

The Revival Chronotope: Understanding Pentecostal Revival among the Kuki in Assam

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Abstract: This paper employs ethnographic data to illuminate how the religious imagination of Pentecostal Christianity has reconfigured the way the Kuki people in Assam imagine their life course. The paper begins with emic explorations about what Pentecostalism and various elements of Christian cosmology mean to the Kuki people. This follows with a detailed historical and ethnographic survey of the phenomenon of “Revival” in Songpijang Village, North Cachar Hills District (Assam, India). Revival is a collective emotional experience and ritual corroboree linked to the Protestant Christian idea of being “born again.” A close interrogation of its features reveals that it has altered Kuki perceptions of space of time—rewiring their categories of understanding, so to speak. Drawing on the work of Mikhail Bakhtin (1981), this paper refers to this altered time-space as the “Revival Chronotope” and proposes that its dominance in Kuki society may be considered as a new form of “living heritage” that connects the Kuki people to a past, present, and future beyond their traditional culture and history.

Keywords: Pentecostalism, Revival, Chronotope, Life Course, Kuki Tribe, Assam.

I. INTRODUCTION

This article presents detailed ethnographic data related to the Christian phenomenon of Revival in order to show how the religious imagination of Pentecostal Christianity has reconfigured the ways the Kuki people in Assam imagine their course of life. Much of the material and ideas herein are drawn from one of the co-author’s unpublished Phd Thesis (Malsawmtluangi n.d.). The ethnographic data herein was collected from the same co-author’s fieldsite: Songpijang Village in North Cachar Hills District (Assam, India). Songpijang, which is near Haflong town, is village that is predominantly inhabited by the Kuki (Thadou) people. The profusion of Christian religious institutions here has led to a sharp decline in ritual practices associated with pre-Christian Kuki lifeworlds. In their place, there is a new emphasis on the ritual life of being “born-again” through states of “Revival.”

The article begins with a brief outline of Pentecostalism and Christian cosmology as they are understood by the Kuki people. This provides us with the terms and conditions of possibility for understanding a major phenomenon that has become one of the most important features of Kuki life today in Songpijang: Revivalism. If contemporary cultural fashion will be of any consequence, then the 50+ years of intense Revivalist culture that has dominated Kuki society in Songpijang will most likely be considered a heritage institution after the next 50+ years. As Revivalism redefines the life course at a micro level, it also reconfigures society at the macro level. It is the motor—the dynamic ground—for how the Kuki people understand their past, present, and future. Accordingly, we shall introduce the concept of the “Revival Chronotope” to illuminate how Revivals have reconfigured Kuki experiences of space and time.

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II. SOME THEOLOGICAL AND MORAL FEATURES OF CHRISTIAN COSMOLOGY AS UNDERSTOOD BY THE KUKI PEOPLE

Not all Christianities are the same. Denomination, culture, and ideology make this world religion intensely diverse. Before exploring how Kuki people understand Revival in their own theological and moral terms, we must explain the kind of Christianity they currently follow in Songpijang and which unites them ideologically. This kind of Christianity is not a denomination or particular church (though they have those as well), but a generic movement that defines the kind of Christian beliefs and practices followed by Kuki people today. It is a modern form of Pentecostalism, and we shall briefly explore its definition here. We must be clear, however, that the Kuki people in Songpijang, except for a small number, *do not actively identify as Pentecostal Christians at all*; so to call them “Pentecostal” is not to define their particular Christian identity or denomination, but to describe the general practices, beliefs, and style of worship—basically the *ideology*—that unites them.

A. Pentecostalism:

According to anthropologist Tanya Luhmann (2012: 14), modern Pentecostalism began in Los Angeles, California (USA) in the early twentieth century. It was an offshoot of Evangelical forms of “awakening” which had occurred globally over the past three hundred years. Modern Pentecostalism was not confined to the United States, however. It spread globally very quickly, and has taken root in many postcolonial nations. So, how is Pentecostalism defined? And what are the basic set of shared beliefs and practices do they follow?

Pentecostalism is a subset of Protestant Christianity which also has an Evangelical form, meaning that it has an emphasis on mission work, gospel spreading, and general social conservatism. It places special emphasis on a direct personal experience of God through baptism by the Holy Spirit. Pentecostals believe in salvation, divine healing, spiritual gifts, vocal gifts, prophecy, the speaking in tongues and divine interpretations, power gifts, intense worship with the body, charismatic signs of the presence of the holy spirit, and ordinances. They also believe in what is known as the “foursquare gospel.” The term foursquare refers to the four fundamental beliefs of Pentecostalism: Jesus saves according to John 3:16; Jesus baptises with the Holy Spirit according to Acts 2:4; Jesus heals the body according to James 5:15; Jesus is coming again to receive those who are saved according to 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17. According to Luhmann (2012) modern or “neo” Pentecostalism can also be referred to as “renewalist,” given its emphasis on being “born again” and participating in Revivals (see below).

The Kuki people in Songpijang do not see themselves as part of the global Pentecostal movement. Nevertheless they share ideas, rituals, and orientations toward the body, the Holy Spirit, and the Bible with Pentecostalism more broadly. Indeed, rather than aligning themselves with the name of a global movement, the Kuki people in Songpijang couch their understanding of Christian cosmology in a set of concrete theological and moral ideas. The most important ones are: being born again, sin, and backsliding. We shall review each of these and then review a short typology of how people in Songpijang classify each other in terms of their moral commitments before moving on to the most important theological-moral-cosmological idea in Songpijang today: Revival.

