

Moussons

Recherche en sciences humaines sur l'Asie du Sud-Est

4 | 2001

Recherche en sciences humaines sur l'Asie du Sud-Est

Articles

Cosmology, Prophets, and Rebellion Among the Buddhist Karen in Burma and Thailand

Cosmogonie, prophètes et rébellion chez les Karen bouddhistes en Birmanie et en Thaïlande

MIKAEL GRAVERS

p. 3-31

<https://doi.org/10.4000/moussons.3181>

Résumés

English Français

This article probes into the historical details and the present practices of Karen Buddhist movements. The Christian Karen have had a dominant position in the media and scientific publications. However, the Buddhists are probably still the majority among the Pwo and Sgaw Karen. The recent split between the Christian Karen National Union and the Democratic Karen Buddhist Organization is a dramatic expression of the political role of religion. Religion, religious movements, and prophetic leaders are important elements in Karen identification and their relationship with neighboring peoples, states, and colonizers. Religious cosmology and rituals are not merely the essentials of their world view but also constitute modes of empowerment, which are analyzed and discussed in this paper, based on ethnographic fieldwork begun in 1970 among the Karen in Thailand on the border with Burma, as well as on archival research in London.

Cet article examine le détail historique et les pratiques actuelles des mouvements bouddhistes karen. Alors que les Karen chrétiens ont joui d'une forte visibilité médiatique et scientifique, les bouddhistes sont probablement encore majoritaires parmi les Karen Pwo et Sgaw. La récente scission entre l'Union Nationale Karen (chrétienne) et l'Organisation Bouddhiste Karen Démocratique exprime de façon dramatique le rôle politique de la religion. La religion, les mouvements religieux et les chefs prophétiques sont autant d'importants facteurs identitaires pour les Karen dans leurs relations avec les peuples voisins, les États et les colonisateurs. La cosmogonie et les rituels religieux, formant la base



de la vision karen du monde, constituent aussi des modes d'habilitation, que cet article analyse et discute à partir de données ethnographiques collectées depuis 1970 parmi les Karen de Thaïlande à la frontière birmane et d'une recherche d'archives à Londres.

Entrées d'index

Mots-clés : cosmogonie, connaissance, rituel, bouddhisme, mérite religieux et pouvoir, missionnaires chrétiens, révolte ethnique, mémoire sociale

Keywords: cosmology, knowledge, ritual, Buddhism, religious merit and power, Christian mission, ethnic rebellion, social memory

Notes de l'auteur

This is a revised version of a paper given at the symposium in honor of Professor U Pe Maung Tin (1888-1973) at SOAS, London, in 1998. I am grateful to Daw Tin Tin Myaing, daughter of Hsayagyi U Pe Maung Tin, for the invitation to participate in the event; and to Mr. Ashley South, who kindly supplied information on the Talakhoung movement. Finally, I thank Martijn van Beek for comments on a earlier draft and the anonymous *Moussons* readers' pertinent critique and suggestions.

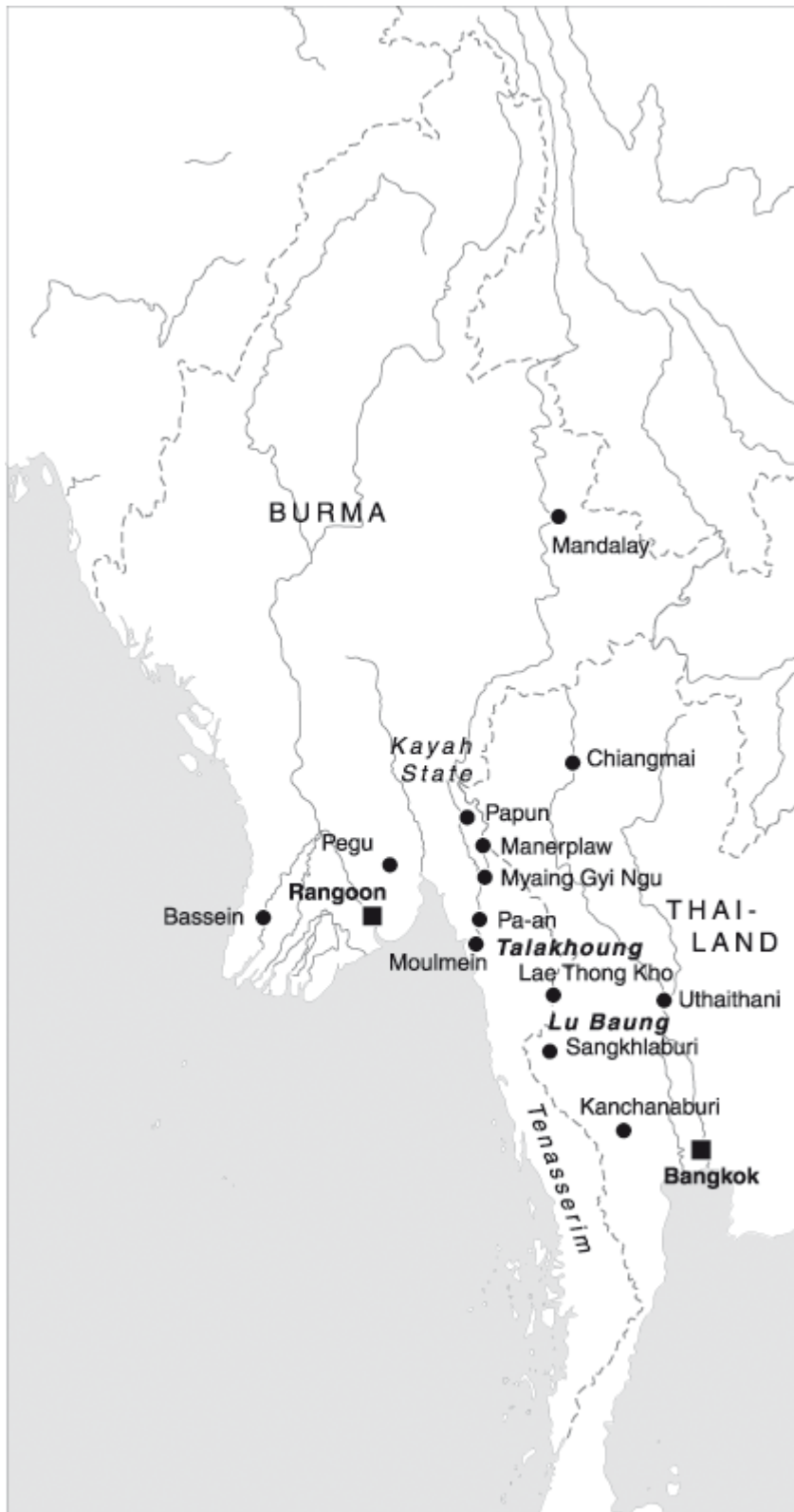
Texte intégral

Introduction

- Burma has suffered from civil war since its independence in 1948. Several ethnic groups have struggled for independence and the last of these ethnic wars, involving the Christian-dominated Karen National Union (KNU), has endured for fifty-three years and continues to generate misery in Burma and amongst the estimated 120,000 Karen refugees in Thailand.¹ The Christian Karen have dominated the discourse and the literature, although they have never constituted more than ten to fifteen percent of all Karen.² In 1994-95, KNU split and a Buddhist organization, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Organization (DKBO), was formed by the charismatic monk, U Thuzana, who proclaimed that peace would come when fifty white pagodas have been build. This movement is only the most recent of several in a continuous line from before colonization. The Karen Buddhist movements sought to establish a relatively independent domain and community under their control, and some of these movements ended in rebellion against the British.
- In the following, I analyze examples of these movements in order to explore the role of religious cosmology, ritual, and leadership as a fulcrum for political struggles. The aim of this paper is to explore the history, concepts, and intentions of these movements. I draw on my own fieldwork among the Buddhist and Christian Pwo and Sgaw Karen on the Thai-Burma border (see Fig. 1), as well as on colonial documents and missionary journals.³ Before presenting the movements and their cosmology, I discuss a few important and general aspects of the movements.

Fig. 1. Location of Karen sites





3 It would be easy to explain the rebellions as a result of Burmese or British suppression, as a simple, pre-modern form of resistance against intervention of powerful states (Gosh 2000), or as a revitalization of cultural systems (Adas 1979). There is ample evidence of heavy taxation in parts of Burma after the British conquered Tenasserim in 1824-26 and Rangoon in 1852. The rump kingdom of Burma also had to increase taxes and make the collection more effective. The American Baptist missionaries living among the Karen point to high and inflexible taxes as a major reason for the widespread rebellion of 1856-60.⁴ Taxation became more direct, land was measured, and agriculture was gradually commercialized.



But the religious dimension of the rebellions is equally important and has been often neglected, except in missionary writings. The Karen did not merely react against taxes or colonialism; they had their own projects and attempted to establish a righteous social order under their own control and based on their own knowledge and organization. We have to look into the ethnographic details and the complexity of the movement, instead of searching for singular causes and reactive actions (see Ortner 1995). Stern, who pioneered research on these movements, saw them as millennial movements and a dramatic expression of ethnic discontent with the current social order (Stern 1968: 297). Adas (1979) likewise called them millenarian. This utopian or millenarian aspect, however, is merely one dimension in the very long perspective. The more immediate and worldly perspective is the creation of a domain, a zone of peace and morality, a heterotopia, which is just as important to the actors. Without this sacred space, the new era will not materialize.

4 The Karen did not separate the economic, political, and religious dimensions of their world. The social upheavals in the wake of British colonization (1824-1886) signified that the current social and moral order was changing and demanded action. Some of the Karen converted to Christianity in order to obtain knowledge, power, and protection, and some of the Christian Karen fought against their Buddhist Karen brothers. In the process, religion formed new identities beyond local Karen communities and, at the same time, religious identification generated political divisions.

5 Although explanations given by Karen villagers during my fieldwork cannot be extrapolated to reconstruct the past, they can to some extent illuminate the inner logic and intentions of the movements. Cosmology and rituals are still at work. In discussions about the past, the present, and the future, Karen elders repeated the following explanations, which I reproduce here in a condensed form: “We, the Karen, live scattered; we have no leaders and are like orphans. We have been dominated by the Burmese, the Mon, and the Thai; we are poor and lack knowledge. The world is shrinking, we are under pressure and morality is declining—we are losing our tradition (*ta a lu a la*, ‘things we know, things we do’).” They showed me old coins, asking if the faint portrait was their culture hero and leader, Phu Leung Heing. “Will we have our own king some day? Will we become rich?” The foreigner from the West should know—but the Karen complain that we often conceal a large part of our knowledge, and they are thus waiting for more to be revealed according to their myths.

