors, the specificity of missionaries' roles and their positions taken toward the locals with regard to British administration have also been analyzed. In addition, this study has focused on the practical evangelization strategies missionaries undertook to gain conversions among minorities and the discourse legitimizing this strategy. In the span of time considered, both the Eastern Burma and Divine Providence Missions were successful in establishing the roots of a newly introduced Catholic faith among minorities in southern central and northeastern Burma.

In today's Myanmar, Christianity is the second largest religion with 6.2 percent of the population considering themselves adherents, according to the 2014 Myanmar Census. Although the census does not address religious affiliation by ethnicity, the percentages of Christians have grown significantly in states in which the populations are

mainly non-Burmese: in the Chin State, Christians represent 85.4 percent of the population; in the Kayah State, they represent 45.8 percent; and, in the Kachin State, theyrepresent 33.8 percent of the population (The Republic of the Union of Myanmar, 2014). In the area considered for this research, the number of Christians remains low when considered as part of the general religious mapping of the mainly Buddhist Shan State. Nevertheless, the presence of the Roman Catholic Church is today a solid reality. Both the provinces of Toungoo and Kentung have dioceses administrated by local bishops and operated by local clergy comprised, for the most part, of minority representatives (Fr. Corti, General Secretary of PIME, personal communication, December 18, 2017).

This concluding chapter restates the problem that this research has investigated, focusing, once again, on the academic interest which stimulated this work, namely the issue of minorities' conversion in mainland Southeast Asia. In addition, the following sections also present the major findings with regard to the research questions presented in Chapter One and identify the implications and limitation of this study, as well as possible directions for further research.

6.1 Minorities' Conversion and the History of Missions

As previously mentioned, the present work was initially inspired by the question of why minorities in mainland Southeast Asia converted, and continue to do so, to Christianity. Exploring this issue also begs the question of how such a process should be articulated in relation to other relevant issues, foremost among which are economic and social changes, modernization, ethnicity, and the dialectic between majority and minorities within national contexts. However, as Wood (in Hefner, 1993: 305) argues, "conversion to Christianity means different things to different peoples and entails divergent social consequences." Whereas motivations can include a number of possibilities, similarly the methodological perspective and approach to the phenomenon of conversion varies consistently, with none of them alone apparently fulfilling the task of fully explaining it.

In some cases, universalistic and abstract explanations have attempted to explain conversion to world religions at large. Horton's (1975) influential work proposes an understanding of conversion to world religions as a means of reframing the general worldview according to a new enlarged macrocosm. In the case of Africa, he explains

conversion to either Christianity or Islam in terms of a shifting dialectic between microcosm-macrocosm that is activated by the social and economic changes introduced by colonialism. More recently, Keyes (1993) has reframed this argument by claiming that universal religions, with their abstract systems, are more suitable to modern societies in that they are more adaptable to various living conditions. Abstract and universalistic explanations fail to include a number of phenomena that seemingly contradict them, such as the case of the revitalization movement occurring among the Akha. In this case and to the contrary, the traditional Akha religion is being reframed as an alternative faith to Christianity.

Other approaches have attempted to explain minorities' conversion to Christianity both within and beyond the context of mainland Southeast Asia. As previously mentioned, conversion to Christianity has been approached through the lens of identity politics, and Salemink (2009) has claimed that the link between identity and religion is not always meaningful; rather, it appears as meaningful under specific contextual conditions. Other arguments have been advanced when attempting to explain why minorities convert, such as economic changes (Tapp, 1989; Hansson, 1992), high mobility, or a critical condition experienced by communities at the moment of their encounter with missionaries (Tapp, 1989). No individual factor can singlehandedly account for conversions; rather, as Tapp (1989) concludes, a combination of a number of different explanations may provide insight into this complex phenomenon.

