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From Millet to Rice

The Politics of the New Faith and Time Discipline among Borderland Communities in Eastern Nagaland

This article contests the commonly held view that missionary influence "modernizes" tribal life, with reference to the specific case of Sema and Ao Naga evangelical work among the Yimchungrü of Tuensang district, Nagaland. I show how social change was impelled by syncretic religious adaptations and control over local land and labor relations by the village church. Tuensang district was placed under the North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA) administration soon after India's independence from British rule in 1947, and a massive modernization project was initiated, which included the popularization of terrace wet rice farming. The diffusion of a new faith by Baptist missionaries since the late 1950s produced a new chain of relationships in which rice was preferred as the crop of civilization by the church missionaries and their converts. By the 1990s, Yimchungrü farmers had started growing rice as their staple food crop. This phenomenon is linked to changes in labor contribution by the church societies based on Naga traditions of social hierarchy on the basis of "age-sets." Therefore, I argue that these changes were based on the syncretic cultivation of a new faith and were less defined by a simple modernization project.

Keywords: Naga—borders—millet—rice cultivation—*jhum*

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Christianity spread to the Naga Hills during the late nineteenth century with colonial conquest (Thomas 2015, Lotha 2007). Colonial hill administrators like Joseph Phillip Mills and John Henry Hutton believed that the missionaries would destroy Naga culture (Mills 1926; Hutton 1945). They represented the "idealist humanist" school of British anthropology and believed the Naga to be untouched by civilization. The Ao, Angami, Lotha, Rengma, and Sema were the first to be converted by the American missionaries during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the past decades, a number of studies have come out on missionary evangelism in the Naga Hills (Downs 1971; Pruett 1974; Philip 1983), dominated by two main views: (1) that missionary influence has been a totalizing modernization project, and (2) that the missionary influence was a measure of submission to a higher power, in other words the "moral of improvement" and discipline and acted as an instrument of emancipation and protection during the post-independence counterinsurgency military operation (1947–90). These views, though drawing merit based on textual sources such as private papers and missionary records, have been overstated, as the studies show a lack of ethnographic data. Meanwhile, more recent ethnographies and historicized accounts by anthropologists and historians of South Asia present a more complicated story of local religious beliefs and evangelization that took the form of conquest and at the same time incorporated local practices into the "sacred and profane" to make Christianity more relevant to the indigenous Naga tribes (Longkumer 2010, 2018; Joshi 2012; Thong 2012, 2016; Thomas 2015; Fobes 2017; Tzudir 2019). However, these postcolonial studies, notwithstanding the fact of being seminal in their own right, are more focused on either indigenous religious movements and healing practices, such as the Hiraka movement, or on a critical appraisal of the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society (ABFMS) and other colonial missionaries' work during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and its links with the rise of Naga nationalism. By contrast this article focuses on a different geographical area in the Naga Hills, where missionaries entered after the 1950s and the mission work was carried out by "indigenous Naga tribes" who were proselytized by the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society during the late nineteenth century, particularly the Ao and Sema Nagas. Therefore, it presents a fresh focus and emphasis while adding to the ongoing debate on religious pluralism in the context of indigenous and tribal social formations. The article will, through thick description, explore

the connection between agriculture, community food habits, and people's creeds that were connected with changing conceptions of time and household labor relations invented from Naga tradition. For example, the indigenous understanding of "age-set" was reconfigured by Ao pastors who cultivated the new faith through incorporation of Yimchunger work ethics into a new world order, *lanson*, an institution that had incorporated both "modern" and "traditional" understandings of the Naga village society, which I shall discuss later.

Therefore, the history of missionary evangelism among the Nagas is far more complicated than is usually presented in colonial correspondence and modernization literature. The article contests the commonly held view that missionary influence "modernized" tribal life among the Naga. In its place, I propose that social change was not only produced by modernization or technological changes brought about by the church but by syncretic religious adaptations and control over local land and labor relations by faith-based institutions and agency exercised by indigenous Naga converts. The Baptist missionaries worked from below. Church deacons and pastors were enrolled from Naga villages. Although they were initially recruited from the Ao and Sema areas, they were later replaced by local village preachers. Relatedly, in the construction of village churches, the villagers generated donations from voluntary labor contribution. The Baptist missions worked with internal support and through a system of contribution from each village to the church headquarters. Baptism, in effect, produced community solidarity once the seeds of the gospel were sown in Naga hearts and minds. The Ao and the Sema evangelical missions played an instrumental role in the formative years to develop values of hygiene, nonviolence, obedience, and the idea of compassion and benevolence among the Eastern Naga. They also diffused the ideas of English education and the cultivation of rice.

Religious syncretism is the key to understand how Christianity and the missionary discourse of improvement and progress has been blended into the indigenous belief system of the Naga. While the missionaries disapproved of redistributive practices, such as feasts for the whole village after a good harvest, the church assimilated the traditional institutions of the Naga into a new moral order based on a calendric notion of time and a protestant work ethic. In this study, I will draw on my fieldwork embeddedness among the Yimchungrü[1] Naga tribe in Tuensang district of Nagaland, who participated as informants, friends, and interlocutors. They helped me in understanding the social relations in the village. Before studying the village scene, I will briefly give a synoptic overview of the history of missionary work among the Yimchungrü Naga.