6 These statements and concerns, I believe, represent an essence of a widespread self-identification among the Karen as a relatively marginalized and powerless people vis-à-vis the Burmese, the Thai, and the Americans. The Karen consider their religious movements as a remedy to obtain power and to create, at least, an autonomous domain where their tradition rules. My informants often spoke about previous movements and struggles in order to explain the present situation. Similar statements and references to historical events are found in political documents and the literature, although with different political connotations.

7 The key word in the Karen self-presentation is knowledge, or lack of knowledge. They emphasize that leaders must have a sufficient knowledge of Karen traditions and cosmology.⁵ But they must also be able to estimate and predict future events in relation to the surrounding socio-political environment. Thus, they are prophets—but not merely in the Weberian charismatic style.⁶ Their knowledge is predominantly ritual and symbolic, and they know the cosmology and the moral rules, but they must be able to organize people around centers with pagodas in sanctified zones, as we shall see. All their knowledge must be validated by their ability to call upon and mobilize the Karen beyond the local community and



persuade them that the leader can bring about change and create a larger and righteous community. In other words, the leader, his knowledge, and his lifestyle relate to the political conjuncture of a social crisis and connect cosmology with practice. An important dimension of this conjuncture is the high expectations of imminent transformations and action, as described below.

Great Expectations: Ariya Metteya, the Imminent Buddha

8 In 1830, when Francis Mason began his forty-year work as a Baptist missionary among the Karen, he discovered the importance of the *bodhisatta*, the coming Buddha, among Buddhists in Burma. He noted: “Areemataya [Ariya Metteya] occupies as prominent a place in their prayers as Gaudama.” Those who will meet the coming Buddha shall be liberated from poverty, ignorance, sin, anger, war, and hunger. Buddhist ethics will pervade society and people can live peacefully —“There shall be neither hill, valley, nor forest” (*BMM* 13: 354). However, this era will only come after a *cakkavatti*, a universal ruler, has cleared the world of its vices. Thus, there is an apocalyptic vision claiming that Buddhism and its ethics have degenerated since Buddha (Gaudama). Even Buddhism itself is governed by the law of impermanence. Whilst Ariya Metteya is waiting in Tusida heaven, Indra or his representative on earth, *cakkavatti*, *i.e.*, the one who makes the wheel of righteousness revolve, must cleanse the world by fire (against lust), water (against anger), or wind (against ignorance), leaving the few meritorious persons unharmed to welcome Ariya Metteya. Indra will send his deities, the *deva*, to announce the tidings.⁷

9 This cosmology provided a model for the Burmese and Mon kingdoms, and the king’s palace and its pagodas were modeled after King Indra’s residence on the top of the mythological Mt. Meru (Tambiah 1976).⁸ Famous pagodas, such as the Swe Dagon in Rangoon and the Shwe Maw Daw in Pegu, are important symbols of a righteous Buddhist rule and are also mentioned in Karen prayers. Several kings have appeared in the role of a *dhammaraja*,⁹ as well as a coming Buddha. At the same time, this cosmology has provided a model for rebellion, in the form of *min laung* (“imminent king”), pretenders who often claim to be related, in various combinations, to the characters of *cakkavatti*, *dhammaraja*, and *bodhisatta*, in order to affirm legitimacy for their rebellious movements.

10 Burmese history is full of examples of such rebellions.¹⁰ Karen were involved in the Mon uprising of the 1740s, led by a king, of an uncertain identity, who took the title *S’min Dhaw Buddhakeiti* (*S’min Dhaw* is Mon for *dhammaraja*). He came from a Karen village, had 3,000 Karen followers, and seventeen of his officials and some ministers had Karen names. He was said to know the dynastic rules, to have been a Buddhist monk, and to use magic to make his supporters invulnerable. He also had a white (*i.e.*, spotted) elephant, the symbol of a *cakkavatti* or Indra. These Karen came from the eastern hills north of Moulmein. Yet, the rebellion was not ethnic, as it included Mon, Burman, Shan, and Pa-o (Thaungthu), and aimed at a righteous rule opposed to the kingdom of Ava.¹¹ The rebellion was brutally suppressed in 1757 by the Burmese king Alaung Hpayà, resulting in thousands of Mon and Karen refugees pouring into Thailand in an exodus. This period came to be known to the Karen as the “Alaung Hpayà-hunger.” However, many Karen had been monks in the Mon tradition, which is the foundation of the movements analyzed below. The area north of Moulmein, along the rivers Salween and Yunzalin, and in the hills on the



frontier with the Thai states, has a long tradition of rebellions, which continued after the intervention of Christian missions. Today, it is the struggle between the KNU and the DKBO that has taken over the arena.

- 11 The American missionaries were attracted to the prophetic religion of the Karen and fascinated by their myth of creation and the lost book of wisdom. Most writings on this myth, however, take the missionary version as a universal belief among all Karen. I believe that it is relevant to assess how this myth came to constitute the essence of (Christian) Karen identity and how the missionaries used Karen utopian ideas in their own messianic construction. Scholars have overlooked Mason's explanation about how he and his competent Karen assistant, Saw Quala, collected different versions of the myth among Karen groups living in Tenasserim, and selected the most useful. Mason wrote:

The Karens were not agreed in regard to the name to be used for God. In some sections one word was in use, in others another. I found that according to the tradition *Yuwah* was the omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent Creator and Ruler of the world; and he must therefore be, I reasoned, the true God. I therefore adopted the word *Yuwah* in prayer and preaching, *to the exclusion of the other* (BMM 36: 131; my emphasis).

- 12 The *Yuwah* (or *Y'wa*) tradition is mentioned for the first time in 1834 by Mason in his translations of the poetry depicting heaven, Satan, the fall of man, and other biblical themes. In three generations, *Ka Cha Yuwah* (Lord/Ruler *Yuwah*) will burn the earth and the waters will rise. One verse foresees for the Karen a new era as prosperous town dwellers and "citizens;" another foresees the arrival of a Karen king and the end of their sufferings:

Good persons, the good,
Shall go to the silver town,
The silver city;
Righteous persons, the righteous,
Shall go to the new town, the new city;
Persons that believe the father and mother [*sic*]
Shall enjoy the golden palace.

In the midst of their sufferings,
They remember the ancient sayings of the elders,
That God would yet save them,
That a Karen king would yet appear.
The Talain (Mon) kings have had their season,
The Burman kings have had their season;

And the foreign kings will have their season,
But the Karen king will yet appear.
When the Karen king arrives,
There will be only one monarch;
When the Karen king comes,
Then there will be neither rich nor poor;
When the Karen king arrives,
Every thing [*sic*] will be happy;
When the Karen king arrives,
The beasts will be happy;
When the Karens will have a king,
Lions and leopards will lose their savageness.¹²

- 13 Thus, when they collected Karen myths, the missionaries selected the most suitable, that is, those most easily adaptable to Old Testament creations. In this version, the Lord, *Kacha Yuwah*, "the Supreme Being," was identified with the Jehovah of the Old Testament, who has given the book of wisdom to all mankind.



The Karen brother lost his book of parchment in his swidden field and is now waiting for the white brother to return with his golden book, and for the missionaries this could only be the Bible. The term *ka cha* in Pwo (*ka hsa* in Sgaw) means “lord,” as in Ka Cha Glông, “Lord of the Pagoda,” or Buddha (see *Thesaurus* 1963: 4). A closer look reveals that the verses and the moral precepts are similar to those of the Buddhist-oriented movements, as we shall see in the following. The verses signify the expectations of a moral empowerment of the Karen and of a cultural and political revival. Thus, by missionary agency, one mythological figure among many entered the Karen translation of the Karen Bible, since its first edition in 1843, as the Creator and Lord, and pervaded the whole corpus of literature on the Karen.¹³ Certainly the myth of Yuwah and the lost book is widely told among Karen. Among the Buddhist Karen I know, however, there is no worship of this figure. And, significantly, the Baptist missionary, E.B. Cross, wrote: “At the time when Christianity was first introduced among the Karens, no distinct traces of the worship of *Yuwah* were found.”¹⁴ I suggest that the missionaries, consciously or not, understated the widespread worship of the future Buddha. Moreover, we find in their journals many descriptions of Buddhist-oriented religious movements similar to the Lu Baung and Talakhoung movements, and of a strong resistance to Christian missionaries and conversion.

¹⁴ In the beginning, the religious leaders whom the missionaries met were wearing a white dress, known as *bu kho* in Sgaw Karen, with a string around their wrists and beads around their necks. They urged their followers to abstain from drinking alcohol and from killing chickens and other animals as offerings to the spirits (*BMM* 31: 390; 9: 243). Some of the *bu kho* were also vegetarians. Ceremonies were held at the full moon and worship was performed in “rest houses,” *zayat*, constructed like temples and in pagodas built of bamboo and mud (see Fig. 2). Sometimes a book was worshipped and, in two villages, Mason found the scriptures as objects of worship. Missionaries listened eagerly to prophecies about a “new era,” a king, and “God” sending a messenger: “The priest of Bodh whose reign is short must leave to make them room,” *i.e.*, to make room for a new era and a Karen king.¹⁵ Although this prophecy is based on Karen interpretation of Buddhist cosmology, the Baptist Mission foresaw the end of Buddhism and a revival of Karen pristine Christianity, long subdued by ignorance and heathen practices. The leaders dressed in white said that they learned the prophecies from a hermit (*yathe*; *ruesi* in Sanskrit; see *BMM* 9: 234; 31: 390; 39: 135). Rarely did the missionaries recognize that, although there were no monks in the villages, these Karen were, in fact, Buddhists and expecting Ariya. The Karen movements have been and remain unopposed to monks, whom they venerate. But the prophecies of the *yathe* said that the era of Gaudama Buddha and the monks was over, and that Ariya is the first and most important Buddha, who had been waiting during the reigns of the other Buddhas; therefore, there is no need to worship with the monks of the Gaudama era. It is not surprising, thus, that the missionaries considered these movements to be non-Buddhist, and focused on the myth of Yuwah, which they constructed as the pristine Christian mythology of all Karen. Wherever missionaries saw Karen in monasteries, they usually gave up attempts to convert them. But among the movements, they have continued their work to the present day, despite fierce opposition.

