

## 1. Outline of your project stating your research questions

In 2003, during an eighteen-month period of fieldwork in Myanmar (primarily, Yangon) as a fellow of the Blakemore Foundation, I took a side trip to Taunggyi, the provincial capital of the Shan State. Taunggyi, as a major urban area, is the northernmost point of regions populated by members of the Pa'O ethnic group, numbering about one million individuals. On that trip I first encountered Pa'O culture and music. The Pa'O had chosen (ca. 1915) to adopt and adapt the Anglo concertina (Pa'O: *khaya*), first received from British soldiers and Salvation Army officers, in the second decade of the twentieth century as a logical replacement to their traditional free-reed bamboo mouth organs (Pa'O: *tonglit*). Like their predecessors, these concertinas were employed as instrumental accompaniment to long, sung historical narratives and religious texts (*sathung samain*). My unexpected musical encounter led me to cultivate a relationship with members of the Pa'O Literary and Cultural Council Committee (PLCCC hereafter), the cultural arm of the Pa'O National Organization (PNO), who had maintained an archive, library, and museum in Taunggyi for decades.

Within the larger context of Myanmar national media, which prioritizes and glorifies Burmese culture, and by extension Burmese performing arts, as primary to the Nation, the rich and varied musical traditions of ethnic minority groups, such as the Pa'O, who also live within the political borders of Myanmar, are significantly marginalized if not ignored outright. When Pa'O music is featured in the media, the refined song traditions I have come to know are absent and what is broadcast instead is marching/outdoor gong and drum instrumental ensemble music. This less-refined, less text-dependent music, is more easily received by the majority Burmese (who speak no Pa'O language) and so is chosen as representative of "Pa'O music" in national cultural contexts. The result, as has been demonstrated in other similarly diverse nations with a dominant majority culture, is that Pa'O music is largely seen within Myanmar (and beyond, even) as primitive, repetitive, without refinement, and lacking in complex textual traditions. One may interpret this as: 1) a contemporary post-colonial artifact resultant from, and symptomatic of, the disruptive political and cultural trajectories of British colonial policy (Borchert, 2018; မောင်ခွန်နွယ်, ၁၉၉၂; ပအိုဝ်းသမိုင်းပြုစုရေးအဖွဲ့, ၂၀၁၅.); 2) a failure to fully realize more promising visions of a newly independent and inclusively diverse nation (especially, in the Pa'O context, of only partial fulfillment of the terms of the Panglong Agreement [1947] to which the Pa'O were party) (ခွန်ရာဇာ, ၂၀၁၂; ဦးခွန်မောင်တုတ်, ၂၀၁၈); and, 3) perhaps most alarmingly, a tendency in twentieth and twenty-first century scholarship (internal *and* external) to reify Burmese-dominant intellectual frames (Douglas, 2001 and 2013; K, 1941; Ferguson, 2016; Okell, 1971; Williamson, 2000; အနုပညာဦးစီးဌာန, ၁၉၉၈; စံမြင့်, ၁၉၉၀; author's personal interviews with PNO/PLCCC staff). And yet, Pa'O culture possesses a varied and rich complexity, largely unexplored beyond its source.

In my doctoral project I propose to engage and investigate the song traditions of the Pa'O, in direct partnership with my colleagues in the PLCCC/PNO, focusing on two distinct (though related) textual traditions: one is liturgical and the other is historical. Regarding the former, Pa'O

