Reverse Mission and Homeland Imagination: Trends and Issues in Burmese Migrant Christianity

David Moe

Introduction

In his seminal work *The Next Christendom*, Philip Jenkins observes that the center of gravity in the Christian world has shifted from the Global North (Europe and North America) to the Global South (Latin America, Africa, and Asia).[1] While this is true, the US, a unique nation of immigration, remains the center for education and global migration. Therefore, students, scholars, and refugees from the Global South come to America as pilgrims with their distinctive forms of political repression, ethnic marginalities, and religio-ethnic identities.

Some scholars of world Christianity and mission have paid close attention to the theological issues of the relationship between mission and migration. Scholars, such as Justo Gonzalez,[2] Peter Phan,[3] Jehu Hanciles,[4] and M. Daniel Carrolls among others[5] have played significant roles in writing about what I call the trilogy of world Christianity, global migration, and intercultural mission/theology. Their aim is to invite readers to rethink the identity of Christianity as a religion of migration. The relationship between mission and migration is not a new issue; it is as old as the stories of Israel in the Old Testament and of the apostles in the New Testament. Israel and apostles are called to move from one place to another.[6] Especially in the NT, people's migration to another place is crucial for their identity and mission movement. Acts 1:8 sums it up: Jesus said to His disciples, ". . . you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." This reveals the apostles' cross-cultural move of mission. Gonzalez rightly notes that "Diaspora Judaism is of crucial importance for the history of Christianity, for it was one of the main avenues through which the new faith expanded throughout the Roman Empire. Diaspora Judaism unwittingly provided the church with one of the most useful tools of its missionary expansions, the Greek translation of the Old Testament."[7]

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It is fair to say that people in the first century share some similarities with the moves of Burmese Christian immigrants in the twenty-first century. Although the motivations for their moves might not be exactly the same, the concepts of their moves share some similarities. They left their homelands by force or by choice and adopted foreign lands as their new homes. It is in this analogous sense that I will be exploring contemporary trends and issues in the Burmese migrant Christians who move to the United States. Particular attention will be given to the Chin, Kachin, and Karen ethnic groups who represent the highest percentage of Christian population both at home and abroad. Here, some terminologies need clarity. Despite some controversy, I take the liberty to use the term "Burmese" for the Chin, Kachin, Karen, and others regardless of ethnic and religious groups and for the national language. On the other hand, the term "Bamar" will be used for the ethnic majority groups who represent Buddhism.[8]

The story of Burmese migrant Christianity is not widely heard in the academic discourse about Asian American theology and missiology. It is fair to comment that Asian American theology is mainly represented by some academic theologians of Chinese, Korean, and Indian origins. What we learn about Asian American theology is the story told and written by most scholars from Chinese, Korean, and Indian ethnic backgrounds. While we appreciate their pioneering works on Asian American theology since the 1980s, it is important to introduce the hidden story of other Asian American Christians, such as Burmese migrant Christians. Burmese migrant Christians are on the margins of the margins in the context of Asian American theological discourses.[9] The main purpose of this paper is not to react against Asian American theology, but to add the story of Burmese migrant Christianity to the making of Asian American theology.

First, I will begin by exploring how scholars reconsider a theoretical concept of Christian mission as reverse mission in the contemporary context of global migration. I will examine whether or not the academic concept of reverse mission is popular among grassroots migrant Christians. I will also discern if reverse mission is rhetoric or reality. Second, I will describe some trends, challenges, and issues in Burmese migrant Christianity. My goal is not necessarily to provide a sociological study of Burmese migrant statistics. I will suggest how one should respond to trends, challenges, and issues. Third, I will describe the gap between academic and grassroots voices and suggest why and how one should bridge the gap. I will also describe the need for dialogue between scholars from the Global South and the Global North for imagining intercultural theology. I will conclude the paper by showing how Burmese migrant Christians should imagine their homeland from the perspective of holding a double identity.