Fig. 2. Religious leaders circumambulate a pagoda made of bamboo during a Lu Baung ceremony





Thi Pho Gee village, Ban Rai District, Uthaitхани, 1971

(Photo M. Gravers)

- 15 In general, the Karen did not expect the return of Yuwah, but of Ariya.¹⁶ The king mentioned in the verse cited above is most likely a *cakkavatti* figure, a universal ruler sent by King Indra, who is a prominent figure in the cosmology. The missionaries continued to confuse their own translations of creator and king with *min laung* (“imminent king”) and *bodhisatta*: “The Karen in all this region north of Moulmein have a tradition that God is about to visit this world in human form. Numbers have inquired if Mr. Vinton is that God” (*BMM* 16: 295). Half a century later, in 1902, Alonzo Bunker wrote about the Yuwah myth and a coming Karen king: “Still mistaken about the nature of the Deliverer and persistently regarding him as a temporal king, like the Jesus of the old, they were ready for any extreme measure. If a leader had appeared, these simple-minded people would have rallied around him by their thousands, armed, and ready to make war upon their oppressors, the Burmans” (Bunker 1902: 98). Indeed, the Karen rallied and rebelled, but also against the foreigners and their intervention in their religious and social universe. The white foreigner (*kho la*) was considered a powerful figure, who would not always share his knowledge and power, and was therefore a source of unrest in the world.
- 16 The first Baptist missionaries saw in the Karen the lost tribe of Israel and had great expectations in their conversion. The Karen’s cognition simultaneously anticipated the revelation of knowledge and redemption from the evil forces of the spirits and from the repressive officials. Thus, it was a conjunction of powerful symbols and expectations, as expressed by a Karen assistant to Vinton: “I have learned one thing—the most valuable of all knowledge—to pray and obtain” (*BMM* 25: 85).

Prophetic Rebellions

- 17 Interestingly, in 1833, Adoniram Judson, one of the pioneering missionaries, met the leader of a movement that later developed into a rebellion. That leader, known to the missionaries as “the prophet Areemaday” (Ariya Metteya), was a Sgaw Karen named Ta Bu Pho, who lived along the Yunzalin river and had gained wide support



from Karen in the area between the rivers Sittang and Salween, down to Moulmein. He was eager to establish contact with the American missionaries and invited them to open a school. In the missionaries' journals, he is described as "an extraordinary young man of twenty" and "the great prophet." He said that he was a Buddhist and that he foresaw a great war during which "God would appear in the form of a king and restore the reign of peace" (*BMM* 17; 13: 40). His movement expected the return of Ariya, and it is indeed extraordinary that he named himself Ariya Metteya. The missionaries had hoped to win him and his numerous followers over to Christ, but these Karen resisted fiercely. They wanted a share in the knowledge and power of the white *kho la* as part of their own religion. Other Karen religious leaders resisted conversion by a rare and demonstrative inhospitality or withdrew to the forest.

18 The religious leaders were called *bu kho* in Sgaw Karen (*boung kho* in Pwo), meaning "the head of religious merit." Areemaday was a *bu kho* (the term is still widely used), whose role is to keep up the ethical rules (*sila*) until Ariya's time. He created a zone of morality and peace in a village or a group of villages, and the center of this zone was (and is) a pagoda. While some *bu kho* became famous and gained support from a wide area in Burma and Thailand, only rarely did they proclaim themselves a *min laung*—as Areemaday did around 1840, forming with the Kayah chief or prince (*sawbwa*) of Baw Lakhé an alliance to fight against a Burmese force in 1844-46. At that time, the area was considered a tributary to the king of Burma, and Areemaday was killed and his followers dispersed and slaughtered (Mason in *BMM* 42). Areemaday was just one Karen *min laung* in a "dynastic" line of leaders. The first in this genealogy of ten *min laung*, as reported by British intelligence sources, was Saw Quai Ran, who appeared in the eighteenth century, probably before or at the same time as King S'min Dhaw. Every single one of the following *min laung* referred to Saw Quai Ran and venerated this great leader, who was believed to return some day with an army.

19 The *bu kho* resisted conversion to Christianity and the social divide that it created. The missionaries reacted against the 'pagan prophets' by interrupting *bu kho* rituals and prayers with Christian songs and strong-worded doomsday speeches urging the Karen to break with prophets and monks. In several instances, missionaries tried to stop the hoisting of a pagoda spire or "umbrella" (*hs'doeng* in Karen; *hti* in Burmese), a powerful symbol of Buddhism and royal power. Missionary Bullard intervened in a ritual raising of an "image" (*i.e.*, a pagoda spire or finial) to the top of a pagoda. He described vividly in his journal how he told them to let go of the rope. After some argument, Bullard said "let me cut the rope," and the spire suddenly came down. While the Karen were shaking with anger, Bullard triumphed, trusting that the spire had fallen by the power of his words and belief (*BMM* 25: 311-315).

20 When the British annexed central Burma in 1852, the missionaries played an important role and tried to conquer new spiritual ground. They saw Buddhism as a spent spiritual force, declining like the "despotic Burman rule." However, they encountered fierce resistance. In 1856, a new movement developed into one of the most widespread rebellions during colonial rule. Among the leaders were the two sons of Areemaday. The new *min laung* along the Yunzalin River was Saw Duai Gow, whose headquarters were near Papun and who was allied with the chief of eastern Kayah. The guerilla force, also including Shan, attacked Christian Karen villages, as well as Burmese villages where the headmen cooperated with the British. When the colonial force of British officers, sepoy from India, and Christian Karen volunteers entered the mountains, the guerillas ambushed it in ravines with traps made of pointed and poisoned bamboo, then attacked it with big stones and



crossbows. “These marauders and deluded savages” withdrew quickly when the army forced them uphill “with heartily [sic] cheers; the Karens yelled and screamed in return” (see *India* 1856-57). Numerous Indian soldiers and British officers were wounded or killed in this guerilla war between 1856 and 1860. Many Karen, including unarmed villagers, were killed, and thousands left their villages and crops, which were then burned by the British army. Visiting the area in 1861, Francis Mason, who had visited it in 1837, reported that it was almost deserted. Hunger and poverty resulted from the war. In 1857, Mason asked the British Commissioner of Pegu to arm 1000 Christian Karen, but the British hesitated, fearing that some of them would abjure Christianity and join the rebellion.¹⁷

21 When the British army reached Papun, located in the hills above the Yunzalin River, they found a camp in a large compound with, in its center, a pagoda decorated with colored flags. Here the leader had collected an arsenal of weapons, mainly spears and crossbows, and also muskets. The camp had been deserted. Next to the pagoda was a *pyatthat*, an audience hall including a throne, where the *mìn laùng*, Saw Duai Gow, received his followers and their donations. The pagoda with its top spire (*hti*) is a symbol of power and signals a zone where peace and morality reign (see Fig. 3). The *pyatthat*, normally with a seven- or nine-tiered roof, is related to royalty. Like all the Karen *mìn laùng*, Saw Duai Gow used Papun as his center and rebuilt the pagoda’s *hti* made by his predecessor, Ta Bu Pho (Areemaday), thus confirming his legitimate position in the dynastic line.¹⁸ After this ritual, Saw Duai Gow declared himself *hpayà laùng*, imminent Buddha! The compound also included several barracks for the men. Reports do not specify the exact number of the *mìn laùng*’s supporters, but figures from a few hundred to two thousand guerillas are mentioned. Saw Duai Gow was forced to withdraw to eastern Kayah by coordinated British army expeditions. He is believed to have been killed by Thai forces from Chiangmai. Karen from Thailand participated in the rebellion (Stern 1968: 307).

Fig. 3. Karen pagoda in Burmese style, made of bricks, in Sangkhlaburi



In the foreground, a derelict pagoda of dirt and bamboo, 1996

(Photo M. Gravers)



At the same time as Saw Duai Gow proclaimed himself *mìn laùng*, a leader appeared and a rebellion began around Bassein, where the Mission had a new

stronghold. This *min laung* (*mau lay* in Karen), too, had a large following. He was believed to have come from Toungoo and could not speak the local dialect. Like Saw Duai Gow, he proclaimed that he would “drive out kullahs” (or *kho la*, “the foreigners,” a term used in Burmese and Karen): The Mon, Burmese, and English had had their time; now the time had come for the Karen to assert their rights, as stated in the verses cited above. He issued proclamations and claimed a royal mandate, used royal titles, and made tattoos making his followers invulnerable. The reports said he claimed to be an incarnation of a deity, with the 32 signs and 80 marks of a superior being. These are signs of a *cakkavatti* or a *bodhisatta*. But his rebellion was easily subdued and he was arrested.¹⁹ At first, he was believed to have acted on orders from the Burmese king. But it was a Karen movement, and probably related to the Papun rebellion. This confused the colonial administration, who relied on the missionaries’ interpretation of the “simple minded and superstitious” Karen, prone to follow “imposters and false prophets.” In a report to the British Commissioner, Baptist missionary Brayton stated that “[I]t is a trait in the national character of the Karen to have religious prophets rising up among them” (*India* 1856-57, vol. 25). According to missionary Carpenter, who worked in Bassein, many Karen believed that Christ would come again soon and give his disciples “great treasures and power.” “Throw away your brass and tin ornaments [...] when Christ comes he will give us abundance of silver and gold,” the prophet proclaimed.²⁰ Ironically, the Mission now struggled against the same expectations that had attracted many Karen to Christianity and, at the same time, raised expectations among the missionaries.

23 Some sources say that it was a formidable rebellion, while others say it was exaggerated. However, its importance is obvious in intelligence reports, in particular since it happened simultaneously with the so-called “Great Mutiny” in India. New prophets and *min laung* continued to appear among Karen in the mountains. In 1867, one Maung Dee Pha declared himself *min laung* near Papun. Colonial reports called him a *dacoit*, a bandit. As late as 1938, a leader named Phu Gwe Gow, described as an “enlightened agitator,” started a millennial movement in the Salween area. He was killed by the British-organized Force-136 during the Second World War.