interpretations of the Theravāda Buddhist, Pali-language canon notably diverge from those of the more dominant Burmese, Shan, and Mon lineages within Myanmar. For the Pa'O, compelling intersections from more northern traditions, including even a handful of clearly Mahayanist ideas as well as Sanskrit texts, emerge on close listening/reading in addition to unique mystical, astrological, and numerological embellishments (ဗေဒကောဏ္ဍည, ၂၀၀၀; ဗေဒရသမိ, ၂၀၁၆ and ၂၀၁၇; all publications and Pali-Pa'O translation/elucidation/commentary series of ပိဋကတ်ပြန်ပအိုဝ်စွဲ; author's personal interviews with Khun Rama and other Pa'O monks). Pronounced variation can be found as well in the Pa'O sense of their own history, both independent of the Mon/Burman paradigm and within the contemporary Myanmar nation-state. Therefore, historical and cultural narrative texts represent important documentation of Pa'O traditions frequently challenged by external dynamics ([re]presentation, national politics, economics, etc.) (ခွန်ရာဇာ, ၂၀၁၂; ဦးခွန်မောင်တုတ်, ၂၀၁၈; ဗေဒရသမိ, ၂၀၁၄). Further, the apparent interchangeability of male and female voices in these musical forms, where there is no dominant vocal preference, is of additional interest to this research project (personal interviews during field recording sessions with musicians; statistical analysis of commercial recording market). By their marked presence within sung traditions and narrative perspectives, female Pa'O voices occupy positions of authorship and authority within the composition of important Pa'O traditions, religious interpretations, and kinship stories (Ikeya, 2005; MacLachlan, 2011; personal interviews)

*My initial research questions are as follows:*

- A. What content within Pa'O song traditions echo dominant (Burmese/Mon/Shan) religious and historical narratives, and more importantly, where do texts diverge, presenting a unique Pa'O perspective? This investigation will explore both Pa'O interpretation of the Theravāda Buddhist canon as well as historical and narrative texts of people(s), spaces, and kinship.
- B. How do the Pa'O negotiate these differences across contexts, from national to local media and public events, and beyond, including within more intimate spaces such as the archive, monasteries, and private homes.
- C. What are the actual dynamics of practice around gender in performance, where initial appearances indicate fluidity and equality?
- D. How does composition, instrumentation, and performance practice establish a musical environment in which these differences may be expressed and fully realized among Pa'O musicians, vocalists, and audiences? Is there opportunity for understanding and/or consumption of these musical works beyond Pa'O listeners and on what level of appreciation (sensory, textual, intellectual, or more)?

## 2. Summary of existing research indicating relevant studies on your topic already published and the relevance of your study in relationship to current discourse in your field.

Within the allied humanities/social sciences fields of Myanmar/Burma studies, focused, long-term research has markedly expanded into ethnic minority areas with the recent opening of the country to increased access. While the majority Burman population still enjoys a position of power and influence, there have been significant steps toward a broader view of the nation. The work of scholars such as Douglas (2001, 2013) (ethnomusicology), Fergusan (2016) (anthropology), Harriden (2002) (political science), Ikeya (2005) (gender studies), McCormick (2011, 2014) (political science), Salem-Gervais and Metro (2012) (education), Scott (2009) (political science/economics), and Watkins (2013) (linguistics) stand out as primary examples of investigations at the political and cultural margins in Myanmar. As yet, there have been no significant research projects focused specifically on the Pa'O from outside of their own internal work, primarily managed through the PLCCC/PNO (ခွန်ရာဇာ, ၂၀၁၂; ပအိုဝ်းသမိုင်းပြုစုရေးအဖွဲ့, ၂၀၁၅).

The project that I propose, especially with regard to female Pa'O vocalists, necessarily intersects with gender studies and will therefore rely heavily on existing work in that domain. Gender and ethnicity have long been important topics in Southeast Asian Studies. Andaya (2006), Falk (2013), Holt (2017), Ito (2013), Lentz (2011), Michaud (2000, 2009a, 2009b), Ó Briain (2014, 2018), Rasmussen (2010), Taylor (2008), and Weiss (2006) are especially relevant where both Indonesia and Vietnam serve as rich examples of nation-states composed of a plurality of peoples. Here, I wish to draw specific attention to the recent work of Lonán Ó Briain, whose research among minority musicians in northwestern Vietnam is a terrific model as it investigates multiple layers of cultural/performative dynamics and is especially relevant to my own research. These works provide some comparison for the interpretation of ethnicity and gender in Pa'O communities. But as is true everywhere, gender and identity constructions are first and foremost local. As of yet, there is little written addressing the challenges and dynamics of understanding gender in Pa'O communities.