B. Being Born Again:

The term “born again” does not refer to biological birth. Instead it refers to “a new you.” Being “born again” is about choosing (or being given by God) an entirely clean slate to begin one’s moral life again. The concept ties into the theology of Jesus Christ’s resurrection from the dead and ascension into Heaven. There are around 32 bible verses that mention this concept directly or indirectly, and these verses are very well-known among the Kuki people. Some of the verses from the Bible which can give us an idea of what we are talking about are: “Jesus answered and said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God”” (John 3:3). And “Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable, through the living and abiding word of God.” (First Peter 1:22-23).

To be a born again one has to look into one’s heart and soul. It is not something that you can share with someone. It is a personal decision that one takes to choose God as his personal God and savior, decide not to serve sin, and then lead a path Holy and pleasing to God. Let us cite an example well-known to the people in Songpijang. First, we have an alcoholic who creates all sorts of havoc in his family. He beats up his wife and tortures the children and in every occasion he is a creator of chaos who fights in the society. Yet one day he becomes born again and confesses his sins to become

one with God. Second, we have another person who goes to church everyday, never drinks, obeys his parents, and has a strong moral compass, but is never born again. He never changes and is never aware of the deeper sins he might be committing because on the surface he looks like a proper Christian. In the Pentecostal-type Christian ideology in Songpijang, just because a person does not drink or create chaos and havoc does not make him a better person with regard to spiritual status. For that miserable alcoholic, the old sinful life died and a new person in him was born. This is in short what being born again means. It is the toughest phase in one's life as it means a constant fight with oneself to choose good over evil. A born again person can fight temptations of life and struggles through God which wraps them with eternal peace. Like the famous "dark night of the soul" as described by St. John of the Cross, a "born again" person knows the depths of evil and darkness, and thus the value of goodness and the light. Someone who never sins, like our church-going teetotaler above, cannot see the value of goodness in the same way.

Many Christians in Songpijang village could come to big question mark when asked "Are you a born again?" (*Na pientah tah em?*). It is scary as well as confusing in the sense that if they are not "a born again person" (*Pientah*)—as it clearly states in the Bible (John 3:3) that "unless one is born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God"—then it might mean that they are not a true Christian and won't go to heaven when they die. It is confusing in the sense that it is not quite clear how one can attain the status of being born again. A choice to do so may not lead to a genuine experience of being born again. And if they have already attained it, they wonder "Why do we still sin?" For, a born again person, as mentioned in the Bible, should not sin: "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin." (Romans 6:6). This issue is thus dealt with in the Revival camp or Revival crusades (see below) so that one could be free of all sorts of confusions and fear of not entering the Kingdom of God. But, it should be noted that this is the basic double-bind of Pentecostalism: to be born again, one must genuinely experience it as such; but if one continues to sin (and this is inevitable), then they have to keep being born again and again and again. We shall address this further below, for it speaks to what we will call the "Revival Chronotope."

C. What is Sin and What Does it Lead to?

It will not be appropriate to go into detail of the theological origin of sin, which started from Lucifer (Satan, the fallen angel) and how he tempted Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden and cursed humanity with perpetual sin. In Songpijang, to put it simply, *sin* is an act of wrongdoing or transgression of God's law. It includes a failure to do what is right. Sin is described in the Bible as transgression of the law of God (I John 3:4) and rebellion against God (Deuteronomy 9:7). It is very important to talk about what sin is and what it leads to in Kuki society. The reason being is that the Kuki people have today completely embraced Christianity and feel that they been made aware of things that were unknown to them. Prior to the arrival of Christianity, the Kuki people did not have a concept of hell but believed in an abode of the dead called *Mithikho*, a place where they believe the spirit rest after death. In their eyes, the concept of sin and its consequences as such were unknown to them. They drank and sang together, followed strict customary laws, and propitiated their God on earth (*Noimang Pathien*) and God in the sky (*Chung Pathien*) for bountiful crops and harvests, and performed rituals and incantations to avoid the wrath of their Gods upon them. One thing was known to them that not practicing certain rituals like *chang-ai*, *sa-ai*, *kolbu-ai*, *chon* etc. could be a hindrance or obstacles on the way to *Mithikho* (land of the dead). Then they would have to be stuck with the old torturess *Kholsamnu* who stands on the passage towards *Mithikho* and judges who can proceed and who must stay in a state of "limbo." In Kuki Christian society, heaven and hell are completely different concepts. A surplus of unforgiven sin leads to hell (endless pain and torture); forgiveness of sin leads to heaven (perpetual peace).

Here, we might find an interesting elaboration on these points from an event that occurred during one of the researcher's fieldwork: the birthday celebration of a very elderly woman named Lamhao Nu. During her birthday party, she talked about her long life with God. She was one of the early Christians in Songpijang. When she was almost fifteen she was already a Christian, but as mentioned the concept of sin and its consequences were unknown to those people at the time. One day, a few missionaries came to Songpijang and went to each household and talked about the Gospel (Word of God). Pi Lamhao Nu said that those missionaries came knocking at her door too. She attended to them. But what happened next blew her mind away. The message that they brought to her was that, "If you do not repent your sins and become a born again you will not enter heaven" (*Na chonset na dalhah lou a, na pientah lou leh vangam a na lut lou ding ahije*). These words haunted her day and night as she could not understand what it really meant. She was scared and worried and did not possibly know how to deal with this strange feeling that (1) she might be sinning, (2) how could she become born again and what that even meant, and (3) might she be ultimately punished by God for something she didn't know

anything about. She then prayed day and night and one night she fell completely at ease. She felt a touch of holy love on her and it took away all her stress and worries about the message. She then realized that was what the missionaries meant by becoming “born again.” The feeling made her new and gave her peace of mind; eventually she could see her transgressions in the light of that holy love that she experienced.