24 The British and the missionaries considered these movements and rebellions to be anti-colonial as well as anti-Christian. And that was indeed the case. Several missionary journals mentioned Karen anger over high poll taxes after the British annexed central Burma.²¹ Burmese officials collected the taxes ruthlessly and excessively. Moreover, conversion to Christianity divided families and villages. Baptism meant that Christians had to sever relations with heathen relatives and friends. Conversion was thus a source of immense social suffering and conflict, dividing villages and families. The other prominent aspect was the struggle to establish a legitimate political leadership using the symbolism of the Mon and Burmese kingdoms. This, however, is not the same as proclaiming a pure ethnic Sgaw or Pwo Karen kingdom. Shan, Mon, Pa-o, Kayah, and probably members of other ethnic groups participated in the rebellions. One of the most powerful and feared rebel leaders was a Pa-o named Maung Thee Lah. The British forces put a reward on his head and he was killed during an attack.

25 The Ariya rebellion utilized the Buddhist cosmology and rituals to create a sense of continuity and legitimization. The symbol of the pagoda, the precepts, and the *bu kho* tradition enhanced the moral empowerment of the movements and their leaders. Papun, a small town of 1,400 inhabitants around 1900, became the central place of their new expanding universe, and the pagoda communicated its symbolic power inside and outside ethnic boundaries. All these elements signified a new era



for the Karen, as related in the verses, and a revitalized ethnic identity. The Karen version of Buddhist cosmology and leadership, however, was also shared by other ethnic groups and mobilized people across ethnic boundaries. It annulled differences for the time being, and focused on one “otherness,” *kullah*, the white foreigner: that is, not just “we the Karen against the foreigners,” but “we the Buddhists against the Christian *kullahs*.”

26 The movements were projects for a total transformation of the social order. How, then, can we understand the transformation of a Buddhist-oriented movement and its non-violent and vegetarian ideals into armed rebellion? To understand this transformation, we must examine the cosmology and its prophetic model of a new era of peace and morality under Ariya. I shall use present-day Karen religious movements for this purpose, although I am aware that one cannot read today’s content backwards to explain history. Religion is not an unchangeable cultural schema. Nevertheless, by examining present-day movements and comparing them to descriptions available in missionary journals, we can reasonably surmise the ways in which the ideals and the symbols in the models of the past informed social practice.

27 Anticipating Ariya: Lu Baung and Talakhong Cosmology

28 Thailand’s Karen located near the Burmese border have had extensive contact with their ethnic cousins in Burma. Although society, culture, and the religious movements show great variation, they share a common cosmology. It is thus possible to identify these common traits in the cosmology of the Lu Baung and the Talakhong (Telakhon) movements. In 1848, missionaries Bennett and Cross visited “Siamese” Karen in Tenasserim province. Bennett described a pagoda made “of dirt and bamboo,” a *zayat*, and ceremonies led by a religious leader, *boung kho*, in white dress similar to the Lu Baung. The movement thus extended from the Siamese provinces of Uthaihani and Kanchanaburi into Burma. Other movements, such as Areemaday’s, probably also had followers in Thailand.²² The Karen of the Lu Baung identify themselves as Ga Phloun Lu Baung Saraung, “Pwo Karen of the Yellow Thread Movement”—*saraung* [Mon *saran*] refers to ceremonies and collective religious work in general (Shorto 1971: 30, 374).

29 The Lu Baung (Yellow Thread) Pwo Karen relate how a hermit (*yathe*) named Th’ Hsoeng Ne Dje visited them in the past and urged them to quit raising pigs and chickens to be sacrificed as offerings to the malevolent spirits called *ka lau*. The *yathe* was a person of high *kamma* (in Pali; *karma* in Sanskrit; *khoun* in Pwo), sent by king Indra (Hs’ Meing Eing). He advised the Karen on an alternative worship that could protect against evil spirits and prevent misfortune: They should fasten a yellow string made of seven cotton threads around their wrists, and build a pagoda (*glông*) and a *zayat* (*hs’ ro*) as their center of worship. There they should earn merit at the lunar phases and perform larger ceremonies during a full moon. Instead of pigs and chickens, they should make offerings of flowers and wax candles; most importantly, they should follow the Buddhist precepts (*sila*), avoiding killing, fornication, theft, lies, etc. They had to keep the area clean and avoid drinking alcohol, using opium, and carrying weapons during ceremonies. The *yathe* advised them to appoint a *boung kho*, “head of merit,” as their ceremonial leader and moral adviser. In front of the entrance to the pagoda, they had to erect a pole with a *tha doeng thô* (spire of a pagoda; *tdun* in Mon; *hti* in Burmese), dedicated to the Earth Goddess, Hsong Th’ Rwi, who protects Buddhist ethic and merit-making before the arrival of Ariya (Metteya).²³ This goddess is therefore the most important figure, and the pole is “the heart” of Lu Baung religious work. The pole symbolizes the rule of *dhamma* (*thô*), *i.e.*, the law and rules of Buddhism. At this pole, libation takes place at the end of ceremonies. Next to this pole is another, four-branched pole,



called *la'*, probably symbolizing the universe and its directions (the four *lokapala*) and related to Indra (see Fig. 4). A *la'* is usually erected before a pagoda, to “conquer” the area so that *dhamma* can gain influence. A *tha doeng* pole is placed close to every house to protect the family. It “shades and cools down,” say the Pwo Karen. During the ceremonies, Indra, his messengers, the *deva* (*de wea tau*) deities, Hs' Meing Htô (Dhammaraja), and other protective and spirit-like figures descend from their heavens and participate in earning merit. The pagoda is the universe in miniature with a *tha doeng* at the center for Ka Cha Glông, Buddha. From this center radiates the moral empowerment of a wider zone. It is a sacred (*tjein hri*) place and space, sprinkled with libation water in order to become a “cool,” *i.e.*, peaceful place.

Fig. 4. The *la'* and its fence are sprinkled with libation water by the boung mü in order to ‘cool the place,’ *i.e.*, make it peaceful, during a ceremony for Phi Be Yu, the Rice Goddess





Thi Pho Chue village, Ban Rai District, Uthaitхани, 1971

(Photo M. Gravers)

- 30 The *yathe* told the Karen that they could accumulate merit (*boung*; from Mon *pon*; Pali *puñña*) and hope to avoid misfortune, live in peace, and exist in the era of Ariya. All their prayers contain this hope and anticipation. The yellow string, which replaced a white one, is the most important symbol. By the yellow color (of Buddhism) they can be recognized after the apocalyptic chaos preceding Ariya's arrival. The string also protects the person's life and soul. Misfortune and disaster will strike a person, in particular a woman, who renounces the string and changes denomination.²⁴ Until about 1960, the string was tied in an annual collective ceremony, provided that no participant raised and ate chickens or pigs and that all



rules were strictly followed. This has now become impossible, and the Pwo will not risk incurring misfortune by holding a flawed ritual, polluted by Thai visitors with weapons or alcohol, for example.

31 The other important part of the legend is the liberation from the resource-consuming ritual offering of chickens and pigs to the evil spirits, as well as from drinking rice liquor, the cause of anger and violence. These rituals were also difficult to perform and did not always work. Now it suffices to place a tray with flowers, candles, and a human figure made of rice outside the village and ask the spirits to leave.

32 One of the ceremonies, presided over by elder women, is for the Rice Goddess (Phi Be Yuh). At the lunar new year, the young people wash the *boung kho*'s and their parents' feet in lustral water. The women wash their men's feet and dry them with their long hair (today, they use a towel). In this way, demeritorious acts are washed away, merit transferred, and respect shown. Premarital sex and fornication have to be exposed and the culprits must pay a fine to the *boung kho* and pray for forgiveness to Hsong Th' Rwi. If such acts are not disclosed, the whole family, and sometimes the whole community, may be hit by disease and other calamities. The male culprit will be disfigured or devoured by a tiger!

33 In prayers, in which the *boung kho* mixes Karen with Mon terms, the Karen reveal and explain the intentions of the Lu Baung religion. His followers will remember the ancestors' *kamma* and pray for good crops and enough food, for illness to be averted, for the precepts to be followed and demerit avoided, for more knowledge (*paung nya*, from Pali *pañña*, "wisdom") to be obtained, for themselves to become wealthy and "citizens" (*doung pho*, "children of the city;" *doung* corresponds to Mon *dun*, "city"); and, most importantly, pray for a leader to appear and the era of Ariya Metteya to arrive. They pray to Hsong Th' Rwi, *deva*, and Indra to fulfill their wishes. Everything depends on merit, and merit depends on a relatively peaceful social order. But why not pay respect to the monk, give him alms, and listen to his recitation? To discover the meaning of Lu Baung cosmology, it is important to take a closer look at the different types of movement leaders and their relative symbolic power.

34 A *yathe* (*ruesi*; Pwo *eing hsai*) is a hermit monk in a brown or Bordeaux robe, with long hair and a rosary, who wanders around, sleeps in caves, keeps to celibacy and a vegetarian diet, and often fasts.²⁵ He lives alone in the wilderness, contrary to the monks living a collectively organized life in a monastery, which is part of the Sangha. He is outside of society and knows how to handle the wild and supernatural forces, for example, by using meditation. To the Karen, he is a wise man and can live as a Buddhist, independent of the Sangha hierarchy. The *yathe* is viewed as a liberator preparing for the arrival of Ariya and representing him on Earth. Thus, he is close to the *cakkavatti* ideal, as well as to the *bodhisatta* and his ten perfections. A *yathe* is sometimes given the title of *talakhoung*; *tala* is a Mon word used as a title for a monk (*talapoin*) or Buddha;²⁶ *khoun* means *kamma*, i.e., a person possessing a special *kamma*. A *yathe* may also reappear before or simultaneously with Ariya.

35 The *boung kho* (head of merit), in white dress and with a turban around his long hair, is a *yathe*'s disciple, the keeper of morality and peace, and the ceremonial leader. He must avoid eating meat during the ceremonies. His work is viewed as "cooling down" the community, compared to a political leader whose domain and work is "hot." He is married and his wife is also a ceremonial leader (*boung mü*; see Fig. 5). She continues his work after his death, and such widows can become leaders in their own right. Often a *boung kho*'s son becomes a leader when he has acquired sufficient knowledge and experience. A *boung kho* works like everyone



else. He prepares for the coming of Ariya and has contact with his messengers, Hsong Th' Rwi, the *deva*, and Indra. He can pay respect to a monk and join in ceremonies in monasteries. But he need not do so, since he is as effective a “field of merit” and guardian of the precepts as a monk! He represents Ariya, the imminent Buddha. His influence is normally limited to his village, although the oldest *boung kho* is paid respect and revered by the younger leaders in other villages.