As I position myself in training and ongoing research interest as an ethnomusicologist, I have included in my initial reading list those musical studies that take in other geographic regions, from nearby China to the African continent, with an ear towards supportive and challenging voices among diverse contexts. Not only do I hope to expand understanding of these types of dynamics in ethnicity and gender within the narrow contexts of Myanmar internally and as an example from Southeast Asia more broadly, my ultimate goal is to participate in a larger conversation about the voices and stories that have been intentionally pushed to the margins.

The field of ethnomusicology is well-suited for this study of the Pa'O in particular and *specifically because* the textual traditions under scrutiny exist in the musical context of instrumentally accompanied song. While it may well be possible to explore the texts separate from their performance, my own long-term experience with this tradition strongly suggests that

the musical performance itself supplies the historical foundation and cultural sustenance for the future persistence of the tradition. While the research will necessarily draw from allied humanistic fields, the heart of the endeavor remains firmly situated within the scope and ongoing expansion of ethnomusicological query, where the innovative application of current theory and methodology promises to illuminate the questions of cultural identity, religious practice, and gender proposed here.

### **3. Outline the intended procedure: methods, order of required work steps**

Beyond the anticipated KUG curriculum of coursework, seminars, forums, and consultations with faculty advisors in Graz, this project requires an intentionally crafted focus on direct fieldwork, primarily on-site at the PLCCC in Taunggyi, Shan State, Myanmar, as well as outreach to Pa'O villages in southern Shan State, Kayah State, Kayin State, and northern Mon State. Future fieldwork for my KUG research project will build on a sustained foundation of intentional engagement, research, and cultivation of Pa'O resources that I began in 2003 and has persisted to the present. Access to many previously designated restricted areas was recently opened with a dramatic shift in national politics in 2011, making a more comprehensive study of Pa'O music newly possible to a foreign scholar. I acknowledge, with reservation, that the military coup of 2021 and subsequent return to military rule may well problematize such wide-scale access for my proposed project in the near-term. I remain confident in the prospects for a successful project based on three factors:

- 1) I maintain a sizable personal archive of resources (texts, fieldnotes, field recordings, commercial recordings, etc.) drawn from seventeen years of periodic fieldwork, including those from within the recent decade of greater political openness;
- 2) as a provincial capital, Taunggyi will continue to be within an accessible geo-political zone due to standing cease-fire agreements with the military once current conflicts in the central Bamar-majority corridor stabilize;
- 3) there are areas within northwestern Thailand, freely accessible, within which knowledgeable Pa'O informants with strong connections to the PNO also reside.

Due to my current and long-standing professional connections to Myanmar as well as previous graduate work in the field, my Burmese language skills are advanced to the point of being sufficient for focused academic research with Burmese primary and secondary sources. I have also undertaken significant periods of study of the Pa'O language, but here I would anticipate needing to expand my abilities in the language as a necessary component of the research project. The former head archivist of the PLCCC, Khun Rama (d. 2019), was a Buddhist monk of nineteen years and a capable instructor for me in both the Pa'O and Pali languages, including his recent systematic work to publish dictionaries and grammars of Pa'O. It would be important to note here, both for a deeper sense of the research itself and the need for specialized training, that these song traditions rely heavily on a form of the Pa'O language that demonstrates both a higher literary register as well as complex metaphor, symbolism, and grammatical structure, similar to other vocal traditions in the greater region of Southeast Asia.

Having worked directly with Khun Rama, his apprentices, and his monastic colleagues on Pa'O literary traditions, I remain confident that I have access to the language resources needed to complete my proposed studies.

Though I have previously recorded several hours of vocal music in Taunggyi to complement what little was available on commercial cassettes, I would anticipate conducting a more comprehensive project in partnership with the PLCCC/PNO to record and analyze these musical traditions across a larger geographic area, including Diaspora communities. The work would then also include transcription of these texts, which will be labor-intensive as the texts tend to be long, non-repetitive narratives and religious elucidations. As with my previous work with Pa'O cultural leaders, archivists, and musicians, these types of publications, performances, and recordings will bear proper attribution of authorship and editorship among the collective. I continue to view this work as an intellectual partnership in cultural preservation and wider understanding.