In the beginning of the Christian era, Christianity was a foreign life-world imposed on the Kuki people. But slowly the Kuki people begin to learn and take heed to an idea that “the wages of sin is death” (*Conset man chu thina a hi*) and that it leads to hell. For people in Songpijang, sin distances oneself from God. When one drifts apart from God he becomes what is called a “Backslider,” a lost and defeated person.

D. Backsliding:

Having mentioned about being born again, it is very important to bring to light the opposite side of it (which is connected to the idea of sin for the Kuki people). It is known by Kuki people that if good exists, then evil exists too. And they are in a constant battle for supremacy. This is a fundamental idea of Christian theology and theogony. We thus need to discuss the opposite side of the coin from being born again, which is “backsliding”—an adverse effect of being born again and engaging in Revival (see more on this below). Indeed, these three phenomena—Born Again, Revival and Backsliding—are inseparable. When a born-again person falls out of Revival and into old sinful habits he is called backslider; when a person backslides—i.e. falls away from God—he literally returns to a life of sin.

III. REVIVAL

To understand Revival—perhaps the most important Christian heritage-practice for Kuki people today—we have to understand what it looks like through the eyes of the Kuki people in Songpijang. To do so the researchers worked closely with an informant from Songpijang, Mr. S. P. Changsan, who provided details about the nature and history of Revival. These are outlined below. The contents of these discussions were eventually published in a Souvenir in Songpijang, which was written in the Kuki language. Changsan added new information to the publication in the Souvenir as well. One of these additions can help orient our discussion of what Revival is and what it means to and does for the Kuki people. According to that Souvenir’s epigraph, the word “revival” was derived from the Latin word *revivere*. It means “to live again.” Thus, its connection to the “born again” theology is paramount; for to go through Revival means to be revitalised in a literal sense of the term.

A. Biblical Origins of Revival:

According to S. P. Changsan, there are descriptions of Revival in the Old Testament, but the Revival phenomenon that one sees today has its roots in the first Christian experience of the feast of Pentecost. Hence, Pentecostal Christians took their namesake from this celebration. The events that took place among Christ’s Apostles and believers on the Day of Pentecost depict the working and nature of Revival (Acts 2: 1-13). What happened on the day of Pentecost was a result of deliberate and continuous prayer of the Apostles, where they for the first time experienced and witnessed the works and wonders of the Holy Spirit in them as well as others.

In brief, on the Jewish festival of Pentecost (Shavuot), the 12 Apostles of Jesus, along with around 120 followers including Christ’s mother Mary, all gathered to celebrate the feast. Their intense devotion and prayer allowed for the descent of the Holy Spirit from above, which came among them like a “mighty wind.” The Apostles and followers took this as a gift from God (the Holy Spirit being the third aspect of God, following Him as the Father and as the Son/Christ). The key sign of the event, which St. Peter declared to be a fulfillment of a prophecy, was that everyone gathered began speaking in languages that no one had ever heard or understood when “cloven tongues like as of fire” sat upon the heads of the Apostles. This phenomenon is known as “speaking in tongues” or more technically as “glossolalia,” and is believed to be the transmission of a divine language. The description in Acts 2:1-6 is as follows:

“And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other languages, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language.”

The first Christian Pentecost would become the model and template for the Revival phenomenon that swept through Europe and the United States from the 18th to the early-20th centuries. According to S. P. Changsan, Revivals today seek to capture or replicate five important features of the first Pentecost in each Revival. They are:

1. Believers should be always together:

According to Acts 1:4, believers were advised not to leave Jerusalem after the ascent of Christ into heaven and to wait for what God has in store for them. And so, together they waited for the promise of the Father to descend from heaven. The Apostles along with some of the believers started prayers and they prayed continuously. On the 50th day of their prayer (on the day of Pentecost, 50 days after Easter) the promise of God in the form of the Holy Spirit was visited upon them.

2. Fulfillment of Prophecy:

On the day of Pentecost prophecy was fulfilled. Acts 2:1 literally reads “As the Day of Pentecost was being fulfilled.” What was fulfilled was the prophecy given both by Jesus Christ and John the Baptist concerning the coming of the Holy Spirit. John had earlier spoken of Jesus in Matt 3:11 (“I need baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and Fire.”)

3. Power to the Believers:

The coming of the Holy Spirit was also to give power to the believers. When Pentecost occurred, the Holy Spirit came as promised, baptised the believers into Christ and gave them power to be his witnesses. And so they were fearless like never before.

4. Speaking in tongues:

As Pentecost occurred, a rushing mighty wind filled the house and it appeared to them like fire and the Apostles began to talk in different tongues. They began talking in tongues (“glossolalia”) they never knew and people were amazed. This was the doing of the Holy Spirit. Today’s Revivals show the receipt of this gift continues to today.

5. Starting (or Restarting) of the Church:

Pentecost is considered the “Birthday of the Church.” The Old Testament period of Law was ended and a new era of Love and promise began. Those who believe in Jesus Christ during this present age become part of the Body of Christ known as the Church. The Church age began at Pentecost and will conclude only when Christ comes back for his loved ones. Revivals allow for a renewal of the Church, the collective of worshippers.