Reverse Mission and Religious Movement: Is Reverse Mission Popular among Grassroots Communities?

Is the concept of "reverse mission" popular among grassroots Christians? It is observed that the concept of reverse mission is popular among academic communities. In particular, scholars of world Christianity treat the concept of reverse mission as a contextual agenda for new theological discourses. However, the concept of reverse mission is not popular among many grassroots Christians. I recently preached at the Myanmar

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Christian Community in Baltimore on the topic of reverse mission based on God's call of Abraham to move to the promised land for the mission (Gen 12). Instead of using the US as analogous to the promised land, though many grassroots migrant Christians see in that way for imagining American Christian nationalism, I chose to see God's call of Abraham to move to the foreign land as analogous to Burmese Christians' move to the foreign land. After my preaching, some church members came to me and said, "We have never thought about reverse mission. We thought Myanmar is the only mission field, and we financially support a few missionaries in Myanmar."

What exactly is reverse mission? Scholars agree that reverse mission is a missiological concept of sending Christians from the then mission-receiving continents (Global South) to the then mission-sending continents (Global North) as missionaries and migrants.[10] Reverse mission is about non-Western Christians who have been reached or even colonized by Western missionaries in the past, bringing the Gospel back to Christians in the West. Historically, it focuses on the late twentieth-century reversal of Christian mission movement from the Global South to the Global North. The Global South is not the mere Western missionary receiver, but the missionary sender.[11] For instance, Myanmar received Catholic mission in the sixteenth century and then Protestant mission in the nineteenth century. But things have changed in the past few decades. Now Myanmar is no longer the mere mission-receiving nation, but also a missionary-sending nation. Such reverse concept is seen in the lives of Christian migration to the West.

Since the late twentieth century, a good number of ethnic minority Christians have migrated to Western countries, especially North America, as refugees. Most of them have migrated to the US through the United Nations High Commission of Refugees in Malaysia, while some Christians, especially Karen and Chin, have come to the US through the UNHCR in Thailand and India. They have left their homeland, but they have not left their religion behind. Rather, they have brought their faith or religion with them to the foreign land. For some, religion is in their bones. Especially for Chin, Kachin, and Karen, their ethnicity and religion [Christianity] are not separable. The vast majority of these ethnic groups are Baptist, though smaller numbers of them are Methodist, Catholic, Presbyterian, Pentecostal, and so on. What they have in common is that their ethnic migration can best be understood as reverse mission and religious movement.[12]

> First, reverse mission tends to be rhetoric because there is no mission success in converting Western people.

This leads us to the next point. Is reverse mission just rhetoric, or is it reality? Some Christians criticize the term "reverse mission" more as rhetoric than reality. For them, there are two reasons. First, reverse mission tends to be rhetoric because there is no mission success in converting Western people. Historically, the success of Western mission in a colonial period has been measured by the quantities of new converts. In some contexts, Western missionaries had to report to their sending mission agents about the numbers of new converts so that they received financial support. Second, but related to the first, it tends to be more rhetoric because migrant Christians do not often reach out to Westerners; rather they reach out to

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their own people within their religious and social communities.[13] The second reason seems more appealing. Burmese Christian migrants are more comfortable with reaching out to their own people. Living in a foreign country, migrant Christians imagine their social community by reaching out to each other.[14] Some grassroots Burmese Christians do not think of their move to the US as reverse mission. Given the fact American missionary Adoniram Judson is the greatest missionary to Myanmar, they still see mission as a move to Myanmar from the US. They do mission work in Myanmar by financially supporting missionaries among Buddhists.[15]

One may not deny the fact that reverse mission seems to be rhetoric in some ways. Yet one should also accept the fact that it is a reality. The reality is that mission is no longer understood and practiced as the West's one-way move of reaching out to the non-West as the mere receiver of Western missionaries. In recent decades, both academic and grassroots Christians have migrated to the Global North. While some grassroots Christians are manual workers, academics are teaching at some institutions as professors. In their respective workplaces, they interact with people of the same and different religions and ethnicities as neighbors. To say that mission is reversed, we mean by the movement from the non-West to the West through forced and voluntary migration. Reverse mission is not mainly defined by how one religiously converts Westerners, but it is defined by the paradigm shift of move to the West from the non-West.