Fig. 5. Boung kho and boung mü



Pho Meing village, Ban Rai District, Uthathani, 1989

(Photo M. Gravers)



Boung kho in Uthathani province explained that the monk, as created by the historical Buddha, had lost his moral power and could not observe the many precepts and rules. The monk may also leave the order, whilst the *boung kho* must

continue until he dies, or else he faces the punishment of the spirits and loses merit. In other words, the *boung kho* has a higher moral power than the monk.

37 The *min laung* (“embryo king,” “pretender”)²⁷ is a different, although related, character. He is the man of the moment, combining many of the ideals and figures discussed above, in particular *cakkavatti* and *dhammaraja*. His identity is often obscure and he has to prove that he has the merit and ability to organize and lead an armed struggle. Sometimes, a *yathe* or *boung kho*, like Areemaday, proclaims himself *min laung*, according to Mason (*BMM* 42: 66). The *yathe* had the advantage of his wandering life, which conferred on him an unclear origin and identity.

38 The Karen *min laung*, however, have rarely been near real royal power since the time of King S’Min Dhaw, in the 1740s. The important point, thus, is not whether a kingdom will materialize, but rather how to expand a sphere of control, repair a fragmented universe, and bring peace.

39 The inner world or zone of the *yathe* and *boung kho* is a sphere of merit, non-violence, and morality; it is relatively cool, clean, and harmonious; in other words, a sanctified domain. The center is the pagoda and *zayat*. The world outside is governed by destructive forces; it is hot and contested. Here the *min laung* has the ability to intervene and he must fight to expand the inner sphere into hostile outside terrain. Before Ariya’s advent, apocalyptic destruction will reduce the peaceful spheres to small enclaves. If we translate this symbolism into worldly practices, these Karen, like the Mon and Burmese, use the cosmological model to explain changes, crises, as well as modernization. In times of crisis, this model is highly accentuated.

40 In recent years, the Lu Baung religion has become very difficult to maintain in the face of dramatic economic and social changes.²⁸ A brief summary of the changes can merely indicate the causes of the crisis. In the 1970s, large tracts of forest disappeared and many villages lost control of most of the land they used to farm. The Srinakharin Dam flooded 16,000 ha of forest in the Huai Kha Khaeng wildlife sanctuary and many villages were displaced. Many Karen joined the Communist Party of Thailand guerillas in the 1970s, and the Karen suffered from the guerilla war, which ended in 1982. Villages in the forest have been forced to abandon swidden agriculture and reduce their cultivated area. In 2000, five Lu Baung villages in the Tung Yai wildlife sanctuary were forced to move out by the Royal Forest Department and the army, which destroyed their religious buildings and pagodas. Following media attention, they were finally allowed to stay. Farther north, in Mae Janta Lu Baung village, the Border Patrol Police (BPP) forced the Karen to eat pork and harassed them during ceremonies. The BPP threatened the villagers with eviction from the wildlife sanctuary. The conflict resulted in the murder of five policemen, and 22 Karen were jailed. In some villages, the Lu Baung gave up their religion and looked to charismatic monks for leadership. The young generation sometimes opposes the religious rules, arguing that they inhibit adaptation to modern life and maintain a relative poverty. However, in 2000, a big Lu Baung pagoda ceremony took place in a Pwo Karen area, in Uthathani province, with guests coming from villages far away. The Karen in this area had almost abandoned Lu Baung rituals, and only one *boung kho* was left to carry out the ritual work. Thus, the social memory of the Karen cosmological model is still at work and can mobilize people in “defiance of disenchantment” (*cf.* Comaroff 1997) This could be a sign of a revitalization of identity, an attempt to regain moral control, communicated to the “outside” world.

41 Whilst the inner world or universe of the Lu Baung movement was, and still is, based on egalitarian principles, the Talakhong (or Telakhon) movement in Burma and Thailand is more hierarchical and has a “dynastic” line. It has one *yathe* leader,



the *talakhong*, called Phu Chai' ("Grandfather Buddha").²⁹ Like the Lu Baung, the Talakhong has probably shrunk in membership since the 1960s, but it still has an estimated 3,000-5,000 followers—Sgaw and Pwo, as well as some Mon and Shan.³⁰ It was founded in Burma by a *yathe* named Saw Yoh, probably in the mid-nineteenth century, and could be related to Areemaday's movement and the 1856 rebellion. He established the center of the movement in Mae Khlhong province (now Tak province), in Siam. Its center today is still the village of Lae Thong Kho (Ler Toh Koh in Sgaw, and sometimes called Htimaw) in Thailand's Tak province, on the border with Burma.

42 The leader and Phu Chai' since 1989, U Jai was born in Burma. He is the tenth *yathe* since Saw Yoh, and dresses in white with his long hair tied in a knot on his forehead. He is celibate and women are not allowed into the *hs' ro'* (*zayat*). The Talakhong uses the same cosmology as the Lu Baung, but it has a different organization. Phu Chai' heads different committees. *Boung kho*, religious leaders, and *gaw kho*, "secular heads" in charge of the school and taxes, are his subordinates. Near his *zayat* live a group of about eight young men, novices, among whom the next leader is selected by him.

43 The ceremonial place is also different from the Lu Baung. There is a fence where Indra, the ruler of the present era, visits the world, and a bridge where Talakhong followers will meet Ariya, whom they consider to be the real Buddha. There are also poles like the *hs' doeng* and a cross-like structure called *tala*, symbolizing Buddha and his five incarnations. Two big tusks from a white elephant are a symbol of Indra. Some rituals differ from the Lu Baung, for example, the big bonfire at the end of the ceremonies. Buddhist monks sometimes seem to participate in rituals, which also deviates from Lu Baung practice.

44 T. Stern has given the most comprehensive account of this movement and says that "Saw Yoh was jailed [in Burma] by officials who suspected him of rebellious designs" (Stern 1968: 322). When he came to Siam, the authorities there also considered him a rebel, and Thai authorities have constantly kept the movement under surveillance. In the 1950s the Talakhong joined with the KNU in attacks on Burmese forces; in the 1960s, it had a short alliance with another group, including Karen, from the Communist Party of Thailand. However, the Talakhong has quickly dropped these alliances to maintain its independence. At this time, Phu Chai' had a book of rules written to give the movement a legitimate status vis-à-vis the state authorities.

45 According to Talakhong tradition, Phu Chai' is the only person able to read the golden book and recognize Ariya. Saw Yoh was said to be a grandson of King Indra, sent down amongst the Karen.³¹ A prophecy told that important events would occur during the rule of the seventh Phu Chai'. When this seventh Phu Chai' was visited by American and Karen Christian missionaries in the 1960s, he asked for a letter stating that all Karen should join his movement and give him the authority as their leader,³² but the missionaries would not give him such a letter. Instead, they gave him a Bible with golden ornaments, but he was disappointed when he discovered that it did not disclose Western scientific knowledge. He wanted the white brothers to establish a school, but he did not want to be converted.

46 As it was widely believed that Ariya would appear in the time of his rule, the seventh Phu Chai' had a dream that he was Ariya. Then he began acting in a more secular fashion, taking a wife and killing his critics. The relationship with the Christians stopped after Phu Chai' accused them of withholding the true Golden Book. A conflict also developed with the Karen National Union (KNU), and Phu Chai' asked the missionaries to help stop the conflict between the KNU and the Burmese army, arguing that the fighting disturbed the religious consciousness of the Karen.



He was killed around 1966 by the KNU, which considered him a liability to its nationalist cause. Since then, male followers began to wear a green *longyi* (sarong for men), diverging from the blue and red KNU *longyi*.

47 The Talakhong is more fundamentalist in the way it maintains what it considers to be genuine Karen traditions; for example, the men still keep their long hair tied in a knot on their forehead and wear a long white gown during the ceremonies, and trousers are banned. As in the Lu Baung movement, there is a ban on raising and eating chickens and pigs. Phu Chai' fasts during the rainy season and his disciples are vegetarians. Opium and liquor are strictly prohibited, as well as watching movies or theatre. Fornication is an offence against the whole movement and the culprits must build a small pagoda, make offerings of candles and flowers, and give the leaders white cloth and utensils before they are allowed to participate in rituals again. The Talakhong keeps a book of rules in a special box for the holy books. These rules are probably followed most strictly around the Phu Chai' in Lae Thong Khu.

48 Both the Lu Baung and Talakhong movements have worked to balance modern knowledge with the traditional cosmology and morality.³³ If we compare them, it appears that the former is egalitarian and includes women in all rituals, while the latter is a hierarchical version of the same social and cultural model. Both combine a collective memory of past experiences of social crises and social suffering, and anticipate a peaceful and prosperous future. The Talakhong believes that all religions will combine and that the Karen people will be united with the arrival of Ariya. The Lu Baung believes that a Karen king, an old culture hero named Phu Leaung Heing, will appear, as in the verses cited above. The model explains the different sources of power, their agencies and possible practices for a change. They have much in common with the Kachin *gumsa-gumlao* model in Edmund Leach's 1954 classical anthropological study (Leach 1964). The Karen movements, however, are not opposite structures, but stages in the same process of social change, only fragments of the history of which can be related in this paper. The aim of the Buddhist Karen movements is to create a sphere of peace and morality, to straighten a skewed and chaotic universe. Rebellion and the establishment of a political domain under a Karen leader are merely parts of this project, and not an aim in itself.

49 The Karen movements have many features in common with popular Buddhism in Burma.³⁴ They clearly demonstrate how they relate to Burmese and Mon religious cosmology. This is not a denial of a specific Karen identity. On the contrary, it shows a particular and diversified Karen culture within the universalizing Buddhist cosmology. In the modern politics of ethnic difference and nationalism, the movements have become part of new modes of categorization and boundary making in which Buddhists belong to the Myanmar state and Christians are more or less outside.