Baptist missionaries entered the Yimchungrü land after 1947. The mission workers were the Sema and Ao Naga who were converted in the late nineteenth century by American Baptist missionaries. When the first evangelists came to stay in Yimchungrü villages, they introduced rice as the crop of the "civilized" people. Initially the Sema evangelists faced difficulty in preaching the message of the Gospel because of hearsay about headhunting forays that restricted their travel in between Yimchungrü villages, as narrated by my interlocutors. The Ao Baptist missionaries followed the Sema evangelists.

Baptist Christianity was slowly but steadily incorporated into the life of the local villagers. The 1950s was also a period of great transformation in Naga society, as Naga nationalists were waging a guerrilla war against the Indian armed forces. The church played an important part as a mediator in the conflict to re-establish peace and faith among the community (Thomas 2015; Srikanth and Thomas 2005). The government counterinsurgency campaign ran parallel with the colonial Forest and Agriculture Department ideas of improvement through the popularization of wet terrace rice cultivation. For this, the North-East Frontier Agency administrators introduced wet terrace rice cultivation to the Yimchungrü and other Naga tribes in the Tuensang area. Angami and Chakhesang were sent as agricultural demonstrators locally known as *kelu babu* (water-field officer). However, this project was not taken up by the village people, with the exception of a few village headmen who participated in the program. For the government, it was a policy to befriend the Yimchungrü Naga, who were hostile and suspicious toward the administration. Nonetheless, initial intervention failed to generate much enthusiasm, as the Yimchungrü staple foods (millet and Job's tears) were grown in *jhum* slash and burn fields. Village labor was organized around the chief's family and was a means of establishing reciprocity and allegiance with the headman's family and kin. Mission work in the initial years found few followers.

In the 1960s, when a small proportion of the village adopted Christianity, village churches sprung up. In the early 1970s, the Yimchungrüs established their Baptist Association in Shamatore Town. The Baptist missionaries soon began to build physical church houses. The villagers achieved this through voluntary labor contributions to the church. The villagers were organized as a work force by the Yimchungrü Baptist Church Association, invoking the Naga institution of "age-sets": these were age groups that had been instrumental in executing communal village activities in previous times. The young and the brave guarded the villages from enemies while the other able-bodied men went to collect the harvest and protect the women from feuding clans. The young women would husk and winnow grain. Together, the age-sets competed with one another in community tasks.

Each individual, depending on their age-set, was assigned a responsibility. The church construction work in Leangkongrü village was completed in eleven months. In the coming years, as the whole village adopted Christianity, the church used the age-sets as a collective work force in agriculture to generate income through voluntary labor and in turn changed their cultivation of millet and Job's tears to rice and long beans. The transformation came through the acceptance of the Naga age-old customs of age-sets being used in a new set of labor relations and reciprocity established by church followers. How did the church achieve this transformation? In order to understand this change, we have to study the centralization of time in Naga life.

Centralization of time among Yimchungrü Naga

Anthropologists have recognized that a relativistic view of time reckoning is essential to understanding non-Western cultures. In this section I discuss the ordering of time in relation to power by reference to the institution of religion. The tradi-

tional Yimchungrü Naga understanding of time was based on the day-to-day interaction of villagers with nature, the agricultural cycle, the flux of day and night, and the rhythm of life celebrated through feasts, festivals, rituals, and sacrifice. This was markedly distinct from calendric notions of time and labor introduced with the coming of the church in the late 1950s.

With the acceptance of Christianity, there has been a slow transformation of many of the earlier practices. Today farmers, for example, do not sacrifice chickens before the sowing season or offer Feasts of Merit after a successful harvest. Rather, celebrations take place in individual households and in the church, following the Judaeo-Christian calendar, with its three important festivals: Christmas, New Year, and Easter. People go to church and pray for a good harvest. Before the arrival of the missionary evangelists, time reckoning among the Yimchungrü was dependent on the day-to-day needs of the present. There was limited planning for the future; agriculture and crop cultivation were designed to meet subsistence needs year after year. In fact, farmers grew crops, such as millet, that required less labor, produced more grain, and had a longer shelf life. During my fieldwork, one of the villagers (household no. 15), who still possessed Job's tears harvested ten years previously, explained that it was "wealth" and a resource crop for subsistence during hard times (such as drought).

Yimchungrü time seldom indicates an exact point in the progression of time. Longer periods of past time were often explained to outsiders in terms of successive "age-sets" and generations, for example, "my father's generation," "my grandfather's generation," and so on. Beyond such expressions as "yesterday," "today," "tomorrow," "the day before yesterday," "the day after tomorrow," "nowadays," "long ago," and the equivalent for month or year, other times in the past were indicated by referring to shared events, such as epidemics, droughts, or large forest fires, as in many African and South East Asian societies (Booth 1975, 81–91). Just as with the past, the future was understood through common reference to future phenomena that would affect their lives.

