COLONIALISM, CHRISTIAN MISSION, AND INDIGENOUS: 
AN EXAMINATION FROM ASIAN INDIGENOUS

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Introduction
This paper will examine the relations between colonialism and Christian mission in Asia with special reference to Indigenous people in Northeast India. This examination is key to unraveling the history of colonialism and its responsibilities for the subjugation of Indigenous people, politically, socially, culturally and religiously. Contrary to the widely held view that missionaries functioned independent of colonial powers, I will argue that there were close relations between colonial powers and missionaries and that however good their intentions might have been the missionaries contributed in the colonial projects.

Colonialism and Christian Mission: A General Overview
The history of modernity is characterized both by colonial extension and missionary expansion in the non-European world. In the words of David J. Bosch the colonial period “precipitated an unparalleled era of mission.”¹ When the European colonial forces had established control over non-European countries such as in Asia, Africa, Latin America and Pacific Islands, this consequently provided opportunities for Christian missionaries to follow suit with their missionary adventurism.² In general, wherever the colonial powers were planted there inevitably followed Christian missions. Historically, the general assumption was that colonial expansion to the non-Christian world was believed to be God’s providence; it was regarded as opportunities for propagating the Gospel to the “heathen” world. At the time when the debate was raging in Britain on Christian missionary activities in colonies in general and India in particular, Wellesley argued that:

It would not only be impolitic but highly immoral to suppose that Providence has admitted of the establishment of British power over the finest provinces of India, with any other view than of its being conducive to the happiness of the people, as well as to our national advantage.³

Penny Carson asserts that Wellesley’s statement was consistent with the views of the Christian Evangelicals who were the major force behind the modern missionary movement. According to Carson, Evangelicals

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Saw no inconsistency between their conviction that Providence had given India to Britain for a higher purpose... and their belief that possession of India should also contribute to the national wealth. However, they were also increasingly concerned about the state of Indian society and its spiritual and moral welfare. Evangelicals argued that only through the inculcation of Christianity could Britain improve not only the spiritual but also the moral and material condition of the people.4

Of course, the history of colonialism and Christian missions go way back to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as a result of the expansion of Western Europe, the period often referred to as the “age of discovery and expansion.” “During this age of discovery and expansion” wrote Richard P. Dunn, “the church sent forth missionaries steeped in European culture that was Christian and a Christianity that was intimately bound to European culture.”5 There was no doubt about the close connections between colonialism and Christian mission; they went hand in hand. For example, the kings of Spain and Portugal enjoyed the papal privileges granted to them for both colonial and missionary enterprises.6 the Spaniards in Central and South America and the Portuguese in the western of Africa and Brazil. Both were known for imposing Catholicism, their state religion, on the nations they colonized “asserting the state’s duty to further the progress of the Corpus Christianum.”7 In fact, “The propagation of the faith and colonial policies became so intertwined that it was often hard to distinguish the one from the other.”8 Winona LaDuke, an American Indian scholar and activist, an Ashinaabeg (Ojibwe) by tribal affiliation, said it best:

Papal law was the foundation of colonialism; the Church served as handmaiden to military, economic, and spiritual genocide and domination. Centuries of papal bulls posited the supremacy of Christendom over all other beliefs, sanctified manifest destiny, and authorized even the most brutal practices of colonialism.9

Both the colonial powers and missions held the "civilizing responsibility" which is also known as the “white man's burden” as their shared goal. "The mutual binding between missions and colonial politics was at its strongest where the two accepted the 'white man's burden' as a genuine responsibility which some anti-imperialist missionaries referred to as Christian imperialism."10 It might rather be more appropriate to call these missionaries liberal missionaries than “anti-imperialist” missionaries, after all, none of the missionaries were anti-imperialist in a true sense.

The Scottish debate on mission methods in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries further underscored this point. The debate centered on whether civilizing or

4 Ibid., 46.
5 Dunn, Missionary Theology, 10.
6 Dunn, Missionary Theology, 11; Cf., Bosch, Transforming Mission, 228.
7 Carson, “The British Raj and the Awakening of the Evangelical Conscience”, 47.
8 Bosch, Transforming Mission, 228.
10 Ibid., 7.
Christianizing should come first. While some argued for civilizing the people first, others argued for the latter. Those in favor of the latter argued that Christianizing itself was a means of civilizing and the two went together inevitably anyway. This view was represented by James Montgomery when he wrote:

> The wisdom of man says, “First civilize, and then Christianize barbarians”; but the wisdom of man has proved itself foolishness in every experiment of the kind.
> 
> The counsel of God is the reverse; ‘Go and preach the gospel to the Gentiles. you will civilize them by Christianizing them.’