S. P. Changsan explained the connection of Revival to the Biblical event of Pentecost as follows:

“The Story of the Book of Acts is the story of a revived Church committed to witness for its Lord and God. Spiritual revival always leads to passionate witness. Sharing is the natural outgrowth of a transformed life. Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Follow me and I shall make you the fishers of Men’ (Matt. 4:19). The closer we follow Jesus, the more we care for what He cares about. If we have little interest in sharing His Love with others, it may be because we are following Him at a distance and need a personal Spiritual Revival.... The power of the New Testament witnessing was rooted in the ingenuity of lives changed by the gospel. The Disciples [Apostles] were not play-acting or staging a show. They were not just going through the motions. Theirs was not some sort of artificial spirituality we see often today. An encounter with the Living Christ had changed them, and they could be no longer silent about it. At Pentecost the disciples were changed people. Something happened to them so that the Holy Spirit could control them. Holy Spirit overflowed from their lives to refresh the lives of the others. Likewise, the Holy Spirit works in certain ways from one man to another. A spiritually revived man knows to love God and be a witness for His works of wonder.”

B. Historical Revivals in N. C. Hills:

Now in 2017, it has been almost 95 years since the first Kuki people in Songpijang Village became Christians, 75 years since the establishing of churches, and 50 years since the first Revival in Songpijang. S. P. Changsan provided the researcher with the history of Revival in Northeast India, and especially in the North Cachar Hills District (a.k.a. Dima Hasao) and Songpijang. This is outlined below and will provide a background for understanding Revival and how it was instrumental in converting many people to Christianity.

ADVENT OF CHRISTIANITY IN ASSAM (AFTER REVIVAL IN AIZAWL)

According to S. P. Changsan:

“Before we became Christians, in the year 1906 in Lushai Hills [presently known as Mizoram] a huge Revival broke out in Chatlang (Aizawl). Because of this Revival many non-believers in Mizoram accepted Christ and became Christians. The people of Mizoram marched to different places to spread the word of God/Gospel in places like: Tripura, Manipur, and other interior villages. While we were still non-believers in Assam, some of the people from Aizawl known by the name *Cross Sepai* (“Cross Soldiers”) entered in Assam in the year 1921 as missionaries to bring the word of God to us.”

The names of these first *Cross Sepai* were: Pu Sangkhuma (worked at P. Leikul village), Pu Darhmingluaia (worked at Ngente village and then Lasang village), Pu Paranga (first worked at Thingkap Village and then at N. Leikul village), Pu Aichunga (worked at Pangmol village), Pu Hmanga (worked at Vongzawl village), Pu Hrangthatlana (first worked at Thingkap village and then at Ngente village), and Pu Sinna.

Changsan further stated,

“When they entered Assam, none of us knew God (Jesus Christ). We worshipped trees, and rocks, drank *zu* [rice wine], and lived life fully but unaware. Wherever they went, they faced lots of obstacles. The villages wouldn’t let them in. In Kuki villages, people refused to give them shelter and threw their baggage out of the village! Some were beaten up and some threatened. But after a long sojourn and hardship, two people from Ngente village, Pu Songkhotindou Changsan and Pu Thangkhosei Changsan received Jesus as God and accepted Christianity in the year 1922. They were the first Kuki Christians in N. C. Hills. The new believers began to construct a church to worship God, but this was destroyed by the then chieftain (*Hausa*). Early Christians were out-casted them from the village. They then moved to one place which was then a thick jungle. They cleared it up and settled down in a place which is now known as Lasang Village. Six people along with their families were out-casted and joined them. And these six-people built up a new church again in the year 1927. The name of the six people who not only built a new village but a new church were: Pu Mangtinsei Changsan, Pu Vungseh Changsan, Pu Paokhosat Changsan, Pu Tonglun Changsan, Pu Nguljalam Changsan, and Pu Darhmingluaia Lushai (one of the cross soldiers [*Sepai*] from Aizawl).”

FIRST REVIVAL AT GAMVOM

The first-ever Revival in Assam took place in Gamvom Village (N.C. Hills District) in 1941, which was the fruit of continuous prayer and unparalleled faith of four or five persons. These people believed that Lord Jesus was going to descend to Earth very soon. They were thus a small millenarian group. So, with prayers and utmost devotion they awaited the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. The names of three persons from this group was recorded by Upa S. P. Changsan, and they are: Pu L.Thangkeng and his wife Pi Veijahoi. (Ngalsong village.), Pu Paojaln Haolai and his wife Pi Tingvei (Tumjang village.), and Pu Paokhodou Singson (Lasang village).

All the above mentioned, including some Christian residents of Gamvom Village, participated in the effort to call for Revival while these millenarians were praying for the Second Coming of Christ. During those days, there were not many Christians in Gamvom village. So, these gospel pilgrims were housed and sheltered by Pu Henjalam Lenthang, who once mocked this group and scolded them by saying, “No one is going to come down to the Earth. So, you better go back to your farms.” But that did not affect the determination of the millenarians.