U Thuzana and his “Democratic Karen Buddhism”

50 A recent, powerful Buddhist movement among Buddhist Karen in Burma is based on the same cosmology and tradition. At the same time, it is a reaction to fifty years of ethnic rebellion and nationalist struggles in Burma. The monk, U Thuzana, mobilized the Buddhist Pwo and Sgaw Karen, causing a split in the Karen National Union (KNU) in 1995.³⁵ The Buddhist Karen were generally the poorest fighters in



the KNU and felt they suffered heavy casualties while the educated, wealthy Christian elite were living in luxury. They also felt that Buddhism was suppressed, and U Thuzana complained that there was no proper pagoda at the KNU headquarters at Manerplaw. He began building pagodas on the mountains near the Salween River above the KNU headquarters and invited the Karen to stay in the fire zone between the KNU and the Burmese army. He urged the Karen to become vegetarian (or even vegan) and supplied their food. He was joined by numerous Karen, including former KNU soldiers who were tired of fighting and felt that the Buddhist Karen had no influence in the Christian-dominated KNU leadership.

51 U Thuzana's aim was to create a zone of non-violence, a sacred field of merit. His followers attribute him supernatural powers; they take an oath to support his ideas and they drink his "magic" water, consecrated by reciting Buddhist suttas (and sometimes with a bullet in the cup), which protects them. U Thuzana prophesied that, after building fifty pagodas in the Karen State, peace would come, and he thus appealed to many Karen caught in the present conjuncture of endless violence. He resided in the monastery of Myaing Gyi Ngu, at the confluence of the Yunzalin and Salween rivers. One Karen informant described it as being like a palace, centered on the Nan Oo pagoda, but also as a modern center with electricity, four-wheel-drive vehicles, and up-to-date means of communication. Around the monastery, which has remained unaffected by the fighting, about 2,000 Karen families are said to have settled and to be following the vegan ideals.³⁶ U Thuzana issued identity papers with his own stamp, giving free passage through army-controlled areas. Five rules govern those staying at the monastery: no politics, no fighting, no preaching of other religions, no gossip, and all must follow the five Buddhist precepts.

52 In 1995 the Democratic Karen Buddhist Organization (DKBO), led by U Thuzana, was formed in opposition to the KNU, and its armed wing, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), sporting yellow headbands to mark their identity, began raiding Karen refugee camps in Thailand, killing, looting, and burning. It also fought against the KNU's Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA). Recently, 5,000 Karen refugees reportedly opted not to return to Thailand and asked for protection from the DKBA (*The Bangkok Post*, 13 November 2000). But rules in DKBA-controlled settlements must be strictly observed—e.g., meat is totally banned and the soldiers sometimes search houses for meat, eggs, chickens, and fish—and offences are punished with forced labor. Christian Karen who do not follow the rules are forced out. A group of Talakhong Pwo Karen near Pa-an is believed to cooperate with the DKBO, which would clearly link the present struggle with historical movements and the cosmological traditions applied in a new and different social and political context. The number of DKBO followers is said to be now dwindling due to U Thuzana's inability to provide food for his followers. The DKBA is partly controlled by the Burmese army, looting and burning villages supporting the KNU, and is involved in smuggling. U Thuzana himself is said to be traveling around and building pagodas.

53 How can a monk become involved in warfare, which is detrimental to Buddhism? In fact, he is probably not directly involved and, when DKBA actions started, he withdrew into a prolonged seclusion of meditation. If we compare his with previous Karen movements, we may say that he did follow parts of the cosmological schema by establishing an inner sphere or zone of peace and morality. In the outer zone, violence rules in order to eradicate the differences and homogenize otherness. DKBA officers have repeated that the refugees must simply return to Burma and join U Thuzana in the peace zone. Then the fighting will stop! While no information indicates that U Thuzana is viewed as a *cakkavatti* or *bodhisatta*, he acts like a *yathe*, and it would not surprise this writer if some of his



followers have revived the collective memory of previous movements in an attempt to repair their fragmented, violent universe and stop their immense and prolonged suffering. Building pagodas commemorates not only the previous Buddhas, the *bodhisatta* and *cakkavatti*, but also the builders and charismatic leaders from the past associated with pagodas. It is thus a highly ritualized memory associated with the pagoda, its spire, and its builder, carving out a sacred zone or domain in the landscape.

Conclusion

54 Religious movements of the type analyzed above do not reappear because of millennial and rebellious aspects, but *despite* these reactive functions, which often mean defeat and more suffering. The cosmological models of the movements are important in the way they explain previous experiences, intentions, and practices as part of a present project for the future. In the cosmological model, power is highly ritualized and transferred to religious symbols. Rituals activate the historical memory as part of present practices. Values and ethical concepts are transferred from the past to the present through rituals. They provide a schema of collective memory and identity that can supersede the ethnic and political fragmentation and the disenchantment of deadlocked political struggles. Rituals and symbols communicate particular identities as well as universal messages within the larger region. And Buddhism is an active medium of such communication in Burma and Thailand today.

55 These movements signify a continuous reevaluation of cosmology and ethnic identity, aiming at creating order and overcoming crises. By ritualizing the politics of religious difference, they break with the past order and its sufferings (see Comaroff 1997: 309). The problem here, as in similar cases, is that the past is saturated with violence in the name of ethnicity and religion, as in the recent conflict between the Buddhist DKBA and the Christian KNU. The Karen become vegetarians and perform rituals to generate symbolic and political power. They struggle for peace—but, paradoxically, reconfirm that violence precedes peace, as described in the cosmology. When religion and moral rules fail, weapons enter the scene in an inevitable logical cycle of identification of otherness and identity. Thus, prophecies and cosmology are confirmed, or used to explain events. But how do cosmology and ritual become vehicles of empowerment and change (see Comaroff 1997)? First and foremost, by mobilizing social and cultural practices founded in collective historical experiences. For the Karen, these movements transcend local differences in tradition and create a new community of a higher order.

56 The real force of cosmology and rituals lies in the control of knowledge, concepts, rules, and legitimate authority, as we have seen. Leaders and followers enter a process of identification via a complex system of concepts and symbols in order to verify and validate events, persons, and actions in a specific social and political conjuncture. Cosmology and rituals become the symbolic condensation of such conjunctures.

57 Rituals are repetitive, conventionalized acts with a stereotyped symbolism and rhetoric;³⁷ and they include the knowledge of trans-human forces, e.g., deities, spirits, and other supernatural agencies that can enhance power. These mechanisms not only create a sphere of power and legitimate leadership, but they also signify a particular genealogical knowledge and experience that empower participants and their practices. Thus, the Karen call upon previous leaders' merit and potent agency (*cf.* the Karen 'dynastic' line of rebels in the nineteenth century).



Rituals thus are reconstructions of the past and mobilize the collective memory. This is done by using symbols, poetry, prayers, paraphernalia, and other traditions with a relation to the past but informed by the present social situation. Lu Baung prayers refer to the merit and *kamma* of their ancestors and recall how the forebears followed the precepts and rules. In other words, a connection is established between cosmology, experience, and the actual world in a pragmatic totality.

58 Moreover, the historical memory often refers to events and spots in the landscape that symbolize the collective experience.³⁸ The Pwo Karen in Thailand still include the Kwae Ga Baung mountain near Pa-an in prayers and poetry. The legend says that they hid in caves near Kwae Ga Baung during the Alaung Hpayà war. Names of famous pagodas in Burma are mentioned, and previous prophets and their religious work are also remembered. For the Karen, the construction of pagodas represent a symbolic act of re-territorialization of a zone controlled by the Karen vis-à-vis the kingdoms, the colonial power, and the Christian missionaries.

59 Maurice Halbwachs (1992) emphasized that such religious memory is not outside time, but detached from secular time. However, rituals are not separated from secular practice in general: They connect the secular and the sacred spheres and forces of existence, but without making them identical. These mechanisms of collective memory are important sources of empowerment of religious movements and their leaders and followers. Such power, however, depends on the leaders' ability to mobilize followers via a convincing performance of rituals, of moral practice, and of persuasive talk and locution (see Wolf 1999, Comaroff & Comaroff 1993). But locution and personal charisma and performance are only part of their power (Bourdieu 1987). Power depends upon the leaders' transactions of knowledge with the laity. Their knowledge and religious merit, as well as their ability to establish and organize a sanctified zone (*i.e.*, their ritual capacity and practice), are evaluated. Last, but not least, leaders must obtain the approval of and support from the local leaders (*boung kho*). Power, thus, is not merely a question of personal possession of symbolic capital, but one of attributes imparted to a prophet by his followers.³⁹

60 For fifty years, the subaltern Karen in Myanmar and Thailand have been caught between the KNU's nationalism and the Burman nationalism of the military regime. In fact, nationalism and nationalist movements include an analogous ritual repertoire in ceremonies, parades, and rhetoric when the collective power enshrined in the nation is imagined and recalled almost as a trans-human force. Thus, by getting things done as they had been rhetorically pronounced, rituals become forceful demonstrations of symbolic and moral power. For example, the power of the Burmese military regime is performed and displayed in repetitive rituals of inspections and inaugurations, Buddhist ceremonies of hoisting *hti*, parades, and mass meetings, all occasions with a stereotyped and ritualized rhetoric of mass interpellation.⁴⁰

61 Although religious and nationalist movements are different in many ways, they both use ritualized power and the power of rituals. By participating in and acting through rituals, the efficacy of power is generated. It is demonstrated and pronounced, for example, when the Lu Baung Pwo Karen finish a ritual with a prayer and ask for its fulfillment, using the final exclamation *hsa thau'*, "It is done/well done!"—the equivalent of "to pray and to obtain" among Christian Karen. Religious practices can provide means to activate the forces presupposed in the cosmology, in an attempt to defy disenchantment, although not necessarily in the Weberian sense of a universal reaction against modernity (also implied by Comaroff 1997). Such movements are not merely resisting modernity or external



forces, as demonstrated above; they also try to correct a skewed universe, including the failure of or the flawed coherence between past and present, the lack of recognition of culture and identity, and the lack of a decent moral order, as well as the lack of a decent livelihood. Thus, they cannot be analyzed only as reaction, resistance, or defensive action against others but rather as a genuine project of re-enchantment of the world, its forces, and its relations.⁴¹

Bibliographie

ADAS, Michael, 1979, *Prophets of Rebellion. Millenarian Protest Movements against the European Colonial Order*, Chapel Hill, NC: North Carolina University Press.

AUGÉ, Marc, 1999, *An Anthropology for Contemporaneous Worlds*, transl. from the French by Amy Jacobs, Stanford: Stanford University Press.