The view was that Christianizing and civilizing are two sides of the same coin; in other words, they were inseparably linked.

The most potent weapon behind the civilizing mission was the philosophy that not only entertained but created the idea of superiority over the native race. The idea of the civilizing mission originated in the French mission civilistrice which was itself rooted in the “idea of mastery.” This idea of mastery was further based on twin fundamental assumptions “of the superiority of French culture and the perfectibility of humankind.” Note, this French cultural superiority became the imperial ideology of the British colonizers from the late eighteenth century. The civilizing mission subsumed what the English had been referring as “improvement” or “betterment” or “moral and material progress.” According to Michael Mann:

> Basically, the mission civilistrice rested upon the idea of mastery – or, in other words, “to be civilized was to be free from specific forms of tyranny: the tyranny of the elements over men, of disease over health, of instinct over reason, of ignorance over knowledge and despotism over liberty.” However, in spite of this ‘enlightening agenda,’ the concept of the mission civilistrice was used above all for the self-legitimation of colonial rule.

**Colonialism, Missionaries, and Indigenous (Northeast India)**

The British colonization of India in the eighteenth century and the eventual British control over the northeast region in the nineteenth century – the region inhabited basically by the Indigenous peoples – served to open doors to the region for the missionaries. The pioneer missionaries who came to Northeast India in the nineteenth century belonged to the American Baptist Foreign Mission and Welsh Presbyterian

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12 Ibid., 123.


14 Ibid.
Mission. Though the Roman Catholic missionaries did cross the path on their way to Tibet and China prior to the Protestant missionaries as early as 1626, they did not start any mission work in the Northeast region. They began their mission work in the region only in the early middle part of the twentieth century.

It was a known fact that there was a working relation between the British colonial powers and Christian missions in Northeast India. Although the British government maintained the existence of their policy of neutrality, this policy did not stop some of the individual government officers from indulging in religious activities by way of either helping Christian missionaries or the native people. While the British government denied its involvement officially, the irony was that the government went on to justify its support of the missionaries.

The British India offered two reasons to justify their involvement in religious activities, particularly their support of the missionaries. First, the British administration justified their encouragement and funding of the Christian missions on the grounds that the hill people did not have any religion. Of course the Nagas and other peoples in the region did have their ceremonies and religious culture but the English chose deliberately to ignore them even when they plainly saw. Secondly, they argued that the Christian mission schools were providing “secular” services rather than religious instructions. On these grounds the government justified its activities and maintained that religious neutrality was not being violated. However, it was quite obvious that the missionaries were using education for the advancement of the Christian gospel and for the building of Christian community. The British knew very well that education was a means of missionizing adopted by the missionaries, and as such its claim to justify on the ground of

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17 The directives of the Court of Directors in London on their policy of Religious neutrality read as follows: “It was well known that we would not engage in schemes for attempting to propagate Christianity among the natives; it is a matter of surprise to us that an active part in the prosecution of this plan should have been taken by a Member of the Government, and neither the plan itself nor the very extraordinary mode in which it came to be recommended to your notice should have appeared to you unobjectionable.” Quoted in Downs, North East India, 37.

18 Ibid., 53. According to Tinker, this is exactly what the English colonizers said about the American Indians in the Northeast (New England) some two centuries earlier (1620s, 1930s).

19 Ibid., 53.

20 As early as 1886, E. G. Philip, in a Jubilee report reiterated the following objectives of education: “In aim and plan, the great thing ever before the Mission has been evangelization. The Garos were ruined by sin. The Gospel alone can restore them. But the Gospel must be communicated. Almost of necessity the written page needs follow the preached Word. Such has been God’s plan in all history. Hence the absolute necessity of education among savages, as a chief handmaid to religion. Little call would there be, by a people who cannot read, for Scriptures and Christian Literature the foundation through them revealed Christ of Christian civilization.” E.G. Philip, Educational Work Among the Garos, Jubilee Report, 1886, 67.
secular service proved to be simply untrue. Schools were also set up in the Assam plains for the evangelistic purpose although they were less successful.