These small group of devotees constantly made their way to a place called “Bethel” (a clearing in the jungle that was used to hold prayers at that time). There they prayed and keenly waited for the arrival of Jesus, except something else happened to them. According to S. P. Changsan,

“One day, like always, as they were praying in the Bethel clearing, all of a sudden they were visited upon by the Holy Spirit. As they prayed, some started shivering. Some bodies began to quake. Others were jumping and leaping, and they fell on the ground. Some were speaking in charismatic languages, and some were gifted with a gift of vision and prophecy. The miraculous work of Holy Spirit was thus shown to the non-believers [Kuki people who did not accept Christ]. But many began to convert. Two mentionable people upon which the work of Holy Spirit was predominantly strong were women. Their names were Pi Neikholhai Thangew and Pi Phaltinlhing Changsan. Both of them were gifted with charismatic languages and a prophetic vision whereby the Holy Spirit showed them a flag/banner. They would see this flag/banner in many places and they followed it wherever it led them to. A Gospel verse, ‘For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life’ (NIV John 3:16) became their motto and the general theme of their preaching from then on out.

Thus, by following the footsteps of the Apostles the early Kuki Christians in the year 1941 gathered at Gamvom Village and prayed to God for the blessing of the Holy Spirit. After continuous prayers the Holy Spirit was finally upon them and this very event marks the first Revival among the Kukis of Assam. To commemorate this event, a gathering and feast (Platinum Jubilee) was organised by the Kuki Nampi Taona (KNT) in P. Leikul Village from 3-6 November 2016. The occasion was spent in praying, seeking God, and worshipping Him.

SECOND REVIVAL (FIRST NGALSONG BLOCK CONFERENCE AT LASANG VILLAGE)

The second revival of the Kuki in N. C. Hills occurred at the first conference held at Ngalsong Block in 1943. Revival visited this conference in the same manner as it did in Gamvom Village. Revival here too witnessed strange movements of the body like: involuntary shivering, jumping up and down, and instantly falling on the ground. This conference was said to have been a very successful and a prosperous one. As S. P. Changsan put it, "the best of a kind and second to none."

Because of the return of Revival in this place, everyone was happy and renewed and so were the host villagers. To commemorate the event, they prepared a grand feast where they served meat from the mithun (*bos frontalis*). Even though there were renewed and revived Christians at the conference, the following (three women and two men) were said to have received the utmost level of Revival: Pi Neikholhai Thangew, Pi Phaltinlhing, Pi Nengkhovei Thangew, Pu Paokhothang Changsan, Pu Haominthang Haolai.

THIRD REVIVAL (BOLSOL VILLAGE)

On February 1967, Elder Neihao Suantak and his team from Nachangjol Village arrived at Bolsol village to conduct a Revival campaign. The campaign went on for days without any result until the 10th day when it finally came down on the campers (people who attended the Revival campaign) and the team. The campers responded and rejoiced with involuntary dances and jumping up and down. Their bodies were quaking. Many of the campers confessed and repented from their sins; they devoted themselves to serve God with all their might. Miraculous works like speaking in charismatic languages and prophetic visions took place. They sang in unison what was called *Zion Lapi*. According to S. P. Changsan the original *Zion Lapi* (later called *Zionsong*, or "song of heaven") was actually a song automatically sung by the people during this Revival campaign. It was a song composed by no man and never known or sung before by any one and is sung in tongues (charismatic, divine language). The song is believed to have originated from heaven.

Follow-up revival campaigns spread like wild-fire and took place at Phaibung in 1997, at Songpijang in 1967, Ngavohphai Village, and in Cachar Songpijang in 1968 (a different Songpijang in Cachar District). More and more followed in the years to come.

The very first Revival in Songpijang Village was brought about by Pu Khuptong in his Revival camp, which took place in the year 1967. It was actually inspired more from the outbreak of the Revival that took place in the year 1941 in Mizoram (rather than the local Revivals happening in N. C. Hills). Under Pu Khuptong's initiative Songpijang's first Bethel was established. Many strange events and miracles happened during this Revival, according to village elders. People were talking in tongues and divine languages; others were gifted with gifts of healing and anointing, divine prophecy, visions, etc.

C. Understanding Revival:

For Christians in Songpijang, Revival is something *physically needed* for ends of spiritual salvation and peace. To them it means the rejuvenation, resurgence, or revitalisation acquired through the effluence and the works of the Holy Spirit, especially for those who have been living under sin, suffering from depression, or are in a state of distress. Revival is an emotional group experience filled with what Durkheim (1912) has called "collective effervescence." People dance, sweat, pray, sing, collapse, cry, praise God, confess their sins, and, in their terms, they become "filled with the Holy Spirit." Emotions are high and the energy of the social collectivity takes over. This energy is understood to be purely divine. As such, for people in Songpijang Revival is a priceless gift from God of peace, comfort, and even social solidarity borne of the Holy Spirit. It is believed to be essential for every believer. It is a source of a strange kind of power, which can strengthen the weak and disable the strong. Humility in the face of divine power brought out in moments of collective spirit and prayer might be the best definition.

To attend a Christian Revival means to rejuvenate the very basic foundations of faith and trust in God and in turn to be reconciled with God. For Revival to occur for any individual, one needs to realise that he/she had drifted far away from the love of God and has sinned in the eyes of the Lord. One cannot just *attend* a Revival, one has to *commit* to it. With the realisation and regret of sins committed, a desire for *repentance* comes forth. The belief is that through repenting one's sins, one's life will be remedied and salvaged. As an informant put it, "Christianity teaches about love, life, and truth but most importantly it teaches about salvation and redemption, both of which belong only to God. Therefore, if a man truly hopes for eternal life in heaven, then he must be one with his God, who in order to save him had sacrificed his only begotten son Jesus Christ." In this theology, being born again and accepting Christ as a personal savior are paramount. But what exactly are the practical and ideological features of Revival in Songpijang today?