Homeland Imagination: Generation Gap and Identity Crisis

I have met several Burmese migrants and asked their main challenges. The first challenge is language barriers on the basis of the generation gap within their own community. There is a lingual gap between the older generations and younger generations. While people of younger generations tend to speak English, people of older generations tend to speak Burmese or their native dialect. Some members of the younger generation understand their native languages or their ancestral languages, but they use English as a medium of communication with their parents. Of course, the comprehension level younger generations have of their native language differs from person to person. Those born in Myanmar but raised in the US typically have a deeper comprehension of their native languages. But those born and raised in the US often have a limited comprehension of their native languages.

The second challenge is the potential for identity crisis. Those who were born and grew up in the US do not have any strong sense of ethnic and cultural belonging to Myanmar as homeland. For them, the US is the only imagined homeland. They imagine themselves as Americans rather than as Burmese. In terms of homeland imagination, there is a gap between younger generations and older generations. While older generations have a strong sense of belonging to Myanmar as imagined homeland, younger generations have a stronger sense of belonging to the US. Some older people often said they miss their homes in Myanmar. Although they are in the US, their hearts are always in Myanmar where their ancestors are. Despite their houses in the US, they see themselves as foreigners.[16]

Moreover, there is sometimes an identity crisis among siblings in the same family. One of the grassroots families from my village said that there is an identity crisis among

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three siblings. Two younger siblings who were born and grew up in the US do not see their older Myanmar-born-and-raised brother as their own sibling. Despite having the same parents, they see him as an adopted son. They asked him, "Who are your parents?"[17] The two younger siblings do not see their older brother as a sibling partly because of their different lifestyles and their American accents. In my observation, most of the Burmese migrant parents encourage, even force, their children to learn their native languages. Some children are willing to learn their ancestral languages, but others are reluctant. What should be done? I suggest that one should choose the "middle way," which makes a space for the mutual needs of parents and children. Forcing children to learn native languages is not the only one way for maintaining their ethnic identity. Moreover, just as young generations need to learn their native languages, so the parents should also learn the English language, as much as they can. While learning one's native language is indispensable for maintaining the old homeland's culture, learning English is necessary for adapting to the new homeland.[18]

Multiculturalism as a Source for Intercultural Theology

The world is ethno-religiously pluralistic, culturally diverse, and economically globalized. North America is a good example. In her book *A New Religious America*, Harvard scholar Diana Eck observes that America has become "the world's most religiously diverse nation" (her book's subtitle). [19] At one level, it is hard to argue against Eck's thesis. As a country of immigration, America is probably the world's most multicultural nation in terms of ethno-religious and linguo-cultural diversity. Some people might even say that America is the greatest nation because of its diverse cultures. In other words, diversity is what makes America great. People from the Global North and the Global South live in the same towns and public spheres as the citizens, go to the same and different churches as the pilgrims, and teach and learn at the same institutions as scholars and students. As Alvin Padilla helpfully puts it,

> Learning to live well in the diverse culture of North America is no longer an option, but a necessity. The U.S. Census estimates that in 2050 proposition of the whites in the population will be only 53%. Our children will live and serve in a society in which their classmates, neighbors, and fellow disciples of Christ will be equally divided between whites and people of color. As new people move into our neighborhoods, the communities undoubtedly will change. The change could be haphazard and filled with misunderstandings, hurt feelings, and even violence, or the change could permit all to reinvent and reinvigorate themselves for the better.[20]

This poses a theological question of how multiculturalism and interculturalism are different from and related to each other.[21] In my opinion, multiculturalism and interculturalism are not identical, but inseparable. They need each other. While multiculturalism tends to recognize the description of diverse cultures as God's greatest gifts to the world, interculturalism tends to emphasize the prescriptive nature of respectful