The co-operation between the government and Christian missionaries (mission) existed in the following areas: First, in most cases the missionaries were invited by the British administration to initiate mission works among the people in Northeast region. The first mission also known as the Shan mission was started at Sadya as part of an ambitious Asian mission which would eventually cover upper Burma and China besides Northeast India. The missionaries thought that Sadya’s proximity to Burma and China made it an ideal place from which to launch their mission activities. Although the plan failed due to a number of circumstantial factors, it was certainly significant in that the doors for mission activities were thrown wide open.

British officials David Scott and Scott’s successor Francis Jenkins are known to have contributed the most to the missionary endeavors in Northeast India. Both Scott and Jenkins served as Commissioners of Assam and both came from an evangelical Christian background. Scott took keen interest in the Garo people and most of his service was focused there. He opened a school with the goal to convert the Garos to Christianity and in return it “would serve the interests of government insofar as stabilizing influence.” This was another clear example of a commitment on the part of the mission effort and the clear connection envisioned by the colonial governing officials.

Jenkins helped the missionaries in every possible way in his capacity as the Commissioner of Assam. He even:

Made an annual contribution to the mission of Rs. 500 throughout his life (he remained in Assam following his retirement in 1861, settling in Guwahati) and secured government grants for a new press, for Assamese type for the press, and for some of its educational and literary work.

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21 British magistrate of Sylhet invited William Carey of Serampore to initiate mission work among the Garos which led Carey to send Krishna Chandra Pal, the first Serampore convert to Garo areas. David Scott, the Chief Commissioner of Assam suggested the Calcutta council to invite missionaries to begin humanitarian activities among the hill tribes of Assam. In compliance with the joint appeals of the British officers Francis Jenkins (successor of David Scott), Charles Travelyan (prominent Company officer at Calcutta), and William H. Pearce (Baptist Missionary Society at Calcutta), the American Baptist mission in Myanmar (erstwhile Burma) opened a mission station at Sadya, the extreme eastern end of the Brahmaputra valley, the upper Assam. Sangma, History of American Baptist Mission in North-East India; Downs, The Mighty Works, 16-17; Dena, Christian Mission and Colonialism, 24f. Similarly, A Porteous granted permission for William Pettigrew to enter into Manipur state in 1894 and for missionary entry in Lushai hills, now Mizoram state.

22 The first missionaries to arrive were Nathan and Eliza Brown accompanied by Oliver and Harriet Cutter.

23 For a detailed information and discussion on Scott and Jenkins and their contributions to Christian missions refer to Downs, North East India. 33-52. Downs has given an extensive studies about them. Cf. Lalsangkima Pachuau, Ethnic Identity and Christianity: A Socio-Historical and Missiological Study of Christianity in Northeast India with Special Reference to Mizoram (Frankfurt and Maim: Peter Lang, 2002), 62-66.

24 Ibid., 36. Jenkins was also interested in the educational work of the missionaries to the tribals. In several occasions, he wrote letters to British Authorities in Calcutta and the Mission home boards stating them the needs for mission works and requesting more missionaries in Northeast region.

25 Ibid., 42.
It was a common practice among the colonizers to decide to settle down in the colonies rather than return to their home countries. As Albert Memmi notes in *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, it is hard for the colonizer to go home again because in his own country his standard of living would have to be significantly lowered. So he decided to stay in order to continue to live at the colonized’s expense. And because the liberal colonizer felt some guilt about that, he had to devise ways to give back, that is, to justify his role as a “usurper” in the colony.

In recognition of the invaluable services rendered to the Christian missions the American Baptist Mission’s home board in its official organ, the *Baptist Missionary Magazine*, published their words of appreciation and recognition to the British officials. While this appears to be a normal circumstance in which due appreciations were expressed upon someone in return for the invaluable help received, in this case, in advancing the missionizing project, it also underscored the deep connection that existed between the missionaries and the colonial governing officials. Even if this was a case of relationship entered out of necessity as often argued by some, for advancing their respective projects, what mattered was that they worked together. The missionaries did receive help and in return contributed toward the colonial projects regardless of their good intention.

The motive behind the British administration to invite missionaries was not far to seek – it was primarily for political expediency. The missionary efforts to further the civilizing mission were seen by the administration to be enhancing their efforts toward better administration among the native people. F. S. Downs uses the term "pacification" – to describe how the British meant to pacify the hills people, without the expensive imposition of direct administration the British government sought the help of the missionaries. This was reaffirmed in Jenkins’ support of the missionary work in the hills areas.