In a multiplicity of approaches and perspectives what has been poorly interrogated, especially in the Southeast Asian context, is a historical analysis of missions and missionaries and the specificity and role they played in stimulating conversion. Some monographs have, instead, dealt specifically with the work of missionaries. Beidelman (1982), Kipp (1990), Huber (1988), and Comaroff and Comaroff (1991,1997) all provide vivid examples of the way in which such an analysis can contribute to the understanding of social change at large, emphasizing, for instance, the role missions had in the spread of capitalist modes of work organization and economy. They, in addition, highlight the link between knowledge and power embodied in missions as institutions where discourses produced on others act as a means of control. Influenced by postcolonial and feminist perspectives, these works tend to conceptualize missions as colonial institutions. With regard to this issue, as mentioned, I tend to prefer Fabian's (1990) argument. He proposes

an understanding of the relationship between colonial interests and Christian missions as overlapping in the reality of colonial expansion but still existing as two distinct orders of narrative.

With regard to the conversion of minorities in mainland Southeast Asia, my original aim was that of denaturalizing the two missions considered by approaching them within a primarily historical perspective. As Fabian (2002) has noted, a lack of historical insight in the study of marginal groups can be the result of a lingering prejudice based on the old concept of people who live outside of history. With regard to this point, local church development, observed during the decades of its very establishment, has been approached in this work as the result of a number of political events, shared ideas, and varying motivations sustaining the constitution and development of these two missions. At the same time, this work took into account the conditions of minorities at the time of the missionaries' arrival and the colonial context in which conversions were gained. The following section discusses some conclusive remarks with regard to the issue of minorities' conversion to Christianity in the context of British Burma, as the issue is indirectly addressed in the missionary documents analyzed.

6.2 A Denaturalized History of Local Missions

In the field of socio-anthropological research, post-colonial studies have occasionally provided accounts of individual missions by articulating their constitutions and daily operations within the wider socio-political context under which they happened to be set up, along with their goals and outcomes. In these cases, they have been either conceptualized as an organic part of colonial domination, or, alternatively, as partially independent of it. In both cases, missions and missionaries have been historicized, or, as I propose, denaturalized through the lens of socio-economic or political analysis. Occasionally, such approaches to analysis have been enriched by the adoption of discursive perspectives.

By applying a Foucauldian genealogic perspective, I have through this study widened the historical approach of denaturalizing missions and included a specific analysis of the Catholic Church's condition and goals during the period of time considered. In so doing, I have focused on the merging of both the contextual and incidental reasons that led to the constitution of the two missions considered and the

specific forms that they took as a result. The overall analysis was developed with reference to the three main research questions formulated in Chapter One.

The general research question was split into three operational ones. The first research question was concerned with why the missions were founded. To address this issue, the research highlighted three key factors leading to the two missions foundation: the apostolic effervescence characterizing Roman catholic Church by the end of nineteen century, the competition between churches of various denominations, and the difficulty of converting Buddhists. With regard to the first of the factors proposed, I highlighted how a strategy of apostolic effervescence was used by the Roman Catholic Church to reconstruct the Church's legitimacy and primacy at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was a strategy born of necessity in the face of rising nation-states and secularization processes in Italy and across Europe. As noted by Aubert et al. (1977), this kind of response has recurred during critical moments in the history of the Roman Catholic Church and usually implies a revitalization of apostolic feeling, with the aim of reaffirming the legitimacy and the universalist mandate of the Roman Catholic Church. On more than one occasion, missions in the non-Christian context have served as practical manifestations of this universalism (Melloni, 2011). In this context, the Lombard Seminary for Foreign Missions was constituted for the evangelization of Asia at large, as Asia was the largest non-Christian region in the world.

This research found a second factor leading to the founding of the two missions. The competition among Christian churches of different denominations played a crucial role in determining the establishment of the Eastern Burma and Divine Providence Missions.