AUNG SAN SUU KYI, 1997, *The Voice of Hope*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

AUNG TWIN, Michael, 1983, "Divinity, Spirit, and Human: Conceptions of Classical Burmese Kingship," in *Essays on the Classical States of Southeast Asia*, Lorraine Gesick (ed.), New Haven: Yale University, *Southeast Asian Studies*, Monograph Series, No. 26, pp. 45-86.

BARTH, Fredrik, 1989, "The Guru and the Conjuror: Transactions in knowledge and the Shaping of Culture in Southeast Asia and Melanesia," *Man*, 25: 640-653.
DOI : 10.2307/2803658

BARTH, Fredrik, 1993, *Balinese Worlds*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

BBC, 1963, *Burma Baptist Chronicle*, ed. by Maung Shwe Wa (Frederick Dickinson) & Genevieve Soward, Rangoon: Burma Baptist Convention.

BMM, 1829-1872, *Baptist Missionary Magazine*, vol. 9, 1829; vol. 13, 1833; vol. 14, 1834; vol. 16, 1836; vol. 17, 1837; vol. 25, 1845; vol. 28, 1848; vol. 31, 1851; vol. 35, 1855; vol. 36, 1856; vol. 37, 1857; vol. 39, 1859; vol. 40, 1860; vol. 42, 1862; vol. 52, 1872.

BOURDIEU, Pierre, 1987, "Legitimation and Structured Interests in Weber's Sociology of Religion," in *Max Weber, Rationality and Modernity*, Sam Whimster & Scott Lash (eds.), London: Allen & Unwin, pp. 119-136.

BUNKER, Alonzo, 1902, *Soo Thah. A Tale of the Karens*, New York: Fleming H. Revell Company.

CARPENTER, C.H., 1883, *Selfsupport Illustrated in the History of the Bassein Karen Mission 1840-1880*, Boston: Rand, Avery and Company.

CENSUS, 1901, *Census of India*, Burma, vol. I, Rangoon.

COMAROFF, Jean, 1997, "Defying Disenchantment. Reflections on Ritual, Power and History," in *Asian Visions of Authority. Religion and Modern States of East and Southeast Asia*, Charles F. Keyes, F.L. Kendall, & H. Hardacre (eds.), Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, pp. 301-314.

COMAROFF, Jean & John (eds.), 1993, *Modernity and its Malcontents. Ritual and Power in Postcolonial Africa*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

CROSS, E.B., 1854, "The Karens," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 4: 291-315.

FALLA, Jonathan, 1991, *True Love and Batholomew. Rebels on the Burmese Border*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

FERGUSON, J.P., & M. MENDELSON, 1981, "Master of the Buddhist Occult. The Burmese Weikzas," *Contribution to Asian Studies*, 16: 62-76.

FERRARS, Max & Bertha, 1900, *Burma*, London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co.

FURNIVALL, John S., 1939, "The Fashioning of Leviathan: The Beginnings of British Rule in Burma," *Journal of the Burma Research Society*, 29 (1): 1-137.

GOSH, Parimal, 2000, *Brave Men of the Hills. Resistance and Rebellion in Burma, 1825-1932*, London: Hurst & Co.

GRAVERS, Mikael, 1994, "The Pwo Karen Ethnic Minority in the Thai Nation: Destructive 'Hill Tribe' or Utopian Conservationists?," Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen, Centre for East and Southeast Asian Studies, Discussion Papers, No. 23, pp. 21-46.

GRAVERS, Mikael, 1996, "The Karen Making of a Nation," in *Asian Forms of the Nation*, S. Tønnesson & H. Antlöv (eds.), Richmond: Curzon Press, pp. 237-269.



GRAVERS, Mikael, 1999, *Nationalism as Political Paranoia in Burma. An Essay on the Historical Practice of Power*, London: Curzon Press, The Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, Report No. 11.

DOI : 10.4324/9780203639795

GRAVERS, Mikael, 2001a, "God's Army. The Karen Twins, the Invisible Army and the Media," *NIASnytt. Nordic Newsletter of Asian Studies*, 2: 12-16.

GRAVERS, Mikael, 2001b, "Karen Notions of Environment. Space, Place and Power in a Political Landscape," in *Culture in Forest, Forest in Culture. Perspectives from Northern Thailand*, Ebbe Poulsen, Flemming Skov, Sureeratna Lakanavichian, Sornprac Thanisawanyankura, et al. (eds.): Bangkok: Research Centre on Forest and People in Thailand, pp. 55-84.

HALBWACHS, Maurice, 1992, *On Collective Memory*, ed., transl., and with an introd. by Lewis A. Coser, Chicago: Chicago University Press.

DOI : 10.7208/chicago/9780226774497.001.0001

HEFNER, Robert W., 1993, *Conversion to Christianity. Historical and Anthropological Perspectives on a Great Transformation*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

HERBERT, Patricia, 1982, "The Hsaya San Rebellion (1930-1932) Reappraised," Melbourne: Monash University, Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Working Papers, No. 27, pp. 1-16.

INDIA, 1856-57, *India Political and Foreign Proceedings 1856-1857*, The Oriental and India Office Collections, British Library.

JENKINS, Richard, 2000, "Disenchantment and Re-enchantment: Max Weber at the Millennium," *Max Weber Studies*, 1: 11-32.

KEYES, Charles F. (ed.), 1979, *Ethnic Adaptation and Identity. The Karen on the Thai Frontier with Burma*, Philadelphia: Institute for the Studies of Human Issues.

DOI : 10.1111/an.1977.18.9.23.7

LEACH, Edmund R., 1964 [1954], *Political Systems of Highland Burma. A Study of Kachin Social Structure*, London: G. Bell & Sons.

LIEBERMAN, Victor, 1978, "Ethnic Politics in Eighteenth-Century Burma," *Modern Asian Studies*, 12 (3): 455-482.

DOI : 10.1017/S0026749X00006235

MASON, Ellen B., 1862, *Civilizing Mountain Men*, London: James Nisbet & Co.

MAUNG HTIN AUNG, 1959, *Folk Elements in Burmese Buddhism*, Rangoon: Buddha Sasana Council Press.

MENDELSON, Michael, 1961, "A Messianic Buddhist Association in Upper Burma," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 24: 560-580.

DOI : 10.1017/S0041977X000092235

ORTNER, Sherry, 1995, "Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographical Refusal," *Comparative Studies in History and Society*, 37 (1): 173-193.

PE MAUNG TIN, U, 1936, "Buddhism in the Inscriptions of Pagan," *Journal of the Burma Research Society*, 26 (1): 52-70.

PURSER, W.C.B., & SAYA TUNG AUNG, 1920, *A Comparative Dictionary of the Pwo Karen Dialect*, Parts I & II, Rangoon: American Baptist Mission Press.

RENARD, Ronald D., 1986, "The integration of the Karens in the Northern Thai Political Life During the Nineteenth Century," in *Anuson Walter Vella*, R.D. Renard (ed.), Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, pp. 229-247.

SARKISYANZ, E., 1968-69, "Messianic Folk-Buddhism as Ideology of Peasant Revolts in Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Burma," *The Review of Religious Research*, 10: 32-38.

DOI : 10.2307/3510670

SHWAY YOE, 1882, *The Burman, His Life and Notions*, London: Macmillan, 2 vol.

SHORTO, H.L., 1971, *A Dictionary of Mon Inscriptions*, London: Oxford University Press.

SMITH, Martin, 1991, *Burma. Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, London: Zed Books.

SPIRO, Melford, 1997, "Ethnographic Notes on Conception and Dynamics of Political Power in Upper Burma (Prior to 1962)," *Ethnology*, 36 (1): 31-47.

STERN, Theodore, 1968, "Ariya and the Golden Book: A Millenarian Sect Among the Karen," *Journal of Asian Studies*, 27 (2): 297-328.

DOI : 10.2307/2051753



TAMBIAH, Stanley J., 1976, *World Renouncer and World Conqueror. A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand against a Historical Background*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

TAMBIAH, Stanley J., 1985, *Culture, Thought, and Social Action. An Anthropological Perspective*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

THESAURUS, 1963, *Thesaurus of Karen Knowledge*, comp. by Dr. J. Wade, Rangoon: U Maung U.

WEBER, Max, 1964, *The Sociology of Religion*, transl. by Ephraim Fischhoff, introd. by Talcott Parson, Boston: Beacon Press.

WOLF, Eric R., 1999, *Envisioning Power. Ideologies of Dominance and Crisis*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

Notes

1 Associated Press, 3 January, 2002. On the conflict, see further Smith 1991, Gravers 1996 and 1999. On the history of the Karen in Thailand, see Renard 1986, Keyes 1979.

2 *BBC* 1963: 325. See Falla (1991) for a recent and detailed presentation of the Christian Karen and KNU worldview.

3 The author lived and worked in a Pwo Karen community of about 1000 persons in Ban Rai District, Uthaithani province, in 1970-72 and has worked among Pwo and Sgaw Karen in Sangkhlaburi and Kanchanaburi, and in Mae Chaem district, Chiangmai, in 1976, 1989, 1996, 2000, and 2001. He speaks Pwo and reads Pwo and Sgaw.

4 See *BMM* 35: 420; 37: 167; 39: 350; 40: 321. See also Furnivall 1939.

5 By cosmology, I understand the order of the universe and the logic of its forces as related in myths and ritual. There is no Karen word for cosmology.

6 Weber 1964: 46-59. For a discussion, see Bourdieu 1987: 129-135; Hefner 1993: 13; Adas 1979: xx; see also Barth 1989 and 1993 on knowledge and religious leaders.

7 See Shway Yoe (1882, 1: 106ff) for a general version from the *Dīgka Nikaya Sutta*. Ariya will appear 2,500-5,000 years after the last Buddha.

8 According to Maung Htin Aung (1959: 131), worship of Ariya Metteya has been prevalent in Burma for centuries, and U Pe Maung Tin (1936: 59) cites inscriptions on a pagoda in Pagan referring to the worship of the future Buddha. Spiro (1997) has emphasized that *bodhisatta* was important in the 1950s and 1960s. U Nu viewed himself as a coming Buddha. Aung San Suu Kyi was asked if she is a female *bodhisatta*, but replied that she was nowhere near that state, although she would love to become one. (Aung San Suu Kyi 1997: 9). Thus, this tradition is still very much alive!