#### **4. Candidate's qualifications for a successful treatment of the chosen topic (for example specialization in your MA studies, other specific previous knowledge)**

As evidenced in greater detail within my CV, I have maintained a long-term commitment to research in the musical traditions of Southeast Asia. The earliest kernel of my research interest is evident in my MA thesis written at Northern Illinois University (NIU), a study of how instruction and performance practice of *kendang penca*, a musical tradition of the Sundanese minority on the Indonesian island of Java, differed between the national performing arts conservatory and a local village ensemble (Miller 2002).

Though my MA thesis emerged from previous fieldwork in Indonesia, my studies at NIU were focused on my first steps in Burmese language (funded by FLAS fellowships), engagement with NIU's Center for Burma Studies, and intentionally cultivated transition to work in Myanmar. Since then, my academic service and professional life has been dominated by concerns related to Myanmar, including twenty years of work in Myanmar across dozens of trips to the country.

In brief here and as evidenced in detail by my CV: while a student at NIU, I digitized the field recordings held by the Center for Burma Studies of Muriel Williamson who studied harp in Myanmar in the 1960s; I served as coordinating editor of the *Journal of Burma Studies* for five years (2004–2008); was a Trustee of the Burma Studies Foundation for ten years (2007–2017); received two large grants for the digitization of thousands of early 78rpm recordings of Burmese music (U.S. Ambassador's Fund in 2008; British Library in 2014); and, perhaps most importantly to this proposal of study, received a grant for the digitization of the PLCCC archive of religious manuscripts (British Library Endangered Archives Programme in 2007, link included in bibliography below). Meanwhile, as a professional academic librarian, I have worked tirelessly to expand collections from Myanmar, most recently working with several institutions to shift collecting priorities to resources in minority languages, including substantial collections in Pa'O

(~150 volumes) for Harvard University. Further to the project proposed here, in 2019-2020, I arranged and cataloged the 335 volumes of the Sixth Buddhist Council (ဆဋ္ဌမသင်္ဂါယနာ, 1954-1956, in Burmese [elucidations and commentaries] and Pali [original texts]) for Harvard University Library. And, in 2020, I cataloged over two hundred volumes of Buddhist texts from the early twentieth century for the Southeast Asia collections at Yale University. These texts were significant because they demonstrated in content the assumed degradation of the canon that necessitated the convening of the Sixth Council among Burmese Buddhists in Yangon.

Finally, I include below a short list of my previous professional conference presentations directly connected to my proposed research project:

29 May 2013. “A Preliminary Examination of Pa’O Music in Local and National Contexts” – lecture, Southeast Asia Lecture Series, Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University.

June 2011. “Whether Pa’O Music in Myanmar?” paper presentation – Celebrating the Legacy of Gitalulin U Ko Ko (1928–2007): Symposium and Concert Yangon, Myanmar.

1 April 2011 “Embodied Knowledge and Emerging Resources” – paper, annual meeting of AAS in conjunction with the International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS).

17 February 2006 “Karaoke Modernity: The (Re)presentation of Pa’O Identity on Music VCD” – paper, annual meeting, International Association for the Study of Popular Music – United States Branch (IASPM-US).

12 November 2005 “Knowing Pa’O: Identity and Information in a Myanmar (Burma) Ethnic Minority Library” – paper, School of Information Resources and Library Science Graduate Student Symposium, University of Arizona.

22 October 2004 “Songs of the Pa’O: Music, Text, and Meaning in Taunggyi” – paper, International Burma Studies Conference.

20 May 2004 “The Adoption and Adaptation of the 20-button Anglo Concertina among the Pa’O of Myanmar (Burma)” – paper, annual meeting of the American Musical Instrument Society (AMIS).

### *Proposed Research Timeline*

#### **2021-2022**

KUG coursework; Organization of initial sources and expanded reading; Further language training (Pa’O, Burmese, Pali, Sanskrit); Applications for grants and other funding sources for fieldwork.