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interactions with one another.[22] In his book, *Christianity with an Asian Face*, Peter Phan rightly suggests that one should see the current trends and issues of migration as multicultural sources for doing intercultural theology in the US.[23] People from the Global South, especially from Asia, have brought their multicultural and religious insights of other religious teachings for forming a more diverse America. People from Africa have brought their cultural insights of indigenous religious worldviews and cultures. In the past, Western people had to travel to Asia to learn about Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, and Taoism. But now they can learn about those non-Western religious teachings from migrant neighbors. This calls for both Global South and Global North theologians to interact with one another and to develop intercultural theology in the multicultural context of world Christianity and global migration.[24]

In looking at multiculturalism as source for intercultural theology, Mark Cartledge and David Cheetham argue that the word "inter," does not just refer to the exchanges of insights *between* two groups only. It refers to an engagement with different expressions of theology both *between* and *betwixt* different groups.[25] If they are right, we can think of intercultural theology as a two-way interaction between people from different cultures.[26] The creation narrative recognizes God as the creator of diverse cultures, and the Pentecost narrative (Acts 2:1–21) reveals God's affirmation of diversity as His gift to the present world.[27] According to the Pentecost narrative, God embraces ethnic and cultural diversity by speaking to people in their native tongues rather than speaking to them in a heavenly language.

With the recognition of mutual contributions, I will now show why and how academic theologians and lay Christians should dialogically interact with one another in the context of migration.

The Need for Dialogue between Academic and Grassroots Christians

Academic theologians tend to focus on two liberations in the context of global Christianity—liberation of theology and theology of liberation. While the liberation of theology[28] tends to focus on erudite liberation of majority world theology from Western theology, the theology of liberation tends to focus on political liberation of the oppressed. In the next section I will elaborate on the former form of liberation. Here, I would first like to show the gap between academic Christians and lay Christians and suggest how they should bridge that gap for practicing more relevant theology in the context of migration.

Academic liberation theologians tend focus on socio-political liberation. They believe that socio-political liberation depends on the success of interreligious dialogue. They call on the Church to engage with people of other religions for the common goal of social justice and freedom in public society. In other words, their focus is on the function of the Church. When it comes to the identity of the Church, we tend to focus on its function in the academic world. Academic discussions on ecclesiology tend to focus exclusively on the idea of how the Church should be functionally related to the issues of political liberation and interreligious dialogue. While this is crucially important, academic discussions on ecclesiology do not sufficiently engage with the grassroots issues of the ontology of the Church. Much of the academic discussions on ecclesiology, according to Singaporean

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Pentecostal theologian Simon Chan, tend to be confined to what academic theologians are saying about the Church.[29] Academic theologians propose the prescriptive role of the Church's function in mission without sufficiently engaging with grassroots Christians' multiple witnesses of their faith inside and outside the Church.

Academic theologians' approach to ecclesiology tends to be a top-down methodology rather than from the bottom up.[30] Academic liberationists often talk about advocacy for the political liberation of the grassroots margins, but do they practically advocate for them? Some may advocate for them, but many do not advocate for them at the grassroots level. They rarely advocate with the grassroots communities as co-doers of liberation theology by recognizing their lived experiences and social engagements. They do not sufficiently bring their grassroots voices and practices of worship, prayer, and preaching into theological reflections. Instead, they reflect their academic voices by engaging with their fellow academicians and apply them into the life of the Church. Such a top-down approach is not sufficiently relevant to the life of the Church. But if one starts practicing theology from the lived experiences and expressions of grassroots churches by recognizing their implicit and explicit contributions to the mission of God and by qualifying their voices and practices, theology will be more relevant for the Church and public society.