The word “pacification” is an important colonial invention. It was used in U.S. Indian policy-making and implementation: “pacifying the war-like tribes” or “hostiles.” George E. Tinker, an American Indian scholar and theologian in “Missions and Missionaries,” speaks of pacification as both political and missionary objective over against American Indians.

Christian missionaries began their work of converting the native peoples of the Americas soon after the beginnings of European invasion, both in the north and in the south. Indeed, the missionization of the native peoples in the Americas was the foundation for one of the primary European conquest strategies. In both

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27 Downs, *North East India*, 42.

28 Of course, the help and favor extended to the Christian mission was not limited to the Protestants only. The Roman Catholic missionaries were also extended similar help and support. In fact, Jenkins had not only warmly welcomed the Roman Catholic missionaries of Paris Mission – Fr. Rabin, Fr. Bernard and Fr. Krick – when they arrived in Guwahati in 1850 but also provided accommodations for them. Downs, *North East India*, 48; Cf. S. K. Barpuraji, “Early Christian Missions in the Naga Hills: An Assessment of their Activities,” in *Journal of Indian History*, vol. 48, no.143, 1970, 427-435.

29 Downs, *Northeast India*, 56.
mission and political-military documents this strategy was referred to as *pacification*.30

Then as recently as the early 1970s it was widely used in the U.S. war in Vietnam as part of the on-going narrative to justify U. S. invasion and control of Vietnam.31

The second motive was a social and administrative one – the British saw an opportunity to extend its administration that would minimize greatly the state's treasury working through the missionaries among the native people.

When the tribes had been pacified through the use of military force, the missionary education system was simply a convenient and cheap way of rendering a service that would otherwise have been the responsibility of the government.32

One of the primary tasks of the missionaries was to open schools for the native people. Ministry through education became one of the most effective means of evangelizing among the people. In most places the missionaries were the first to introduce modern education system among the native peoples.33 Whereas the government assistance generally came in the form of funding such as grants in aid, the missionaries ran and supervised the schools.34 By inculcating modern education in schools the missionaries worked toward changing the habits and life styles of the Naga peoples.35 Children were taught to abandon their traditional hairstyles and to adopt the style of the English and the missionaries. It should be noted that the American Indians had very similar experiences. In *Kill the Indian, Save the Man*, Ward Churchill discusses in great length how the churches and federal governments of the United States and Canada established education systems with residential schools for native children as one part of their assimilationist programs.36 “Every single aboriginal child would be removed from his/her home, family, community and culture at the earliest possible age and held for years in state sponsored ‘educational’ facilities, systematically decultured, and simultaneously indoctrinated . . . .”37 While the degree of measures adopted in terms of

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32 Downs, *North East India*. 60.
33 The missionaries were responsible in introducing modern education among most tribes in Northeast India – while the Baptist mission worked among the Nagas, Kukis and Garos, the Welsh Presbyterians worked among the Mizos and Khasis.
37 Ibid., 13.
facilitating such assimilationist programs may vary, the goal of education in general remained the same for Nagas and American Indians; to strip them off their cultures and ways of life.

Of all the missionaries regardless of affiliation working in Northeast India, William Pettigrew’s role was unique. He was a government appointed school inspector while at the same time working as a missionary in Manipur state. In his first year in Manipur he was limited to providing “private tuition for the children of Government officers.” He was prohibited from initiating any evangelizing activity among the Meiteis in the valley for fear that such activities could trigger social unrest and civil disobedience among the predominantly Hindu Meiteis. Consequently, Pettigrew was more a state official than missionary during this time.

Additionally, the colonial government having become aware of Pettigrew’s growing reputation among the hill people, sought for his help in the recruitment process and he did oblige with the request. Pettigrew was instrumental in recruiting many hill people to serve in the Labor Corps for the Allied forces during the First World War. In recognition of the services rendered by the mission the British administration granted the mission a plot of land for starting a new mission station in Kangpokpi area along with Rs. 2000 earmarked annually in the state budget. Thus administration lending hands in securing sites for mission station was another significant help the missionaries received from the government. And still another area of co-operation was in the medical work. In health services government assistance ranged from funding and grants in aid to providing free medicines and, at times, even personnel resources. It must be noted that medical aid and education always were and continue to be fundamental components in building the colonial infrastructure such as highways, railroads, and ports; ultimately indeed, all aid serves the purposes of the colonizer.