D. Revival, Crusade, Camp:

The concepts of Revival, crusade, and camp are closely related. Collectively, these terms mean people coming together to deal with the conviction of sins, confessions of those sins, and becoming born again. It happens 1-2 times per year, or whenever a church or many members of the community feel a need for reviving their faith. For some Revivals, a camp is held at a church or a congregation hall (preferably a church), which takes place for three days and people stay there until the camp period is over. Food and other needs are provided to them. For other Revivals a "crusade" is held. The term "crusade," which has an unsavory linguistic origin in the bloody Christian Crusades of the 11th-14th Centuries (which were invasions by Europeans into the Middle East to purge Muslims from the Holy Land), means something very prosaic and simple to Songpijang Christians. The idea is that people congregate with an individual mission to "carry the cross" (as Jesus did), and to spiritually fight for their own salvation. For a crusade it is not necessary for people to stay at a camp. People may instead stay at home, yet come and take part everyday of the Revival. But the way both camp and crusade executes Revival is almost identical.

The first day is for the whole church, which means young and old, men and women can all take part in the Revival. Teachings on the first day are for a general public. But on the second day there is class division where teachings are given to separate social groups (young, old, adult men, adult women, and children). In course of the teaching questions are posed by pastors and Revival coordinators with directness. They ask: Are you a born again? Are you sure of your salvation? Are you sure that if you die today you will go to Heaven? Do you believe that Christ died and rose on the third day? And do you take him as your personal God and savior? The teachings, classes, and direct questions are created in order to clear all the doubts that individuals might have and help them come closer to God. It allows them to confront and reflect upon their spiritual life.

When people are lifted from all their doubts and acknowledge the love of God, His resurrection, and His promise of salvation, then the people stretch out their hands to each other and often cry while giving personal confessions (more on this below). Songpijang Christians explain to me that the tears are "because of joy." It is in this moment when Revival (properly understood) comes for those who are emotionally and spiritually ready to receive it. Revival, here, refers to "holy works of God." According to the people in Songpijang, it is like a "strong wind" or a "refreshing air" which overtakes a person and makes him "feel a heaven on earth with unceasing praise, joy, and tears." In this intense emotional experience, which is believed to be the presence of the Holy Spirit, people receive "gifts" of anointing, healing, visions, speaking in tongues, divine prophecy, etc.

E. What Happens to the Body?

When Revival takes place among the Kuki in Songpijang, the emotional collective energy does not just appear out of thin air. After the teachings, some of the people attending begin to beat traditional drums in a loud volume and in a very fast tempo. *Zionsong* ("heavenly song") then takes over the crowd. It is a song composed of only two words: "Hallelujah" and "Amen" (Christian words of praise), which are chanted in sync with the drum beat. *Zionsong* can go on for hours. When *Zionsong* begins, a form of dance takes place too. It first takes begins as a circular motion where bodies follow each other in a circle to the beat, but after some time the circles dissipate as people become "intoxicated" by the Holy Spirit and overjoyed, as mentioned by Haolai (2006: 162). The dance thus takes a fresh turn in an ecstatic and compulsive way beginning with quaking of the entire body, or part of it. Individuals fall out of step in the circular dance when they began to quake. The quaking increases with the tempo of the singing and drum until the person has to jump out in ecstasy. Here, everything becomes unpredictable. People may collapse to the ground, shout and scream, twist and contort their bodies.

Sometimes people “speak in tongues.” The whole point is that the Holy Spirit has taken over control of the body so no one is acting according to their own wills.

According to local pastors in Songpijang, a refusal to allow physical expressions of ecstasy to unfold naturally may result into pain in part or whole, of the body, or even in paralysis of the whole body. In other words, it is not a good idea to resist the spirit when it “catches you.” There is an element of contagion here as well. A female Revival participant in Songpijang mentioned to me how extremely contagious quaking is in such a spiritually charged atmosphere. One is easily emotionally susceptible to quaking whether one sits in the back or the front row. Quaking/convulsing may come to several persons at the same time, or even to the whole gathering. It is a generally held belief that dancing and singing together are one form of conviction in the Christian faith. The same can be found among Pentecostal Revivals in Papua New Guinea. Robbins (2004: 131) states that Urapmin remember the feelings of enormous sadness brought on by deep conviction of sinfulness. Their bodies became extremely hot, and they collectively cry in anguish as they recognise the enormity of their need for correction. They furthermore found themselves immediately convinced that Jesus’ return was imminent and that it would usher in the day of God’s final judgement. Robbins also notes said that for those who did not have these experiences directly, merely witnessing others having them had a similarly powerful effect. Gifts of the Holy Spirit like: healings, prophetic dreams and visions, fits of tongue speaking, and other “miracles” (*mirikal*) are also found in Urapmin Revivals just as we find them among Kuki Revivals in Songpijang.

F. Revival and Confession in Songpijang

Whenever there are Revival campaigns in Songpijang, one will find what we might call “confession culture.” As mentioned before, the collective heat and emotional energy often comes out of deep regret for one’s sins. At Revival camps and crusades, participants experience outbursts of tears to proclaim their joy of salvation and eternal happiness in Christ. But the emphasis on confession draws from the fact that a testimony of one person may change the life of another. Repentance and confession of sins, followed by the joy and freedom people feel upon being forgiven is the biggest testimony to the power of Revivals for people in Songpijang. In fact, it is less the miracles of “speaking in tongues” or gifts of prophecy that sway others into joining Revival and becoming born again. Confession is more of a powerful force as it can motivate other people to give them hope and promise for a changed life. Confessions in Songpijang are of two types: public and private.