I am not suggesting that one should romanticize grassroots Christians' expressions of their faith, views of politics, and their emphasis on prosperity gospel. Many grassroots Burmese Christians are theologically fundamentalist and politically conservative. The majority of them are big fans of former President Trump. They highly admire Trump because they believe that he built the US as a Christian nation, and that he made the US economically great. They are less interested in academic discourses about theology and politics. It is true that many academic theologians are also less interested in grassroots Christians voices. It is my suggestion that we need to bridge the gap between these two different voices by interacting with one another as the instruments of God's love, justice, and peace. My conviction is that we should practice Christian theology from the bottom up by humbly and critically engaging with the grassroots Christian community.

Our concern here is how one should integrate the ontology and function of the Church for a holistic mission of the triune God. "Grassroots Christians' contribution to ecclesiology arises as much from how being the church is practiced as how it is understood."[31] While academic theologians tend to focus on the function of the Church in political liberation and interreligious dialogue, grassroots Christians focus on the ontology of the Church in terms of doxological relationship with God and intra-religious dialogue with Christians within their own community.

Grassroots Christians' understanding of the identity of the Church is rooted in the spiritual act of worship. For grassroots Christians, the primary identity of the Church is defined by its spiritual act of worship. Without worship, the Church is meaningless.[32] It is observed that grassroots migrant Christians define themselves as the chosen people of God. To call the Church "the people of God" is to recognize its continuity with the chosen people of Israel. Many grassroots migrant Christians imagine themselves as the new Israel. As Chan points out, that covenantal relationship between God and the worshiping people is summed up in the promise of God throughout Scripture: "I will be your God and you shall

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be my people" (see Rom 9:1–5, 11:1–2).[33] Grassroots Christians often cite 1 Peter 2:9–10 to justify their identity as the chosen people of God.[34]

While grassroots Christians' imagination of their identity as the chosen people of God is strong, their imagination of their identity as the Body of Christ is weaker. In light of the latter, I suggest we put a strong emphasis on the identity of the Church as the Body of Christ. In looking at the Church as the Body of Christ, our goal is to build an intercultural nature into the Church. Doing so demands recognizing diverse gifts for the mission of God. Being baptized into one Christ and one faith (Eph 4:5), we become one Body of Christ. But becoming one Body does not mean complete uniformity or becoming the same in all ways. As Apostle Paul reminds us, we are one Body of Christ with different gifts and ministries (1 Cor 12:5–31). Our diverse cultures and gifts are not to be seen as the sources for discriminating against each other, but to be seen as the strengths for glorifying God in different tongues. Paul encourages us to witness the Gospel of salvation and love in multiple forms. John also talks about the importance of glorifying Christ with different tongues, gifts, and languages (Rev 5:9, 7:9).

In my observation, migrant Christians from Myanmar have a strong sense of witnessing about God with different gifts. However, they are not strong enough in their vision for building the interethnic and intercultural nature of the multicultural church. They have a stronger tendency toward building churches with their own similar ethnic groups. For instance, Kachin Christians tend to focus on building the Kachin Christian community without embracing Chin, Karen, and Lisu, and so on. The same is true of the Karen, Chin, and Lisu ethnic groups. Interestingly, when these groups first arrived in the US from the same nation of Myanmar, they began by building the Myanmar Christian Community (MCC), which embraces more diverse ethnic groups.[35] A few years later, however, some church leaders split from the MCC and founded new congregations with different ethnic and tribe names. This is a common trend and issue for many Myanmar churches throughout the US. While this paradigm of church formation is not wrong, my suggestion is to develop a stronger vision for building a multicultural church with a strong intercultural and interethnic nature by embracing different ethnic and cultural groups.

The Need for Dialogue between Global North and Global South Academics

Global South students have been on the receiving side of theological study for many years, while Global North Christians have been on the giving side. Now things have changed. Some scholars, especially those who are aware of the rise of Christianity in Global South, have created hospitable classrooms for the mutual exchange of theological and cultural insights. These scholars aim to decentralize Western theology by listening to the voices of students and scholars from the Global South. The ultimate goal is to achieve the liberation of theology from Western dominant theology and thinking. They want to move beyond Christendom and imagine a new kind of majority world theology.[36] Western theologians are no longer the controlling referees for imagining majority world theology in the context of global Christianity. Only the Holy Spirit is a referee, and theologians from both the Global North and Global South are collaborative players in practicing world

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theology. As collaborative players, they should interact dialogically with one another and exchange their different insights.