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40 Although the clearing and construction work began in 1919, only in 1921 that the Croziers moved to the center followed by Pettigrews after their return from furlough. Pettigrew states, “the headquarters of our Baptist Mission in Manipur were removed in December, 1919, to Kangpokpi.” In Rev. William Pettigrew’s Mission Reports and Letters 1891-1932. 34.

41 Such relationship was also evidenced in Khasi hills and Mizo hills. O. L. Snaithang writing about the Khasi hills says, “Lieutenant Lewin of Cherrapunji…have been instrumental in securing a site for a mission station in the Jaintia area in 1842. This pattern of relationship had been first established by David Scott and Francis Jenkins who both were evangelical Christians and both helped the missionaries in many ways.” O. L. Snaithang, Christianity and Social Change in Northeast India: A Study of the Role of Christianity in Social Change among the Khasi-Jaintia Hill Tribes of Meghalaya. Shillong: Vendrame Institute, 1993, 52.

42 Milton Sangma talks about how the government assisted the missionaries in providing medical helps in Nagaland – Mokokchung and Wokha areas – free of cost. American Baptist Mission, vol. 2, 204 - 205.
British Colonial Power and Christian Mission: An Evaluation

We will now consider whether the co-operation that existed between the colonial government and the missionaries amounted to actual collaboration and thereby determine if the missionaries were mostly innocent, or otherwise. Different views abound and I would like to categorize them under three groups. The first group maintains the view that missionaries were a distinct element in the larger projects of colonialism. Among the scholars, S. P. Sinha is quite critical of the missionary activities in Northeast India and he maintains that Western missionaries were in close league with the colonial British power and their activities constituted colonial engagement. His comment that, “In fact Christian missionaries are there not for advocating a faith but for keeping imperialism alive” represents the strongest criticism leveled against these missionaries.

The second group of scholars of which F.S. Downs and Milton Sangma are representative argue that the missionaries were not guilty of colonial engagement because they had their own goals and objectives and these were quite different from those of the colonial British administration. The missionaries' co-operation with the administration was prompted by necessity. Further, these scholars contend that this co-operation was limited to education and health services which were part of the humanitarian services rendered to native peoples. While this might be the case, and yet it must be noted that education and medical works were part of the colonial projects. Even if the missionaries did not consider themselves agents of colonial power, they participated, wittingly or not, in advancing the colonial projects.

The third group argues that Christian missionaries however good their intentions might have been, contributed towards the colonial establishment in North East India. In the words of Niharranjan Ray:

Naturally, these missionaries, some of them very well-meaning and pious souls determined to save these communities of people from everlasting damnation, as they saw it, were all part of great establishment of the foreign rulers, and consciously or unconsciously their mission was directed towards upholding and strengthening that establishment.

This is very similar to the view of George E. Tinker, who argued in the context of American Indians that:

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46 The Indians were suspicious of the missionaries and tribal Christians in Northeast India of aiding the British imperial rule. Downs, *North East India*, 61.
The Christian missionaries – of all denominations working among American Indian nations – were partners in genocide. Unwittingly no doubt, and always with the best of intentions, nevertheless the missionaries were guilty of complicity in the destruction of Indian cultures and social structures – complicity in devastating impoverishment and death of the people to whom they preached.48

I concur with the arguments of Tinker and Ray but with one exception. I agree with the premise that the missionaries, however good their intentions might have been, consciously and unconsciously contributed to the colonial project. However, I prefer to use the term 'contributed' rather than 'directed' which was used by Ray. To me the word 'directed' suggests intentionality – that this was intentionally willed from the beginning rather than unintended outcome. I believe the missionaries did come to Northeast region with the intention to propagate the gospel and they meant it to be good. At the same time, I also include the word 'consciously' to the 'civilizing' mission of the missionaries whether it be argued by some that it was the natural outcome of the preaching of the gospel - or part of the "White man's burden". The fact of the matter is that Christian missionaries did perceive civilizing the native peoples to be one of their objectives as is evidenced by their comments about and reactions to the native peoples. My reasoning for this will become evident in the discussion which follows.