This relational sense of time applied also to seemingly personal information. For example, during my fieldwork, when I asked Joseph about his age, he went blank—but he could tell his relative age, that is, whether he was older or younger than someone else. What is important to the Yimchungrüs is the rulers and what they did, not the number of years they lived as chiefs or village headmen. Thus, temporal duration is perceived qualitatively rather than quantitatively. These phenomena have also been recorded in other cultures in ethnographic studies on time reckoning (Ohnuki-Tierney 1973).

The calendric understanding of time and days was unknown to the people. People referred to the past in terms of generations. Leangkongrü, the study village, was two generations old, according to the village residents, while the neighboring village was five generations old. So, according to my respondents, the neighboring village had wider knowledge of Yimchungrü origin and history. The knowledge of the past was central to their culture, customs, and traditions, encoded in events not in chronology. Age-sets were significant beyond their modern utilization for

work distribution—rights and obligations within the group were crucial—and also used for the concept of time as counted in generations.

Ritual priest and control over time

According to the Yimchungrü forefather narrative, there were three pioneers who opened new settlements during the inauguration of the Leangkongrü village. These new pioneers, or village headmen, were locally known as the *kiulongthsüpuh* (village headman who carries the *mithun* [Bos frontalis], a large domestic bovine, while opening a village), the *khihnuhanpuh* (the village headman who carries a dog while opening the field), and the *khiungpüh* (the ritual headman who carries a hen while opening the field). The *khiungpüh* possessed the authority to fertilize the soil, using his sacramental power to bring potency to the *jhum* fields. This authority was bound up with his role in the village as owner, one of the first settlers, and the reservoir of potency. It is through him that potency was imbued in the crops. He unleashed and controlled the fountain of fertility. The *khiungpüh*s were the controllers of time, which was integral to the cultivation cycle. It was he who had the first right to open the *jhum* fields for cultivation and he had definitive authority over agricultural timing. The *khiungpüh*s performed rituals and sacrifices with hens and pigs just before the onset of the sowing season and the clearing of a *jhum* field. For this, he enjoyed the right to receive tributes and gifts from his clan and village second settlers. The clearing of jungle was followed by rest days when no villagers were permitted to enter the *jhum* field. The timing of the planting and sowing was based on his knowledge of the lunar cycle. As custodian of the land, upon him was bestowed the customary right to redistribute resources for communal use. Thus the *khiungpüh*s were the authoritative arbiters of agricultural time and timing. The *khiungpüh*s were dominant until the 1960s, when they came under attack by the mission converts. The decline of the *khiungpüh*s corresponds sharply with the growth of missionary faith that compelled church followers to abandon the rituals associated with sowing and harvesting performed by the *khiungpüh*s.

The understanding of time in Yimchungrü society is closely linked to seasonality and the cyclic events of nature. The rhythms are based on the work performed in a particular season. According to my Yimchungrü informants, *jhum* farmers followed the moon's phase to time their agricultural activities. The months are divided very specifically into thirty days according to the position of the moon, grouped into fifteen "bright" days and fifteen "dark" days. The farmers use the changing shape of the moon to time the sowing and harvesting of their crops. Joseph explained to me with sketches of various moon phases how the Yimchungrü forefathers used the moon to time their sowing and cropping seasons.

However, implicit in his description was an adjustment to calendrical time. Although the moon's phases were never calculated with fixed dates in the past, his description was designed to match my understanding of calendars. The first day was the new moon *khinu ahükhiak* (10th–15th days), followed by the half-moon *khinu müngiphülong* (15th–20th days), then followed by *amükhiak*, the full moon (20th–25th days), and finally the *khinu ashelim*, last moon (25th–30th days).

Joseph explained the relevance of moon phase in farming. Maize, millet, rice, and Job's tears are planted on new moon days (10th–15th days); this is favorable for the growth of the plants and the harvest will be good. If planted during the half moon (15th–20th days), the harvest will be bad. And during full moon days (20th–25th days) no seeds are planted, as this would inevitably produce a low yield.

Baptist pastors and time reckoning

With the arrival of Baptist evangelists in the village, the practice of time reckoning that was closely linked to the agricultural seasons and the age-set changed for good. In the beginning there was strong resistance to the change promoted by the missionaries. However, over time, the missionaries won over the people's hearts and minds through their syncretic adaptation and as individuals began converting themselves to the new religion. The *khiungpüh*'s control over time through a measure of reciprocity slowly lost its charm over his people, as people started believing in the church's doctrine. As the *khiungpüh*'s clan members started to convert to the Baptist church, it soon led to his isolation in the village. Christian families were prohibited by the church from giving him tribute. This had a significant impact on his annual practice of fertilizing the field through pre-harvest rituals. Villagers were encouraged to pray in the church rather than wasting their resources pleasing the spirits. The *khiungpüh* thus lost more and more followers. The opening of paddy fields further limited the role of the *khiungpüh*, as wet-paddy cultivators did not require such blessings. In paddy fields, land was owned individually, and it was the responsibility of each farmer to open his paddy farm for cultivation, unlike highland *jhum* fields, which were based on collective labor organized by the *khiungpüh*. Villages visited the church collectively on Sundays to pray for a good harvest.