The idea of liberation of theology was developed by Brazilian scholar Paulo Freire through his seminal book *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.[37] According to Freire, the pedagogy of the oppressed uses a hermeneutics of suspicion that reacts against "education from above," which represents the interest of the centrist. In some theological institutions, Global North theologians are not interested in theology represented by marginal scholars and students from the Global South. They simply transfer their dominant knowledge to students without learning their insights. What is more problematic is that students from the Global South go home with Western knowledge, which is not always contextually relevant to their situations. For instance, German scholar Rudolf Bultmann's Western concept of mythologization of the New Testament story of Jesus's public ministry of exorcism and healing[38] is not relevant to Africa and Asia where ordinary people experience the fear of evil spirits. In Asia and Africa, ordinary people seek healing, exorcism, and deliverance from demonic spirits. While academic liberation theologians tend to focus on liberation from political oppression, grassroots people tend to focus on liberation from the psychological oppression and freedom from the fear of evil spirits.[39]

What the Western and non-Western theologians have in common is their understanding of political liberation theology. They emphasize the prophetic type of political liberation theology that resists socio-political oppression for the liberation of the oppressed and those on the margins. However, they almost ignore the grassroots people's vision of liberation from demonic spirits. Perhaps the most distinctive contribution from non-Western Christianity, especially Asian and African Christianity, is the understanding of Jesus not only as a prophetic liberator, but also as a priestly healer and as a redeemer from sin and shame. Most of grassroots Christians from Africa and Asia tend to focus on the soteriological motifs of Hebrews (sacrificial Christology) and Colossians (cosmic salvation), while some Western Christians tend to prefer the soteriological motifs of Romans and Galatians (individualistic salvation).[40] It is imperative for Christian theologians and practitioners from the Global North and Global South to exchange their different insights and to enrich each other for a holistic understanding of salvation and global mission.

As Freire suggests, a transformative nature of education has to start from below. It has to take into account the contextual situations of the oppressed. Letting the oppressed people speak their own voices is the way to liberate education from Western-dominant theology. Erudite liberation of education is not simply to be brought down to the non-Western students as mere learners, but to be initiated by them.[41] I am not suggesting student-centered theology. Rather, in order for intercultural theology to take place, I am suggesting subject-centered theology. Northern teachers and Southern students have to interact with each other as the active subjects in a dialogical classroom. But since Southern students have been on the receiving end for many years, it is more important for the Northern theologians to let the Southern students speak by "revealing their hidden gifts and affirming their insights they offer."[42]

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Christian mission is no longer a one-way move to people of other faiths in the context of world Christianity. Likewise, theological education is no longer a one-way transmission of knowledge to the other. Theological education in the context of global migration should be a two-way move of dialogical interaction between Global North theologians and Global South theologians. Theologians from the Global South bring some world and indigenous religious insights for developing an intercultural theology in North America. Thus, it is necessary for theologians from the Global North and Global South to create a hospitable academic space and dialogical interaction for practicing theology in the context of global migration and world Christianity. The result of dialogical and hospitable conversation of brothers and sisters is for mutual conversion (intellectual conversion). Theology should be reconsidered as conversation and conversion.[43]

Homeland Imagination: Globalizing and Localizing Faith

I want to conclude where I began. Scholars have long considered Christianity as a religion of migration since its inception. As a religion of migration, Christianity is not confined to a particular geography and culture. It expands spaces by crossing cultures and geographies. This shows that Christianity is what Andrew Walls appropriately calls a "pilgrimage religion"—a religion wandering around the world without ceasing to indigenize at each homing culture.[44] Walls famously introduces two principles—"pilgrim and indigenizing principles"—to describe Christianity as a religion of global migration without ceasing to indigenize its home. Walls stresses that the two principles are distinguishable, yet not in opposition.[45] Walls' academic description of pilgrimage and indigenizing faith is perfectly suited for the grassroots Burmese Christians' lived experiences and expressions of their faith. They do not think academically about their faith, but they practice the reality of pilgrim and indigenizing faith.