There is an implicit assumption in the argument of those who claim that the missionaries came solely for the good of the native peoples; it is the assumption that these missionaries knew what was best for the native peoples and therefore they were virtually immune to any wrong doing. There is an obvious and profound element of uncritical acceptance of everything connected with the missionaries and Christian missions. Unfortunately, such arguments are still based largely on the dominant paradigm of analysis which perpetuates the validity of cultural elitism and precludes any attempts to see the other side of the experience - the stories of the victims. Even if they – including the Nagas themselves - profess to be studying from the perspectives of the natives they have clearly failed to critically challenge the assumptions of the dominant paradigm.

The case of modern education system will provide an adequate example. The missionaries were responsible for the introduction of modern education, literacy and literature to the native people whose own learning system and means for the transmission of knowledge were oral. The missionaries were responsible for reducing what were life-giving oral traditions down to stagnant written languages,49 and remarkably they are to this day lauded for their “accomplishments” in education.50 Modern education, with all

49 Missionaries like William Pettigrew, E. W. Clark, C. D. King and others were among the noted ones who reduced Naga dialects into written languages. While Pettigrew did for the Tangkhul Nagas, Clark and King did for the Aos and Angamis respectively.
the wonders it brought to native peoples was at the same time responsible for undermining and unraveling the native peoples' cultures and ways of knowing, in many cases it even brought about their demise. What Albert Memmi said about the effects of the introduction of English language in Africa rings true for the Naga people.

...The colonized's mother tongue, that which is sustained by his feelings, emotions and dreams, that in which tenderness and wonder are expressed, thus that which holds the greatest emotional impact, is precisely the one which is the least valued. It has no stature in the country or in the concert of his peoples. If he wants to obtain a job, make a place for himself, exist in the community and the world, he must first bow to the language of his masters.51

In a similar manner, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, a fellow African scholar asserts that if, “The bullet was the means of the physical subjugation, language was the means of the spiritual subjugation.”52

Today Naga people, like any other indigenous people around the world, are faced with the question of the survival of their identity due to the loss of their life-sustaining traditions and cultures. According to Linda Tuhiwai Smith, such undermining of native knowledge systems is part of the mission of the imperial powers. Smith notes:

Imperialism tends to be used in at least four different ways when describing the form of European imperialism which 'started' in the fifteenth century: (1) imperialism as economic expansion; (2) imperialism as the subjugation of "others"; (3) imperialism as an idea or spirit with many forms of realization; and (4) imperialism as a discursive field of knowledge (emphasis is mine).53

This leads us to the second function of modern education which is that of an indispensable tool of Western imperialism. Allan Bishop, in his essay “Western Mathematics: The Secret Weapon of Cultural Imperialism”, debunks the myth of Western mathematics’ cultural neutrality - the idea that Western mathematics is value free.54 The conventional wisdom is that mathematical truths are universally valid. They are in a way. But Bishop goes on to ask:

But where do ‘degrees’ come from? Why is the total 180? Why not 200, or 100? Indeed, why are we interested in triangles and their properties at all? The answer is, essentially, ‘because some people determined that it should be that way’. Mathematical ideas, like any other ideas, are humanly constructed. They have a cultural history.55

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There were and are many other valid ways of knowing including mathematical systems in non-European cultures. But these are demeaned and relegated to the category of ‘ethno-mathematics’, localized and specific mathematical ideas that are not part of or compatible with ‘mainstream’ mathematics; in other words they are inferior to Western mathematics.

Regarding the question of how Western mathematics can be seen as an instrument of imperialism, Bishop identifies three major mediating agents in the process of cultural invasion of the colonized countries by Western mathematics: trade, public and private administration and education. In the field of trade and commerce, the Western concepts of length, area, volume, weight, time and money were imposed on the Indigenous societies. Likewise, in administration Western numerical formulas and procedures were used “for keeping track of large numbers of people and commodities.” The third major medium for cultural invasion was education. “It was part of a deliberate strategy of acculturation – international in its efforts to instruct in the ‘best of the West’, and convinced of its superiority to any indigenous mathematical systems and cultures.”

Western mathematics as a product of Western culture is further associated with a particular set of values which Bishop identifies as rationalism, objectism, and power and control. The rationalizing process and objectification of the world, coupled with science and technology understood as ways to control the physical and social environment, represent the values associated with Western mathematics. In a similar vein Gangmumei Kamei, a Naga statesman and scholar argues that modern education was “designed to inculcate European liberal ideas, literature, and science in the Indian mind, and to produce educated persons who could be conveniently employed to run the colonial administration.”