PUBLIC CONFESSION

The old Revivalist school from the 1960s and 70s in Songpijang had a culture of public confession. This had many merits, but also created problems. The central idea was for Revivalists to motivate each other by giving their testimony at the church pulpit in front of hundreds of people present. The life of one person could motivate other persons into transforming their lives. However, complete revelation in this regard turned out to create a lot of social distress. Societies need secrets to thrive; if everything becomes publicly shared then there is a tendency for things to heat up too fast and conflict becomes inevitable (see, e. g., Dowdy 2017). And, indeed, during the older Revivals in Songpijang, many unknown, hidden facts were revealed and this created chaos and disorder. Those confessions did not affect much during the Revival campaign itself, but later it became very difficult to forget and forgive each other. Feelings of betrayal stuck around after the spirit of the Revival too passed. As such, many now believe that their life is in itself a “testimony,” which need not be spoken out loud in public.

PRIVATE CONFESSION

Having adopted a personal God (Jesus), contemporary born-again movements and Revivals now follow personal or private confession. Occasionally public confessions still take place, but private confession is now the norm. This kind of confession is between God and the individual, which is the only really important relationship in Revival. One confesses all kinds of sins personally to God and accept Him as her/his savior. Still, this too has its setbacks. Public confessions create a very strong feeling of emotional release (catharsis), and give people a striking feeling of having to start all over and become born-again. With private confessions, catharsis is much less, and this drives people to return to Revivals again and again to renew themselves with emotion and spirit.

G. Impact and Effects of Revival:

According to Kuki Christians in Songpijang, to confess and express the love and faithfulness of Jesus Christ is actually God’s chosen method for revealing His word to the world. Therefore, every truly revived man has a “personal testimony”

of his own, which he shares. It basically is a description about how the Lord touched him or transformed him. Most spiritually revived people feel good about sharing his or her testimony, especially because—as stated above—private confessions don't always “do the trick” for create a feeling of really being born again. We shall review some personal testimonies below, but for now we should also enumerate other effects of Revival. Aside from the creation of personal testimonies, the following are a few major effects of Revival:

1. The Growth of Missions and Missionaries:

In no uncertain terms for people in Songpijang, to be Revived means to have been saved from certain death and damnation. This gift of life belongs to and is meant for every living soul who can accept Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. From this gift, a truly revived person is supposed to feel sympathy and love for any ignorant and lost souls. It thus becomes his desire to “save” as many as possible. Hence, Evangelism thrives in the wake of Revivals. Revivalists often become missionaries, dedicated to saving, preaching to, and educating lost souls about the love of God.

2. Increased number of Hymns and Songs:

When a person is Revived, she becomes very expressive about how she was saved and is very eager to proclaim the wonders of Christ. As such, many spiritually revived people compose songs, hymns, and music in praise of God and to document their Revival experience. This practice persists even today and many of these songs become popular in Songpijang and elsewhere; some making it into the hymnal books at churches, others making their way into rock-n-roll concerts.

3. The Growth in Offerings:

Revivals also have an economic impact. In the wake of a successful camp or crusade, donations, contributions, and offerings to a Church soar. As a village elder put it to the researcher, “A revived man always wants to give more to show his appreciation and love. Not only to churches, but as contributions to his society as well. Many public works happen after a good Revival.”

4. A Good Life:

One of the most valuable gifts of Revival is what people refer to as “a good life.” A Revived man is, ideally, free from greed, riches, and pleasures of the world. But, in an almost Buddhist sense, this enables him to live a life free of worry and attachment; he becomes sane and full of contentment.

5. Religious Schisms:

Revivals also often lead to theological schisms and thus new churches, denominations, or religious ideologies develop on the basis of visions and dreams one has during the experience of Revival. This ties in to the idea of being “born again,” but it happens at an institutional or social level (rather than at purely individual level).

In Songpijang schisms have occurred often. For example, it so happened that there was a women who had a vision from God during Revival and was given a divine commandment that the people of Songpijang should have a new church and that its name shall be *Christa Houbung* (Christ Church). This church has different rules and many of these are organised around Old Testament symbolism and the sacred significance of the number 7, which came to the church's founder during her vision. *Christa Houbung* begins every church service at 7:00 pm. They have worship service everyday (7 days a week). They ring the church bell in 7 sets of 3 dings (3, here, representing the sacred trinity: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). Behind their pulpit, there is a painting of a 7 branched menorah (a Jewish candelabrum) which signifies the Jewish people and Israel, and in the center candle is painted the number 7. The women of the church wear a white cloth on their head with the numeral 7 represented on it.

They also follow other unique rituals, setting themselves apart from other churches in Songpijang. During church service men, women, and children enter the church bare foot leaving their shoes outside the church (in honor of the Mosaic myth where Moses took off his shoes before the burning bush). They also believe in divine oracles and the visions that the people receive even in normal non-Revival times. If someone in the church comes up to the pulpit and says that he or she received a vision from God and that God commanded that the church should do fasting prayers for a week or somesuch, then the entire congregation respects the vision and then follows the command.

6. Potential Backsliding:

One final noteworthy effect of Revival is that it tends to set into motion the risk of backsliding. One could see this as a negative effect, but it is actually assumed to be a natural outcome of Revival. When people are born again, they become hyper-aware of their capacity to sin and desire for wiping the slate clean again by becoming born again at any sign of falling back into bad habits. One could say that the Revival experience is addictive in this regard, but it is much more about the kind of mentality that Revival creates—it instills a sensitivity toward observing one’s life and seeing it as part of a biomoral process of rising in righteousness and falling into sin. We shall now explore this phenomenon in more detail.