**2022-2023**

Continued engagement with the KUG academic community; Fieldwork (Myanmar/Thailand); More field recordings, interviews, primary source research, primarily in Taunggyi and regions south (positioning this in the second year provides an opportunity for the currently “hot” political situation in Myanmar to cool).

**2023-2024**

Continued engagement with the KUG academic community; Focus on presenting the research among relevant academic/research organizations (ICTM, SEM, ICAS, AAS, Burma Studies Group, others); Final revisions of the dissertation, submission, and defense.

**5. List of publications of relevant literature on the chosen subject**

/Pa'O primary sources/

၂၀၁၅. မဟာဝဂ္ဂပါဠိ. ပိဋကတ်ပြန်ပအိုဝ်စွဲ. / 2015. Mahāvagga Pali. Pithakat pran Pa'O cvo. / = [The Mahāvagga (in Pali) and translated into Pa'O with commentary]

၂၀၁၆. ဝိသုဒ္ဓိမဂ်ပြန်ပအိုဝ်ကျမ်စောင်. ပိဋကတ်ပြန်ပအိုဝ်စွဲ. / 2016. Visuddhimagga pran Pa'O kyam cong. Pithakat pran Pa'O cvo. / = [Pa'O-Pali text; The Visuddhimagga (in Pali) and translated into Pa'O with commentary]

၂၀၁၆. ဝိမာနဝတ္ထုတွယ်ပြန်ပအိုဝ်ကျမ်စောင်. ပိဋကတ်ပြန်ပအိုဝ်စွဲ. / 2016. Vimanavatthu tvay pran Pa'O kyam cong. Pithakat pran Pa'O cvo. / [The Vimanavatthu (in Pali) and translated into Pa'O with commentary]

၂၀၁၇. သုတ္တနတပိဋက ခုဒ္ဒကနိကာယ ဣတိဝုတ္တက ပါဠိတေးပြန်ပအိုဝ်. ပိဋကတ်ပြန်ပအိုဝ်စွဲ. / 2017. Suttantapiṭaka khuddakanikāya itivuttaka Pāḷi to pran Pa'O. Pithakat pran Pa'O cvo. / = [The fourth book of the Khuddakanikāya, containing 110 suttas, translated into Pa'O with commentary from the Pali]

၂၀၁၈. ဝိနယပိဋက မဟာဝဂ္ဂ ပါဠိတေးပြန်ပအိုဝ်. ပိဋကတ်ပြန်ပအိုဝ်စွဲ. / 2018. Vinayapiṭaka Mahāvagga Pāḷi to pran Pa'O. Pithakat pran Pa'O cvo. / = [The Vinayapiṭaka and Mahāvagga (in Pali) and translated into Pa'O with commentary]

၂၀၁၉. ဝိနယပိဋက ဘုရားဥဒေတေးတန်. ပိဋကတ်ပြန်ပအိုဝ်စွဲ. / 2019. Vinayapiṭaka bhura upade to tan. Pithakat pran Pa'O cvo. / = [Portions of the Vinayapiṭaka focused on regulations of behavior, having to do with Buddhist law, (in Pali) and translated into Pa'O with commentary]

ဗေဓမ္မသိရီ. ၂၀၀၄. ခုဒ္ဒသိက္ခာပြန်ပအိုဝ်လိတ်သောင်း. ကေးကျိုုဆောင်းဖေးသား. / 2004. Khuddasikkha pran Pa uiv lit con. Ko Kyui Chon Phe Sa. / = [Dhammasiri's translation and commentary in the Pa'o of the Khuddasikkhā, a compedium of the Vinaya rules of

Theravāda Buddhism; includes Khuddasikkhāpurānātikā, Khuddasikkhābhīnavatīkā, and Mūlasikkhātīkā]

Digitized religious and literary collection of the The Pa'O Literary and Cultural Council Committee Library. Access: [<https://eap.bl.uk/project/EAP104/search>] and [<https://bit.ly/2CMSsLC>].

To these I would add my own significant archival holdings, including copies of Khun Rama's drafts and notes of his dictionary, subject glossaries, and grammars of Pa'O language. As well, dozens of long-form song transcriptions have already been previously completed.