Missionaries, particularly Baptist and Catholic, competed fiercely in gaining conversions and, as Mgadla (2014) proposed, attempted to organize the region into spheres of influence within which the development of services for locals was a fundamental tool used to gain followers. Similarly, Lankina and Getachew (2013), repeating Berger's (1969) argument, note the role competition played among religious groups in terms of enhancing the quality of the services provided. For the context considered, I have highlighted the impact that competition with the Baptists had in enhancing the quality of services in both the fields of education and healthcare; in addition, I have connected the local improvement of services to the wider debate that

arose within the Roman Catholic Church concerning these issues within a condition of global competition with other Christian churches worldwide.

To identify the reasons behind the two missions' genealogy, a third factor was considered, namely the poor results obtained in terms of conversions among Buddhists. By considering missions of all denominations among Buddhists within the territories of Burma, it was found that they were languishing (see Bourdon, 1874; Wa, Sowards, and Sowards, 1963). The limited results previously obtained among the Buddhist populations in Ava and Pegu Reign determined the shift toward the evangelization of minorities living on the margins of main kingdoms. This problem of limited conversion was also experienced by other orders and other Christian denominations. As a result, by the second half of the nineteenth century, churches of various denominations had made a similar choice to focus on minorities, prompted by the expansion of the colonial control exerted by European countries.

Under these circumstances, the Catholic Church, not unlike other Christian churches, purposely shifted its attention from Buddhist majorities to non-Buddhist minorities living in peripheral areas to solidly root its churches in mainland Southeast Asian countries. The discovery of non-Buddhist groups who were seemingly more open to receiving the Gospel (Wa, Sowards. and Sowards, 1963) gave new energy to Christian churches, which shifted their attention to non-Buddhist groups. Thus, by the second half of the nineteenth century, a general expansion toward minorities living in Toungoo began, facilitated by the expansion of the British presence.

The second research question was concerned with the understanding missionaries had of local minorities. I applied Foucault's concept of discourse in its main specificities, namely in its historiographical attitude, in its lack of a specifically hermeneutic goal, and in the relations it enables to analyze above individual social actors. I have conceptualized the discourse of Lombard Seminary missionaries in historical terms, tracing its origin and its condition of emergence through the link between a pre-existing missionary paradigm and the contextual social conditions that missionaries encountered among minorities in southern central and northeastern Burma. With Foucault's concept of discourse, the research has highlighted the link between discourse and the missionaries' practice of evangelization rather than the hidden goals behind the discourse, as hermeneutic analysis

usually aims to do. In addition, the individual dimension, or agency, was left largely untouched during the course of this research as the emphasis was on shedding light on the discourses in which both missionaries and locals were embedded.

With reference to the agency of social actors, a Foucauldian discourse is concerned with something wider than the production of meaning; it is concerned, instead, with the construction of the field itself, wherein meanings can rise, decline, and link to form discursive systems, or compete for hegemony. As a result of being linked to knowledge and power, discourse makes it possible to fix others' identities and to eventually construct them as subjects. Such a construction process is crucial when attempting to give reasons for the missionaries' evangelization strategy and of its legitimation. The methodology employed to secure conversions and to construct the new Catholic Christians was based on and motivated by this understanding.

As previously mentioned, no preparations specific to the context were provided to missionaries who were sent to Burmese territories, nor did they develop a systematic ethnographic approach or attitude once in the field. Instead, I have argued that missionaries understood the new context through the lens of pre-existing concepts that had been constructed in the centuries following the discovery of the Americas and were mainly based on Acosta's classification of human beings (Bernand and Gruzinsky; 1988; Cuturi, 2004; Sangkeun, 2004). Based on certain characteristics, for instance, nomadism, small village sizes, recurrent wars, the absence of political and religious institutions, linguistic diversity, the lack of a writing system, and poor economic resources, missionaries considered the minorities whom they encountered in southern central and northeastern Burma as being on the lowest level of civilization, just like the groups previously encountered on the Latin American coasts. Evangelization was consequently framed according to this classification with the primary goal of raising minorities' level of civilization through the provision of better living and economic conditions. I refer to this coherent discursive system, linking the level of civilization with a specific strategy of evangelization to be used, as the Latin American paradigm, borrowing Kuhn's (1962) concept of paradigm. In addition, I evoke the use missionaries themselves made of the term paradigm to define models of missionary approach within missiology debate. In addition, the use of discourse as a means of classification with regard to religion on the part of missionaries implied defining who locals were in general terms. In this vein, the category of identity has also been assumed as a form of discourse and similarly

conceptualized as being embedded within power-knowledge relations, which, again, is an approach that has proven particularly popular in the field of post-colonial studies.