The *khiungpüh* slowly became less important in the village. The recomposing of time symbolized a new set of values that distinguished the old from the new. The Baptist missionaries reinvented time by pitching their "calendrical time" against the local annual rituals of the Yimchungrü villagers that were based on day-to-day interactions and tacit knowledge of their agricultural cycle.

The politics of time

The key to the politics of time is that it is a social and cultural construction. Time "belongs to the political economy of relations between individuals, classes and nations" (Fabian 1983, x). In this connection, Bourdieu's definition of understanding time through the calendar as a "synoptic illusion" (Bourdieu 1977, 97) is useful to understand group activity as a codified aspect of social existence. The arrival of Sema and Ao Naga missionaries demanded a new regulation of time that contrasted with the one already in practice. This meant the institutionalization of a dominant time and the legitimating of power by means of the control of time. Time, as Robert Rotenberg has argued, is shaped by power in two ways. First, the planners who control the instruments of time control labor power. Second, the representation of time becomes part of the ideology that legitimates the exercise of

power (Rotenberg 1992, 33). The disciplining of time by the missionaries through the introduction of the Christian calendar cultivated a new dogma of faith or the organization of practices. The new Christian faith demanded that its followers discipline their livelihood toward "the Lord's Day." Sunday became a day for leisure, and spirituality was initially hard to communicate. One of my hosts, Ratzel (from household no. 24), explained that early Christians would often start their Sunday service on Saturday and completely miscalculated the timing. The old-generation church pastor explained that farmers were resistant to such an idea, as they found no value in observing Sunday as a rest day. For them, the end of the sowing season or a successful harvest meant taking rest and enjoying home-made beer with their kinsman by throwing a feast. Taking Sunday off made little sense for cultivators who were engaged in games, headhunting, competitive feasting, and blood feuds.

In the Ao areas, in the 1860s, when the American Baptist missionaries established faith in the Gospel, people were visiting their fields on Sundays (the Lord's Day) to maintain their farms. During the same period in Europe, Edward Palmer Thompson writes that the England Methodist church was seen as an alien thing by the English working class. Workers were accustomed to using Sunday for a variety of feasts, fairs, labor recruitment, and social visits. These amusements were seen as immoral and illustrated a lack of discipline in normal life by the mission workers. A century later, in the Tuensang district, Ao and Sema evangelists were confronted with a similar practice by the local Yimchungrü Nagas. Public morals in the Yimchungrü chieftaincy were encoded in reciprocal and obligatory kin relations between clans and service to chiefs in exchange for peace, protection, and plenty. People lived in the highland villages on the top of the spur where they could keep a watch over enemy villages. Their livelihood was sustained on migratory *jhum* farming, and their social rhythms were consumption-oriented rather than driven by surplus production and accumulation.

All this was to change as the missionaries arrived. Baptist time discipline became predominant within decades. During my fieldwork, I discovered a significant portion of the village households attending village church for Sunday worship. They had been disciplined to attend church service over the last five decades of evangelization. Very few people were uninterested in church activities, except those who were deviant and were often claimed by villagers to be not religious. Some of my young neighbors were reluctant to visit the church as they felt lazy; instead they loved to spend the day roaming in the nearby town, returning back home in the evening. Sunday was a day off from the drudgery of agricultural life. But the rest of the village stuck to the various prayer sessions, which also shaped my Sunday schedule of interviews, as I could not keep up with the number of services that were organized all day long, except the first session in the morning.

In the pre-Christian days, the Yimchungrüs' world was tenanted by mountain gods, *genna*s, and tiger-man spirits. There was no calendar and hence no calendar-based festivals. Yimchungrü culture was one of much leisure. Among the most frequent activities according to the village elderly were sleeping and eating, both of which were of long duration, resulting in innumerable feasts. In missionaries' eyes,

there were endless "vacant hours" filled with tricks, dance, storytelling in *murung* houses (male dormitory), sports, conversation, and sociability when missionaries first entered the field. Similar observations are found in the ethnographic treatises and tour reports of colonial anthropologists like Christopher Von Fürer-Haimendorf (1969 [1939]) and Hans-Eberhard Kauffmann (1939). A few decades later, the diffusion of Baptist time discipline in the Yimchungrü land and its integration into the power relations of chiefs and commoners alike was complete.

In the 1950s, when evangelists came to spread the message of the gospel, the chiefs resisted missionary incursion. There were two waves of evangelic intermediation in the Yimchungrü area: the first were the Semas, and they were later followed by the Ao. As Ato Kaka Yim writes, "the Yimchungrü heard the good news of Jesus Christ for the first time in 1936 (K. Ayipongrü village). However, the first church was established in 1947. Between 1947 and 1952 four churches were established with an approximate membership of about a hundred Christians" (2010, 22). The first Baptist Sema missionaries in Shamatore subdivision established their evangelical work in a Yimchungrü village that had a Sema Naga *khel*,[2] Sükiur "B" village. The Sema evangelists found themselves appointed among their clan to spread the message of the Gospel to the unadministered Naga, who were still occasionally carrying out headhunting forays. In the later 1950s, as the mission activities grew with new converts, the church was established in Shamatore town, the administrative headquarters of the Yimchungrü people. My Khiamniungan Naga interlocutors narrated that headhunting ceased entirely in the mid-1960s. Despite the headman's displeasure at the first missionaries, some pioneers emerged in the late 1950s that accepted Christianity, and among them were the headman's brothers. A decade after the chiefs adopted the new religion as they saw their kin converting to the new faith, creating the unity of religion and power that has persisted to the present time. As one of the village headmen explained, the converts started organizing a village labor force and declined to offer labor to the chiefs, who were still pagan believers.