/Pa'O secondary sources/

ခွန်ဗေဟွမ်. ၂၀၁၈. ဘဝအထိအသိ. ပအိုဝ်လိတ်နျစက်. / 2018. Bhava athi asi. Pa'O lik nya cak. / = [Knowing and being in life; a discourse on Pa'O culture]

ခွန်ရာဇာ. ၂၀၁၂. လူယွဲပြုဖြူရေး. သက်နျာလတ်. / 2012. Lu yvai prvu phro re. Sek Nya Lat. / = [The work of the people. Pa'O culture and community development]

ဗွေကောဏ္ဍည. ၂၀၀၀. ဘဒ္ဒသးရေးပျသနာဒး. ကေားကျိးဆောင်းဖေးသး. /2000. Bhasa re pyassana. Ko Kyui Chon Phe Sa. / = [Literary culture in Pa'O Theravāda Buddhist doctrine]

ဗွေဝရသာမိ. ၂၀၁၄. ပရိတ္တန်ဝတ္ထုပအိုဝ်ပရိတ်ပဠိတော. ပညဟံတန်လိတ်လိုင်. / 2013. Parittan vatthu Pa'O parit Pali to. / = [Teachings and essays on Pali Buddhism translated to Pa'O]

\_\_\_\_. ၂၀၁၄. ရာဇဝင်မင်စဲဉ်. စာရေးနမ်းဟူတမ်း. ပညဟံတန်လိတ်လိုင်. / 2014. Rajavang mang sain. / = [Chronicles of Pa'O history]

\_\_\_\_. ၂၀၁၆. အလောင်နမ္ပူးတန်အလောင်ဝိလာလိတ်သမိုင်ခယ်ဗောရိသတ်သမိုင်ခွန်ဟောင်သမိုင်. ပညဟံတန်လိတ်လိုင်. [Pa'O Buddhism]

\_\_\_\_. ၂၀၁၇. စောက်အာဗ္ဗာအလောင်ကေဗ္ဗာတောင်တွေတောင်မောင် စေါင်းသင်ပွေဗွန်စုံ (လမ်းနီဒေါ်လမ်းစေ့ယွာ) ခြယ်ခံ. ပညဟံတန်လိတ်လိုင်. [Pa'O Buddhism]

To these I would add dozens of collected pamphlets and small volumes of sermons, commentaries, and short teachings of prominent Pa'O Theravāda Buddhist monks, abbots, and lay scholars. [Both in my possession and accessible from U.S.-based academic collections.]

/Burmese secondary sources/

အနုပညာဦးစီးဌာန. ၁၉၉၈. မြန်မာ့ရိုးရာတူရိယာ / Myanmar yoya turiya. / = [Myanmar/Burmese



musical instruments]

စံမြင့်. ၁၉၉၀. မဟာဂီတဆွေးနွေးချက်. ရန်ကုန်: မြဝတီပုံနှိပ်တိုက် / Discussion art music in Myanmar / = [Typical Burmese-centric description of art and classical music of the nation]

ပအိုဝ်သမိုင်းပြုစုရေးအဖွဲ့. ၂၀၁၅. ပအိုဝ်သမိုင်း ၊ ထုတ်ဝေသူပအိုဝ်သမိုင်းပြုစုရေးအဖွဲ့. ပအိုဝ်သမိုင်းပြုစုရေးအဖွဲ့ / Pa'O thmain. / = [Pa'O history]

ဦးခွန်မောင်တုတ်. ၂၀၁၈. ပအိုဝ်အမျိုးသားဆောင်းဆောင်ဦးအောင်ခမ်းထီ၏နိုင်ငံရေးခြံ့. အရှင်မဟောသဓ. / Pa'O amythaung saung U Kham Thi e naingan ye khi a shin ma hasadha. = [Biography of U Kham Thi {PNO chairman} and the political history of the Pa'O National Organization]

မောင်ခွန်နွယ်. ၁၉၉၂. ပအိုဝ်. စာပေဗိမာန်. /Pa'O. / = [ Pa'O culture; for a decade, this was the definitive Burmese-language introduction to the Pa'O]

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