The uncritical acceptance of this modern education system has had a lasting affect on the way education is viewed and pursued in Nagaland. The critical question before us is this: Whose values, histories, stories, and knowledge are we to learn? Unfortunately, to this day almost all the courses/subjects, histories and knowledge taught in the schools and colleges are based on dominant Western and Indian education paradigms. Students read and learn more of Euro-American and Indian history and philosophy than their own. Very little of Indigenous history and culture are incorporated into the school experience. As a result, educated people in the region know more about Euro-American and dominant Indian histories.

The consequence is that the education introduced in Nagaland by missionaries and British colonizers, and continued by the Indian state, has been instrumental in not only perpetuating cultural dominance over the Naga people but also coercing Nagas to participate in their own colonization for over a century. What we must acknowledge is that this has been and is still a process of colonizing the minds of the Naga people through education. Dolly Kikon rightly argues that:

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56 Ibid., 73.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid., 74.
The introduction of an ‘approved’ syllabus by the Indian state, can be seen as a process that ‘recolonized’ the Naga mind, to an extent where the Naga have lost the ability to construct their own past objectively and critically. This has resulted in misinterpretation and misappropriation of the Naga indigenous knowledge and perspectives.

Ashis Nandy asserts that the colonization of the mind is no less debilitating a form of colonization than the material/geographical form. He offers this succinct summary of the psychological impact of such colonization:

This colonialism colonizes minds in addition to bodies and it releases forces within the colonized societies to alter their cultural priorities once for all. In the process, it helps the concept of the modern West from a geographical and temporal entity to a psychological category. The West is now everywhere, within the West and outside; in structures and in minds.

In a similar manner, Marie Battiste, a Mi’kmaq educator of Potlo’tek American Indian Nation, calls this colonizing of the mind a “cognitive imperialism” which is a “form of cognitive manipulations used to disclaim other knowledge bases and values.” The far reaching impact of such cognitive imperialism is that, “Cultural minorities have been led to believe that their poverty and impotence are a result of their race.” True to this analysis, having internalized such negative views about themselves, the Naga people grow up blaming themselves for their unfortunate fate and condition. The Indian state fully armed with an education system coupled with repressive laws and a dominant visible military, has aggressively pursued a plan to rewrite and negate Naga people’s history and cultural priorities. In this sense, education and educational institutions become instruments for control and hegemony.

Education and educational institutions were not the only mediums used to expand colonial controls over Naga people, Western medical practices, medicines, and hospitals were equally powerful modes of control. It has been often argued that European medicines and hospitals were instrumental in saving lives and improving the living qualities of the people. What is never acknowledged is the displacement of traditional Indigenous medicines and medicine persons and the cultural role these played. According to Michael Mann, “Colonial medicine was also considered a useful tool for ruling the country in its potential for colonizing and civilizing the bodies of the people [italics mine].”

All the talk about improving the lives of the people through advanced modern education and medicines serves to affirm the broader Western idea of progress as this is measured in terms of technological advancement and  

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63 Ibid.

64 Mann, “Torchbearers Upon the Path of Progress,” 14.
development. Indeed, ‘development’ became the modern term for ‘civilizing’, but it still operates on the principle of imagined differences and constructed hierarchies.\textsuperscript{65}

Conclusion

The analytical study of the connections between the colonial project and missionaries is crucial to problematizing the theological context of the Asian people vis-à-vis the influences of colonization and missionization. The examination of colonization and missionization must be accompanied by the processes of decolonizing and demissionizing to provide a necessary context from which an efficacious Indigenous theology can be realized.

This examination has demonstrated how colonization and missionization resulted in the shaping and development of a distinct and highly Westernized form of Christianity in Asia in general and Northeast India in particular. The combination of these two overwhelming forces has led to the near obliteration of Indigenous culture and values. And, if somehow that is not enough, the Western worldview which informs and animates the civilizing and missionizing projects made inevitable the destruction of Indigenous worldview and traditional ways in which they understood themselves and their place in the world. Their theological outlook including their understanding of “God” and Jesus Christ, has been and continues to be dictated by the missionary teachings. A theology derived from and centered in the people’s historical experience and cultural reality is a pressing task confronting Indigenous Christians in Asia today.

\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 16.