One of the villagers also narrated a painful story of the chief's wife murdering her husband when the missionary faith was first growing, on the pretext that he was not giving up drinking beer and was impeding his wife's participation in the church congregation. Many pious Christian believers who narrated the incident expressed that by murdering her husband she had sacrificed the evil spirit. An important difference to the earlier evangelical work carried out by the American Baptist missionaries was the entry of native Naga tribes into their lesser-known neighboring tribes' territory. The Baptized Ao Naga, who had a longer share of evangelical engagement with the Yimchungrüs since the early 1960s, not only adopted their faith, they also adopted new etiquette, manners, behaviors, worldviews, and crops that were previously unknown. For example, the pastor Rentiba who came to the village in 1974 established the institution of the *lenso*, meaning New World. The *lenso*, as a village citizen body, codified rules and regulations for villagers, established the moral order, and regulated labor relations through age-sets that were engaged in earning wages for the church. These can also be classified as community-based religious-social institutions. These age groups contributed one-tenth of

their earnings to the church. The present village pastor illuminated in his interview that Leangkongrü was among the first villages in the Yimchungrü area to adopt the institution of *lenso* and had established itself as a model Christian village. The institution of *lenso* promoted modern democratic ideas of civil representation in the village as well as incorporated the tradition social stratification based on age-set to mobilize the village household toward completion of big projects such as the village church, roads, tree plantation activities, and other infrastructure that would promote development and progress in the village without destroying the Naga cultural ethos of communal work ethics and clan participation.

The church pastor, who came from a distant Yimchungrü village, was very ecstatic to share information about his ancestry, stating that his mother was an Ao Naga woman. Both the Ao and Sema evangelists were seen as reformers and missionaries of goodwill and as a morally superior community who taught the Yimchungrü values of attentiveness to the will of god and non-violence. They were responsible for ending headhunting and bringing peace. The new religion was equated with modernity, as an agent of improvement and development of that which was old. This process has also been experienced in other parts of South Asia. David Hardiman's work among the Bhils of Madhya Pradesh shows not only how missionization took shape to convert the Bhils to Christianity but also how certain Bhils forged their own relationship with missionary modernity (Hardiman 2008, 19–20). Hardiman observes from his other studies among the Bhils that "assimilation to dominant values . . . provided a meeting point between the adivasi and certain progressive members of the dominant classes" (Hardiman 1981, 164).

The *Huker Baptist Church Golden Jubilee Khimtan Tsün* (history book), published in 1997, contains an insightful account of emulation and influence by the Ao and Sema Mission on the Yimchungrüs:

> In Huker Village, Mr. K. Kejingkhüm, Mr. P. Thsamphu and Mr. H. Kiuthro had the privilege of attending school at Aizuto and Mokokchung in 1940. While they were studying in the Sema and Ao areas, along with their schooling they also grasped Christianity and a hygienic living standard. They received water Baptism from the hands of Mr. Khuvikhe Sema. Thus, upon their return to the village, they taught and explained about Christianity and new habits they learned during their schooling. (1997, 16)

Similarly, among the Yimchungrü, the Sema and Ao evangelists were seen as agents of modernity to which converts related. In Leangkongrü village, citizens who were studying in towns pursuing higher education were invited by the church pastor to deliver an uplifting speech to inspire fellow villagers to compete and excel in life and improve their existence. In the exalting speech, the guest invitee speakers would often refer to the Ao, Angami, and Sema as rice-eaters and advanced Naga who were assigned important positions in Naga society, whom they should emulate to develop their material and spiritual life.

As the village headmen converted to Christianity, they became inextricably intertwined with church activities. The headmen surrendered their right to receive tributes and gifts and elevated prestige. As they became Christians, the contributions that once reached the headman's household were now directed to the church

as a tithe. Prestige and power were now achieved through participating in church activities and through acting as brokers in government-sponsored development programs and provincial electoral politics. The ability to gain a position within the church was central to establishing authority. The church was composed of deacons and *Kimthsürü* (village Bible preachers) who assisted the church pastor in their day-to-day activities. Deacons were selected from able-bodied men who were morally upright and devout Christians. In Leangkongrü village, Mr Yanthong, who was an ordinary villager, was blessed by the Holy Spirit and became a pastor with no formal training. As Yim writes, when his tenure as pastor in the village was over, many pastors came from Ao missions but could not stay in the village for long. So, in between, the responsibility came upon him, and he served as a pastor for a record six times in the village (2010, 28–29).