Relations between missionaries and local minorities were in fact unequal according to two orders of narratives: the religious, as minorities were perceived as not having any religion, which meant that they were perceived as being as far as possible from revelation and salvation; and the identitarian, reflected in the concept of the degree of civilization and into which minorities were placed at a certain level.

Homi Bhabha (1983), as mentioned, identified the key characteristics used to establish a hegemonic discourse concerning the identities of others, referring to fixity, ambivalence, and hierarchization. These characteristics emerge from the Lombard Seminary missionaries' discourse on minorities. On the one hand, stereotypes emerge in which severe living conditions eventually get confused forever with a condition of savagery, while on the other, there is ambivalence, which, as Bhabha (1983) argues, helps to define at the same time the self and the other. Ambivalence is recurrent within the Lombard Seminary missionary documents where the general contempt directed toward certain locals' practices is counterbalanced by a genuine sympathy and nostalgia toward a condition sometimes perceived as primordial. The third characteristic is hierarchization which implies an unequal distribution of the self and the other within an ideal evolutionary scale. This is exemplified in the assumptions of an old system of classifying human beings based on ancient themes, where the level of civilization is determined by the presence of major urban centers with visible political and religious elites. Through these discursive features, this research has found that Catholic missionaries constructed minorities' identity as subjects to be civilized and converted.

The third research question was concerned with the strategies and tools employed to gain conversions. The research data has provided insights concerning the practical activities that missionaries engaged in and the manner in which they legitimized them. The approach missionaries adopted for minorities was slightly different from that followed when working among Buddhist majorities. With the latter, missionaries engaged in doctrinal confrontations, while the approach used for minorities consisted mainly of the provision of practical assistance, as Fr. Bonetta (1937c) clearly states in one letter. Economic and medical assistance, technical training, and the introduction of new crops were all aimed at improving communities' living conditions insofar as these conditions were considered to be severely impoverished and thus an obstacle to conversion.

Civilization and evangelization merged in missionaries' operations in one goal, even legitimizing strategies that may sound dubious, such as loaning or dispensing small amounts of money to people approaching missions or that of ransoming children to be hosted in mission orphanages. Medical aid became a core element of mission stations, as dispensaries and hospitals provided basic care and, in most cases, non-professional medical services and medicines for free. The yearly numbers of visits indicate the success of such initiatives, while the creation of a Catholic society at the grassroots was achieved primarily through education, which was also intended to be moral (Decorme, 1916).

At the level of the specific catechism proposed by missionaries, I have argued that Christian doctrine was introduced in the form of a dialogue between accommodations with some of the local practices, which were used as a bridge to the new faith, and the firm opposition to superstition, which was considered an obstacle to evangelization. In order to analyze this issue, I have appealed to a discursive notion of the category of religion and its counterparts, such as concepts that emphasize the lack of a religious system and the presence of superstition. Nevertheless, minorities were considered as not having a religion, which was used by missionaries to confirm minorities' cultural backwardness.

As previously mentioned, some scholars within the field of post-colonial studies, wherein Foucault's legacy has been consistently transposed, have focused on the use of the category of religions in non-Western contexts as a process of imposing a contextual Western category onto a number of non-Western contexts. While this process has been problematized as a result of its Euro-centrism, it has been analyzed as a discursive feature entangled in contextual power-relations. Moreover, it has been conceptualized as part of the wider modernization/Westernization project which found its most striking realization in colonialism (Said, 1978; Asad, 1993; Masuzawa, 2005). In a similar vein, Bernand and Gruzinski (1988) have provided a detailed account of the use of the concepts of idolatry, magic, and religion in the context of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century missions in Latin America and the consequences of such narratives in terms of the political and religious initiatives undertaken by both missionaries and colonial agents.