H. The Revival Chronotope:

The cycle between being born again and backsliding leads to what is perhaps the most hidden yet powerful impact of Revival culture in Songpijang. This is what we shall refer to as the “Revival Chronotope.” The term “chronotope” derives from Russian philosopher, semiotician, and literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin. Bakhtin (1981, 84-85) defines “chronotope” (a Greek term for “time-space”) as follows:

“[A chronotope is the] intrinsic connectedness of spatial and temporal relationships that are artistically expressed in literature. It expresses the inseparability of space and time (time as the fourth dimension of space). In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope. The chronotope in literature has an intrinsic generic significance... . It can even be said that it is precisely the chronotope that defines genre and generic distinctions... . The chronotope as a formally constitutive category determines to a significant degree the image of man in literature. The image of man is always intrinsically chronotopic.”

Although Bakhtin was referring to the chronotope as a literary device, the term has gathered a lot of purchase for anthropologists as well (Basso 1984), especially in the way it further grounds Kantian space-time as a cultural-historical form (something dependent not on universal reason, but on particular *socio-cultural experiences*). Genre, in Bakhtin’s definition, thus can be understood as analogous to any identifiable cultural-historical form, such as religion.

The religious experience of revival creates just such a space for the thickening of time and space, but in an *emotional image*: a lack of emotional catharsis due to private confessions along with the inevitability of “backsliding” or falling back into sin compels people to return to Revival camps to be revived over and over again. After a successful Revival, the revived person once again becomes “born again” and the cycle repeats itself—backsliding being almost inevitable. Now, this does not happen to everyone, but it is quite common. The intense emotional knowledge of one’s self and the embodied confirmation of the power of Holy Spirit to heal one’s life is made possible by Revival. This, in turn, inaugurates a cycle of an “eternal return” (to borrow a term from Friedrich Nietzsche)—back to metaphorical birth and righteousness, back to being born again whenever one inevitably backslides into sin in one’s life course. We may call this the “Revival Chronotope” (see Figure 1).

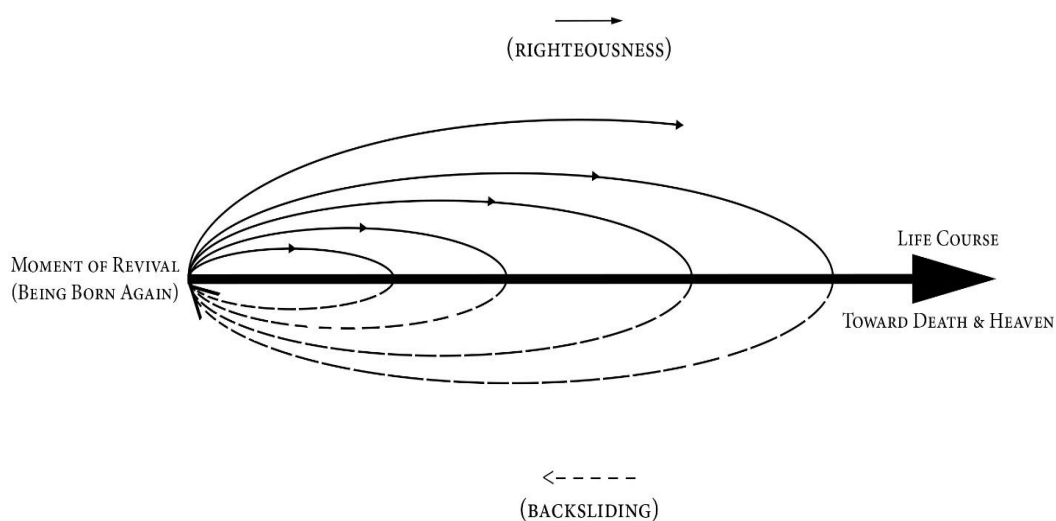


FIGURE 1. The Revival Chronotope

IV. CONCLUSION

For the Kuki people in Assam, Revival is a lifelong commitment. And, interestingly, it has an effect on an individual's conception of time-space. Revivals create a coherent sense of time and space that condenses and orders the chaotic experiences of one's life course, refiguring the life course itself as deeply *personal* and Christian in significance. The Revival Chronotope is form of time-space where one is born again into righteousness, backslides into sin, only then to be reborn into righteousness once again...and so on and so on. If Kuki social history is framed by a *linear* time-space that "over-threw" a pre-Christian ritual past for a righteous Christian future, then the Revival Chronotope offers Kuki individuals a *cyclical* time-space: an experience of fixing one's errors in the present by "starting over all again."

What is perhaps most interesting (if theoretically awkward) about this cyclical experience cathected in Revivals is how it is promoted among the people of Songpijang as a kind of "living heritage"—something they have received from God, through the original Apostles, and all the Christians who have experienced it for over two-thousand years. It is almost as if the experience of Revival is conceived as a new birthright, something all Kuki people should undergo—not only for their own spiritual health and salvation, but in order to *experience* what it means to be a Kuki Christian today. It firmly establishes experience within Christian cosmology—back to the very first Pentecost—and yet gives individuals direction for their own unique course of life. If over 50 years ago pre-Christian ritual heritage was discarded in favor of the moral life of Revivalism, then it is most likely that the rituals of Revival themselves will become a new heritage for the Kuki people in Songpijang over the next 50 years.

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