Baptist time discipline on Sunday

By the 1950s, the Naga nationalists had raised a common ground for the creation of a Naga nation by proclaiming it as a state of Christian brotherhood. "Nagaland for Christ" thus became a marker of difference and a nationalistic call (Thomas 2015). The Baptist institution of observing Sunday as the rest day matched with the administrative schedule of weeks, where Sunday was a holiday. However, the agricultural cycle was still based on seasons. Sunday emerged as a day of atonement for sin and a day of celebration of the resurrection of Christ. A peculiar feeling that can be characterized as somber joy sets Sunday off emotionally from other days.

The tempo of Sunday is deliberate, a feeling that derives, in part, from the relatively long duration of a few activities. Sunday feels different because it draws a circle around the immediate members of a household or close kin. There is a withdrawal into the house away from public view. The intent of the day is to seek redemption through penance. The day also marks a series of meetings when human labor is replaced by mental labor. Work activities other than minimal housekeeping, childcare, and some cooking are not condoned. Time discipline centers on church attendance in the late morning and afternoon for adults and children. The duration of each service is normally an hour and a half in the morning and two hours in the afternoon.

The remaining part of the day is stipulated. After the morning church service, people go back to their houses. The Women's Leader and her group visit from house to house to restore faith. My host's wife was one of the prominent good Christians who visited people's houses with the Women's Leader. In the afternoon after a short snack break, the village youth gather in the church for service. There are cultural performances, church club presentations, and announcements of important meetings. In the early evening before the last service of the day, the pastor announced a brief with the Bharat Scouts and Guide Cadets (mostly school children), who are trained to be disciplined for the annual Republic Day parade to be held in the town playground. Afternoon is separated from evening by another church service, followed by an early evening meal before dark. Once again, the evening is different from a normal weekday: it consists of socializing with

members of other households. The period of quietude continues as family members converse; listen to the radio; watch television, DVDs, or Korean soap operas; or perhaps read the Bible before retiring later than normal.

In the early 1960s the time discipline also spread through "print Baptism." The Baptists took the utmost care to translate the Bible into the Yimchungrü dialect; even preaching between villages varied due to dialectical variations. To cite one example, when the neighboring villages dominated by Tikhir-speaking people were invited to the village church in July 2009 during fieldwork, people found it difficult to follow the Yimchungrü dialect in the church. Baptist missions have made their preaching intelligible to the Yimchungrüs by translating the Bible. The other denominations have also followed the same course these days. However, many of the aspects that were central to the village economy, such as land and labor relations, remained and could not be altered. The missionaries had to appropriate them in the context of a new world vision that was aimed at controlling time through land and labor relations.

A new order of time: Land and labor relations

The new order of time was critical in monopolizing and restructuring labor relations that had previously been established through reciprocal inter-household and age-set divisions of labor in Naga society. Communal reciprocal exchanges took place between the headmen and their followers, who lived in villages that were divided into *khel*s. The missionaries were the first to bank on these networks of labor power. The construction of the Baptist church in Leangkongrü not only demanded a huge labor force but also regulated and regimented labor to provide free, dedicated, and efficient labor to build the village church. In the 1970s, the plan for the church building was conceived by the young and energetic church pastor Rentiba. He was, at that time, in the prime of life. Married to an Ao woman from his native village, he was the most enthusiastic evangelist Leangkongrü had ever received from the Ao Naga.

Middle-aged village men who remember him describe Rentiba as the most dedicated reformer among the Yimchungrü. He inspired villagers to build houses with high roofs and proper ventilation. He was responsible for many other changes that the villagers fondly recollected. As a champion of missionary faith, he worked toward the improvement of the village and housing conditions.

Rentiba divided the village into age-sets to adopt the new cult of toil and hard work. He floated the new principle of organizing labor called *thülen thülen* (labor organization based on age-group). The concept was already there, but the terms and conditions of how it operated changed. The *thülen thülen* were divided between the ages sixteen to sixty and were classified into six groups. They were put under a central governing body of an all-villager *lenso* known as the "Citizen."[3] It was represented by a president, a secretary, and a body of members all selected from the village, who were also members of the Village Council. The Citizen would soon become the all-pervasive and overarching institution of labor organization that also decided on people's moral attitudes. It met annually, where rules,

codes, and ethics of conduct were framed for the whole village. The Citizen acted as a moral authority in people's lives. It was responsible for all social activities in the village and issued birth certificates to newborns and registered deaths. It also had the authority to confer membership to the village clan. A couple of outsiders, mainly the two Nepali men whom I interviewed during fieldwork, became citizens of the village by joining the clans of their wives in the village. Ram Bahadur took the new name of Kizmer after the initiation ceremony. The Citizen gave him this name as he became a member of the Jangrü clan.

The Citizen was thus made responsible for controlling moral behavior and evolved as an overarching body that became even more important than the Village Council.[4] The *thülen thülen* were also part of the Citizen. The *thülen thülen* were organized principally to enable efficient work and earn wages for themselves and the church. Each age-group had to pay free man-days to the church in a year. Similarly, the *thülen thülen* were accountable for their conduct in public. They were obliged to pay a tithe to the church from the earnings they made as daily wage laborers in road construction and in the paddy fields. The middlemen who engaged them in government contracts as wage earners also paid tribute to the church for the success of the work.