In this research, when analyzing missionaries' understanding of locals, I adopted an approach similar to post-colonial scholars by arguing that the same categorization occurred in the new Southeast Asian context.

I argue that the approach to classification based on Acosta and a pyramidal classification of civilizations, discussed by Bernand and Gruzinsky (1988), as well as Cuturi (2004) and Sangkeun (2004), was still widely employed at the end of the nineteenth century and the dawn of the twentieth century in the southeastern Asian context and referred specifically to minorities.

In conclusion, the strategies adopted by missionaries proved to be largely successful in solidly establishing Catholicism among minorities living in the southern central and northeastern territories of contemporary Myanmar. This finding confirms Horner's (1965) argument according to which Catholic missions tend to encourage large numbers of conversions yet also accept ones that are clearly a matter of expedience in order to create a general Catholic environment where a more mature Catholicism could eventually arise. In addition, this process had the effect of favoring the rise of marginal minorities with a new status within a wider socio-political and economic context (see Tapp, 1989). The following sections go back to the general academic background and issue that served as the point of departure for this research, namely why minorities converted and how scholars have methodologically approached this issue.

6.3 Implications and Limitations

As a partial and non-exhaustive contribution to the field examining the process of conversion to Christianity among minorities in mainland Southeast Asia, this research sought to analyze the issues contributing to minorities' conversion from a different perspective. As such, this research sought to identify the extent to which missionaries' choices contributed to the high percentages of Christians among minorities in contemporary Myanmar. This required a focus on the history of Catholic missions at large and research into the establishment of two Catholic missions devoted to the evangelization of groups living in peripheral areas.

This research found that, by the end of the nineteenth century, a shift in the strategy employed by the Roman Catholic Church in Burma can be identified; this shift consisted of the partial desertion of evangelization efforts directed toward Buddhist populations, insofar as the Lombard Seminary missionaries devoted all of their energies toward the evangelization of non-Buddhist minorities. Churches of other denominations also underwent this shift. In addition, the current work found that the Catholic missionary strategy relied on the provision of practical aid from an early stage, which resulted in the

number of conversions increasing steadily. This, however, is not intended as a critique of the quality of conversions achieved by missionaries, nor is it intended to provide a comprehensive answer to the question of why minorities converted; rather, the goal of this research was to highlight the impact that missionary groups' policies had on determining the spread of Catholicism in the area.

With regard to the limitations of this work, the material consulted for this research was limited to archival documents, published papers, and books that exclusively reflect missionaries' perspectives, as the opinions of locals seem to have been marginalized. Similarly, the information and statistics provided could not be verified and compared with other sources in most cases. When possible, with regard to the contemporary and prior Baptist presence within the territory considered, information has been compared with that provided by Wa, Sowards, and Sowards in the *Burma Baptist Chronicle* (1963). As a matter of record, no other sources with regard to the missions analyzed, in either English, Italian, or other languages, were found. A lack of access to Burmese language sources, when extant, also limited the scope of this study.

6.4 Suggestions for Future Research

Future research could search for reports and/or documents provided by groups and institutions other than those associated with Catholic missionaries, in Myanmar as well as in Baptist Mission Archives. In addition, further research in the Propaganda Fidae Archive in Rome and Lyon and/or in the Secretariat of State (Holy See) Archives in Rome may provide details concerning the political relations between the Roman Catholic Church and both the local Princes and the English administration during the period of time considered.

With regard to the development of the Catholic Church in contemporary Myanmar, it would be key to extend the analysis from 1940s onward to identify the factors that led to the contemporary condition of the Catholic Church in that country. In-depth research on the field may be helpful in identifying the current characteristics of Catholic Christianity in the areas examined, by systematically linking the past and the present, as Beidelman (1974) has suggested.

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