The vast majority of diasporic Burmese Christians feel that they have a double identity. They are diasporic pilgrim Christians who practice their global faith in the West. On the other hand, they are indigenous ethnic Christians who indigenize their faith at home in Myanmar. Because of this double identity, they do not want to separate their migrant faith from their indigenous faith. This does not mean that they have two faiths. There is always one faith. As Apostle Paul reminds us, there is "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph 4:5). This means they practice their one faith in multiple forms and in two contexts—Myanmar (where they began their faith) and the West (where they nurture their faith). They practice their one faith by donating some funds to their home churches in Myanmar and some to diasporic churches in the West.

In their social and ecclesial imagination of homeland, diasporic Burmese Christians believe that they belong to two nations—Myanmar and the US. As noted, people of older generations have a stronger sense of belonging to Myanmar, while people of younger generations have a stronger sense of belonging to the US. In this context, theologians should encourage and equip both older and younger generations to balance their homeland imagination and to hold their double identity as the pilgrims in the global mission of God. In the past, Jerusalem, or Rome, or Wittenberg, or Geneva was once the epicenter for Christianity. Today, they are no longer the real centers of Christianity. Western Christianity

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has been decentered by the growth and vitality of non-Western Christianity. There is no center of non-Western Christianity either. Although the vast majority of Christians are now in the Global South, there is no real center of Christianity. Christianity is always moving by way of migration. As a religion of cross-cultural movement, Christianity is not fully at home in this world.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have explored the concept of reverse mission by using the hidden story of Burmese migrant Christians as a case study. I also have examined how the concept of reverse mission could be both rhetoric and reality. Further, I have shown how the US should be seen as a context for global migration and world theological education. In light of this context, I have observed the gap between academic Christians and grassroots Christians in their diasporic Christian communities and suggested the need for dialogue between academic Christians and grassroots migrant Christian communities. Their intra-religious dialogue is important for addressing and overcoming theoretical and practical challenges they face as a community. Likewise, I have demonstrated some ways why and how academic theologians from the Global North and those from the Global South should dialogically interact with one another for developing intercultural theology beyond Western-centric theology. I have ended the paper by framing a dialectical idea of homeland imagination and by showing how Burmese migrant Christians should hold a double identity for the practice of diasporic and indigenizing faith. Putting one leg in the US as a new homeland while keeping the other leg in Myanmar as an old homeland is the most appropriate response to the current trends, contextual issues, and critical concerns migrant Christians face in their lives as global followers of Christ.

ENDNOTES

[1] Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), xi–xiii.
[2] Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Changing Shape of Church History* (Nashville, TN: Chalice Press, 2002).
[3] Peter C. Phan, *Christianity with Asian Face: Asian American Theology in the Making* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003); Peter C. Phan, *Christian Theology in the Age of Migration: Implications for World Christianity* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2019).
[4] Jehu J. Hanciles, *Beyond Christendom: Globalization, African Migration, and The Transformation of the West* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008). See also Jehu J. Hanciles, *Migration and the Making of Global Christianity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2021).
[5] M. Daniel Carroll R. and Vincent E. Bacote, eds, *Global Migration and Christian Faith: Implications for Identity and Mission* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2021).
[6] Carrol R. and Bacote, 37–102.
[7] Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity: The Early Church to the Present Day* (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 1984), 12.
[8] Along the same line of this thought, see David I. Steinberg, *Myanmar/Burma: What Everyone Needs to Know,* 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).
[9] For instance, see Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Joseph Cheah, eds., *Asian Christianity in Diaspora* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014).