The church construction that started in 1972 took twenty-four months to be completed, an incredibly short time for such a huge structure to be erected. It was decorated with brilliant glass windows, all imported from the plains. During the Golden Jubilee celebration in 2008, the church ordered a bell that was custom-built in Kerala. The villagers had contributed Rs. 50,000 (approx. USD $675) for the church bell through wage labor "toil" and from household donations. Since the completion of the church building in 1974, the institution of *thülen thülen* has been established in the village. Too many of the Yimchungrü elders denied that *thülen thülen* ever existed and merely emphasized the symbolic capital attached to it. During my fieldwork, I realized how *thülen thülen* and other organized youth labor groups in the village had transformed the agrarian landscape by timing agriculture with community labor or collective action.

Only farmers who could pay wages were in a position to take part in these groups. These were mostly village chiefs, political intermediaries, party workers, government servants, and town dwellers who were engaged in business and contractual jobs but were connected to the village through their kin groups, who cultivated and maintained their fields with church labor drawn by mobilizing the *thülen thülen*. The remaining village farmers had to depend on clan members and kin labor. The inter-household bonds were weakening as more and more people were taking up rice-paddy plantation. In the upland *jhum* fields, such inter-household cooperation was concentrated in the planting of household garden crops, fruit, vegetables, and tubers, while in the farming of food grains, such as *kholar* and maize, wage labor was sought. In the paddy field, both types of labor operated. Small farmers reported that they used inter-household work parties, family labor, and cooperation between families, while large amounts of labor were used by farmers who needed more hands in the sowing, weeding, and harvesting season. In most cases except family and close kin relations, the transaction for labor

was cash payment. It also strengthened in the paddy fields that were sublet and borrowed from the large paddy owners.

The church timing was to schedule crop cultivation that could aid the production of rice. The church rice committee was responsible for keeping an account of the tithes of rice received from the farmers and their redistribution and subsidization. They also decided on the number of people who would contribute labor and on which dates. The church would not allow labor on Sundays. The regulated labor force placed the church at the center of labor control. The labor, however, was shared between families, and labor was controlled by *khel* leaders; all other labor relations were controlled by the church in coordination with the *khel*s. During 2008–09, all farmers in the village were engaged in the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) of government road-building projects. In the study village, there were nine *khel*s and each *khel* had their household labor force. The *khel* leaders, who were also the village headmen, had to pay tithes to the church. The church pastors, in return, blessed the leaders during revival ceremonies. This reciprocal exchange of labor and faith was central to the generation of wealth and the functioning of the church. For example, the church provided a reward for farmers who contributed the largest amount of rice as a tithe. The families who could grow more rice implicitly engaged more labor from the church voluntary groups through contributing to church income. The households who were efficient in growing rice were recognized as hard workers and attained important positions within the church and were active as deacons and *kimthsürü*.

In the late 1980s, as *kholar* (long bean) farming was introduced farmers brought new lands in the village under their cultivation, which had been devoted to Job's tears and millet. These proved to be the best long bean cultivation sites, as their yield and quality was high. The *kholar* boom arrived in the 1990s. This would not have been possible without the new arrangements of disciplining labor that were centralized by the church. *Kholar* was traditionally grown as a supplementary food crop on small plots of land. With the growing market demand, farmers started growing it as relay crops with maize. The cultivation of long beans in large plots requires enormous labor power, as they are grown in *jhum* plots and cannot be complemented by work parties organized at the household level. Here, church work parties have played a very important role in maximizing labor input during the sowing season. In recent years farmers have also contributed land to church work parties for the cultivation of *kholar* for sale to the market.

The church regulated labor through the Christian Youth Endeavour (CYE), made up of all unmarried women and men; the Village Student Union; and the Citizen, which mobilized the age-sets and the faith-based voluntary groups and clubs. Time management in pre-Christian Yimchungrü society was different in the ways people conceived of age-sets as groups that had rights and obligations to the clan and lineage, as well as to the various *khel*s they belonged to in the village. The village chief controlled the labor force through age-sets as well as his capacity to manage his men, the second settlers, and his close kin and family groups, who were obliged to him. The Baptist missionaries saw the age-set as a resource for promoting ideas of improvement, bringing efficiency in work by grouping the village pub-

lic in age groups. This, as all my informants expressed, brought efficiency to the particular work that was done. The main idea was to use labor optimally. The age-set division of labor was based on the principle of competitiveness. The villagers were no longer lazy and indifferent to time as they had to compete with one another.

Time and the body

One of the most fundamental goals of Baptist evangelists who came to spread the message of the Gospel in Yimchungrü village was to improve the lives of the *jhum* cultivators through instilling the Baptist faith and moral standards that discredited a hedonistic lifestyle. The success of such moral standards was measured through abstinence from illicit copulation and the drinking of homemade beer, and the renunciation of headhunting and inter-clan feuds. Headhunting died down with the extension of post-independence administration and the growth of missionary faith among the Yimchungrü villagers. The missionaries became more tolerant, recognizing that their codes had little impact on sexual promiscuity and moral delinquency. More important was the broader structure of discipline, within which goals of moral development could be achieved: it was not only leisure time that was to be regulated, but the minds and bodies of the people were to be captured by creating disciplined bodies regulated by weekly routines of both work and leisure.