9 A righteous king who rules according to the Buddhist doctrine, Dhamma, and its ten rules for a king: almsgiving, observance of the precepts, liberality, rectitude, gentleness, self-discipline, control of anger, avoidance of the use of violence, forbearance, and non-opposition to the people's will.

10 See Sarkisyanz (1968-69) and Herbert (1982) on the Hsaya San Rebellion of 1930-31. See also Aung Twin (1983) on the concepts and characters of Burmese cosmology.

11 Lieberman 1978. The king, who reigned in 1740-47, combined Buddha, *dhammaraja* and *cakkavatti* in his title, as all *min laung* (Burmese: "imminent" or "embryo king") have done. He could well have been a Karen, but this part of his identity was insignificant compared to the religious and royal capacities.

12 The first version was published in 1834 by Francis Mason in *BMM* 14, and a longer version, almost thirty years later, by Ellen B. Mason (1862: 366-369). The king in the missionaries' imaginations is, of course, the Messiah. I have not been able to locate a Karen version and it is thus difficult to certify the translation. But I have recorded similar verses and myths.

13 W.C.B. Purser & Saya Tung Aung (1920) translated the Pwo word for Buddha (Chai) as "God" and put "Yuwah" in parenthesis.

14 Cross (1854: 308) rejects Mason's idea of the Karen belonging to the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel.

15 The Lu Baung believe that the role of the monk ("the priest of Bodh") will decline before the arrival of Ariya.



16 Yuwah in the Sgaw Karen tradition does not mingle in worldly affairs. He is the creator and Mü Hra (or Xa) is the guardian spirit acting on Yuwah's behalf, demanding to be fed chickens and pigs.

17 Some of the intelligence reports stated that the leader was a former Christian Karen who had studied in Rangoon. Significantly, his personal identity was blurred in order to emphasize his religious status and knowledge.

18 An old prophecy says that "He who raises a *hti* on the Shwe Dagon pagoda [in Rangoon] shall reign in Pegu [the old Mon capital] within a year" (*BMM* 52: 59), the same theme as in the verses cited above.

19 All these symbolic acts are clearly within the larger Burmese-Mon-Karen *min laung* tradition, as it appear-ed, for example, in the Hsaya San rebellion 1930. See Herbert 1982.

20 Carpenter 1883: 31. The first Karen Christians seem to have mixed the coming of Christ and Ariya.

21 Taxes were four times higher after the annexation of central Burma in 1852 (see *BMM* 35: 420).

22 See *BMM* 28: 318-320. Several other movements have existed: Leké, near Pa-an; Duwai (Duwe), now dwindling and affiliated to Talakhoung; Wee Maung, living among Lu Baung and Lu Wa ("White Thread"). Many young Karen tend to worship at the Buddhist shrines and find the movements and their strict moral rules outdated (see Stern 1968).

23 Hsong Th' Rwi is probably derived from the Indian Earth Goddess Vasundhara (Wathoungdaye in Burmese, Nang Thorani in Thai). When Mara, the evil tempter, attacked Buddha immediately before his Enlightenment, Hsong Th' Rwi, who had witnessed Buddha's good deeds, wrung her long hair and the water swept away Mara's army. The myth signifies the victory of Buddhism; and the libation water poured on the ground call upon Hsong Th' Rwi to confirm meritorious acts. At the inauguration of the pole, the Karen also place a coin and a piece of cloth in the ground.

24 The female followers are the conservative element in Lu Baung, in the same way as the Earth Goddess protects religion. Whereas a Lu Baung woman can never change her religious affiliation, a man must change his to his wife's if she is from a different denomination.

25 See Ferrars & Ferrars (1900: 39-40) for photographs of hermits in Burma.

26 See Shorto 1971: 172. *Talapoin* or *talapuïn* means "possessor of merit;" *tala* or *tila* in old Mon means "lord, master, owner."

27 The word is Burmese and commonly used in the literature. The Sgaw Karen in the Irrawaddy Delta used the term *mau lay* (*mau* means "prophet").

28 See further Gravers 1994 and 2001b on the changes in Pwo agriculture, environment, and society.

29 *Chai'* is derived from Mon *caik*, meaning "sacred being," "Buddha."

30 Other sources estimate the number at 6,000-7,000 (Ashley South, pers. comm. 1998; South worked with the Burmese Border Consortium in 1991-97). In the 1960s, followers were estimated at about 10,000. Many have moved near the border with Thailand or into Thailand following the defeat of the KNU. There are some Talakhoung villages near Pa-an.

31 See *Census* 1901: 38. Talakhoung split into two branches after Saw Yoh, who appointed a Sgaw Karen as his successor; the fourth leader, Pukso, ruled in 1901.

32 In the 1960s, Talakhoung expanded. Lu Baung villages in Uthaithani were urged to join and were sent a piece of yellow cloth as a symbolic present to Phu Chai'. Phu Chai', however, rejected the present because he had learnt that some Lu Baung villages had pigs and chickens.

33 Stern (1968) emphasizes that the sources of the Karen movements can be found in the Mon and Burmese Buddhist kingdoms and that the movements provided incentives for modernizing change.

34 See Mendelson 1961; Ferguson & Mendelson 1981. In these articles analyzing Burmese Buddhist associations (*gaing*), the reader will find the same symbols and ritual paraphernalia and figures as in the Karen movements.

35 The KNU began its rebellion in 1949 and was gradually forced out of its bases inside Burma. On the history of the KNU, the roots of its nationalism, and DKBO, see Gravers 1996 and 1999.

36 U Thuzana is a disciple of U Thamanya, a widely respected and venerated Karen (or Pa-o) monk whose monastery is near Pa-an. Aung San Suu Kyi has visited him and recently



became a vegetarian like him. U Thamanya has vegetarian food served to 400 monks and his many followers.

37 See Tambiah (1985: 128) and Wolf (1999: 281-285) on cosmology and power.

38 On the Karen notions of the landscape, see Gravers 2001b.

39 See Herbert (1982) on the contradictory description of the famous Burmese rebel Hsaya San and his personal abilities. Recently, the Karen twin leaders of God's Army denied that they possessed the magic powers attributed to them by adult followers and the media (Gravers 2001a).

40 See Gravers (1999) on nationalism in Burma. Augé (1999: 69) has compared political rhetoric with divination: "Like such acts, political rhetoric invites to action and speaks of the future." It works on historical myths or creates new myths to make history.

41 See Jenkins (2000) for a discussion of Max Weber's disenchantment, enchantment, and re-enchantment at the Millennium hype.

Table des illustrations

	Titre	Fig. 1. Location of Karen sites
	URL	http://journals.openedition.org/moussons/docannexe/image/3181/img-1.png
	Fichier	image/png, 168k
	Titre	Fig. 2. Religious leaders circumambulate a pagoda made of bamboo during a Lu Baung ceremony
	Légende	Thi Pho Gee village, Ban Rai District, Uthaithani, 1971
	Crédits	(Photo M. Gravers)
	URL	http://journals.openedition.org/moussons/docannexe/image/3181/img-2.png
	Fichier	image/png, 177k
	Titre	Fig. 3. Karen pagoda in Burmese style, made of bricks, in Sangkhlaburi
	Légende	In the foreground, a derelict pagoda of dirt and bamboo, 1996
	Crédits	(Photo M. Gravers)
	URL	http://journals.openedition.org/moussons/docannexe/image/3181/img-3.png
	Fichier	image/png, 164k
	Titre	Fig. 4. The la' and its fence are sprinkled with libation water by the boung mü in order to 'cool the place,' i.e., make it peaceful, during a ceremony for Phi Be Yu, the Rice Goddess
	Légende	Thi Pho Chue village, Ban Rai District, Uthaithani, 1971
	Crédits	(Photo M. Gravers)
	URL	http://journals.openedition.org/moussons/docannexe/image/3181/img-4.png
	Fichier	image/png, 355k
	Titre	Fig. 5. Boung kho and boung mü
	Légende	Pho Meing village, Ban Rai District, Uthaithani, 1989
	Crédits	(Photo M. Gravers)
	URL	http://journals.openedition.org/moussons/docannexe/image/3181/img-5.png
	Fichier	image/png, 420k



Pour citer cet article

Référence papier

Mikael Gravers, « Cosmology, Prophets, and Rebellion Among the Buddhist Karen in Burma and Thailand », *Moussons*, 4 | 2001, 3-31.

Référence électronique

Mikael Gravers, « Cosmology, Prophets, and Rebellion Among the Buddhist Karen in Burma and Thailand », *Moussons* [En ligne], 4 | 2001, mis en ligne le 05 février 2015, consulté le 26 décembre 2021. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/moussons/3181> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/moussons.3181>

Cet article est cité par

- Hayami, Yoko. (2011) Pagodas and Prophets: Contesting Sacred Space and Power among Buddhist Karen in Karen State. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 70. DOI: 10.1017/S0021911811001574
- Bird, Jessica N.. Brough, Mark. Cox, Leonie. (2016) Transnationalism and the Karen wrist-tying ceremony: An ethnographic account of Karen settlement practice in Brisbane. *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, 27. DOI: 10.1111/taja.12176
- Lee, Sang Kook. (2014) Security, Economy and the Modes of Refugees' Livelihood Pursuit: Focus on Karen Refugees in Thailand. *Asian Studies Review*, 38. DOI: 10.1080/10357823.2014.931345
- Greene, Alexander M.. Panyadee, Prateep. Inta, Angkhana. Huffman, Michael A.. (2020) Asian elephant self-medication as a source of ethnoveterinary knowledge among Karen mahouts in northern Thailand. *Journal of Ethnopharmacology*, 259. DOI: 10.1016/j.jep.2020.112823

Auteur

Mikael Gravers

An Associate professor in the department of Ethnography & Social Anthropology, University of Aarhus, Denmark, the author has conducted fieldwork among the Karen in Thailand since 1970, and recently in Mae Chaem, Chiangmai, with a Thai-Danish interdisciplinary research project, Forest and People in Thailand (1999-2001), funded by the Danish ministry of Environment. This work will continue with a Carlsberg Fund grant. He is doing research among the central highland minorities of Vietnam. A member of the Danish Council for Development Research since 1999, he has published on ethnicity, nationalism, religion, culture, and environment.

Droits d'auteur



Les contenus de la revue *Moussons* sont mis à disposition selon les termes de la Licence Creative Commons Attribution - Pas d'Utilisation Commerciale - Pas de Modification 4.0 International.