The missionaries valued promptness, cleanliness, hygiene, hourly routines, and schedules not only as preconditions for wage earning and employment but (in the missionaries' minds) as ends in themselves, as the correct ways of living. Protestant schoolteachers inculcated a pedagogical practice that cultivated in young children's minds—and bodies—timetables, school bells, and examinations. Villagers who did not send their children to school were seen as backward. In the church youth gatherings and at Sunday service, educated youths would participate in "exalting," uplifting sessions to inspire people with the goodness attached to getting educated, white-collar jobs, and the city life. In many exalting sessions in which I participated, the village youths named their brave elders who were now officers in the government and public service. Through education, one gained higher status and prestige in the village as the patron, the knowledgeable soul who could understand the villagers' needs and aspirations. In the pre-Christian days, training had been through group participation and apprenticeship. In both government and religious schools, however, a multiple and progressive series of tasks was set, each followed by a test, and with students constantly supervised to keep them from being distracted from their exercises. Such discipline, according to Michel Foucault (1977), opens up an analytical space that coerces not only bodies but also minds. In learning to obey the new routine of elementary schools, Yimchungrü children also learnt to think in the new way of church and officials.

For the pre-Christian Yimchungrü society, time was valued and expressed in daily practice in terms of feasts and reciprocity. One of the Yimchungrü villagers named Linton who had traveled to my host's house narrated the value attached to the rearing of pigs and sacrificing *mithun*s. The older the *mithun* and the fatter the hog, the more it brought prestige to the feast organizer. Similarly, prestige was

gained through "feasts of merit,"[5] which involved enjoying millet beer and lasted for many days during the harvest season festival. With the intrusion of the missionary faith, all such activities were tainted as "economic waste" and "sinful." But to the pre-Christians, it was wealth—a resource for symbolic capital. E. P. Thompson's famous work "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism" shows how the historical transition to industrial society in the West "involved a restructuring of working habits accompanied by a new 'time sense', which changed inward apprehensions as much as external activities" (1967, 57).

Thompson also describes how, in the new time sense, "Attention to time in labor depends in large degree upon the need for the synchronization of labor" (1967, 70). I have discussed how a concern with the synchronization of agricultural activity was expressed by the *khiungpüh*, the highest ritual office among the Yimchungrüs, because of his control of time and kin labor. This new approach contrasts with the sense of time, as Janet Hoskins has shown in the context of Kodi swidden (slash and burn) farmers in New Guinea, as not "tied to the notion of value in a relative rigorous fashion; rather it was presented as characteristic of prestigious wealth objects and a measurable attribute of sacrificial animals" (1993, 219). The Ao and Sema Baptist missionaries brought new temporalities and meanings of time and discipline into Yimchungrü life, based on seven days a week with prescribed days of rest and worship, followed by work. The value of time, as connected with the value of life, in pre-Christian Yimchungrü society contrasts strongly with Baptist time reckoning that, valuing their "Protestant work ethic," organized time as toil and discipline for self-improvement.

Conclusion

This article focused on the politics and control of time in rural–agrarian Nagaland by the Baptist Church, as it shaped the political and social relations in a Naga village. By studying the dialectics of time and work adopted through mission work, I have contended how protestant work ethics permeated people's lives. In village studies in northeast India, the church has been narrowly defined as a social institution of faith, as the regulator of people's moral behavior and wellbeing. In this article I have described the church's organization of time as an object of power relations that controls social relations. With the diffusion of Christianity and the mission calendar in the late 1950s, the notion of time was reimagined with the practice of observing Sunday as the rest day. The introduction of the mission calendar brought particular days of fasting, celebration (Father's Day and Mother's Day), and free man days for the church that are distinct from farmers' local ways of connecting with time. The church organization of agricultural time comes through the disuse of almanacs and the use of a calendric schedule for cultivation. The church pastor and the new institution of missionary faith have replaced the ritual power of the chiefly clan. But they have also blended in a new syncretic religiosity based on the reinterpretation of "age-sets" and *lanso* that reinscribe syncretic religious values among the Yimchungrü Nagas.

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Notes

1. In the Yimchunger Naga language the tribe name is spelt as Yimchungrü. But in the official literature published by the Nagaland government the former spelling is popularly used to refer to them. In this article I am retaining the Yimchungrü pronunciation commonly used in everyday conversation.

2. *Khel* in Nagamese means colony or ward in a village. Naga villages are divided in *khel*s.

3. A "citizen pillar" has been built in the center of the village where all the past village headmen's names have been inscribed as the owners of the village.

4. The Village Council consisted of the Chairman of the council, the village headman, and the members of the council. All of these customary heads were below the Citizen, the overarching body. The Citizen was mainly responsible for dealing with theft, petty crimes, abuses, imposing fines, and defining membership.

5. The grand Feast of Merit was a significant cultural feature of pre-Christian Naga practices that conferred social status on a person.

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