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[10] Matthew Ojo, "Reverse Mission," in *Encyclopedia of Mission and Missionaries*, ed. Jonathan J. Bonk (London: Routledge, 2007), 380–382.
[11] See Timothy A. Brynes, *Reverse Mission: Transnational Religious Communities and the Making of US Foreign Policy* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011).
[12] See "Country Profiles: Myanmar" Migrants & Refugees Section, accessed August 26, 2022, https://migrants-refugees.va/country-profile/myanmar/.
[13] See, for instance, Annalisa Butticci, "Religion in Motion: A Missionary Narrative of Creativity and Survival from the Pentecostal Nigerian Diaspora in Italy," in *Religion on the Move! New Dynamics of Religious Expansion in a Globalizing World*, eds. Afe Adogame and Shobana Shankar (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 203–221.
[14] Myanmar Christian Church members in Maryland, USA, interview with the author, July 30, 2022.
[15] Myanmar Christian Church members in Maryland, USA, interview with the author, July 31, 2022.
[16] Migrant Christians in Baltimore, Maryland, interview with the author, August 14, 2022. Most of older Burmese migrants express their feelings about being alienated in the US.
[17] Migrant family in Baltimore, Maryland, interview with the author, August 14, 2022.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Diana L. Eck, *A New Religious America: How a "Christian Country" Has Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001).
[20] Arvin Padilla, "A New Kind of Theological School: Contextualized Theological Education Models," *African Journal* 2 no. 2 (November 2012): 5–6.
[21] Geoffrey Brahm Levey, "Interculturalism vs. Multiculturalism: A Distinction Without a Difference?" *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 33 no. 2 (April 2012): 217–224.
[22] Levey, 217.
[23] See Peter C. Phan, "The Experience of Migration as the Source of Intercultural Theology in the United States," in *Christianity with an Asian Face: Asian American Theology in the Making* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003).
[24] See my piece, David Thang Moe, "Intercultural Theology in the Multicultural Context of World Christianity: Issues, Insights, and Interactions," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 6, no. 3 (July 2019): 18–23.
[25] Mark J. Cartledge and David Cheetham, *Intercultural Theology: Approaches and Themes* (London: SCM Press, 2011), 2.
[26] Cartledge and Cheetham, 2.
[27] Amos Yong, "Toward A Trinitarian Theology of Religions: A Pentecostal-Evangelical and Missiological Elaboration," in *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 40, no. 4 (October 2016): 99–300.
[28] See Juan L. Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1976).
[29] Simon Chan, "Asian Ecclesiologies," in *The Oxford Handbook of Ecclesiology*, ed. Paul Avis (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018): 595–614, esp. at 595.
[30] See, for instance, Simon Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology: Thinking the Faith from the Ground Up* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 9–46.
[31] Chan, "Asian Ecclesiologies," 595.
[32] See Simon Chan, *Liturgical Theology: The Church a Worshiping Community* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 41–61.
[33] Chan, 24.
[34] Migrant Myanmar church members in Maryland, interview with the author, July 31, 2022.

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[35] For example, see Kentucky Myanmar Christian Community in Louisville, where the author has attended for six years. This church has split into five different groups over the span of ten years.
[36] See, for instance, Gene Green, Stephen Purdue, and K.K. Yeo, eds., *Majority World Theology: Christian Doctrine in Global Context* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020).
[37] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970).
[38] Rudolf Bultmann, *New Testament Mythology and Other Basic Writings*, ed. Schubert M. Ogden (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1984).
[39] See, for instance, Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology*, 126–127.
[40] Chan, 126. N.T Wright often said Western theology is rooted in the Romans. He referred to Martin Luther, Calvin, Barth, and others as some examples.
[41] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 39.
[42] Along the same line of thought, see Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Reaching Out* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966), 61–64.
[43] For detailed discussion, see David Thang Moe, "Theological Metaphors of Teaching Mission in an Age of World Christianity in the North American Context," in *Christian Mission in an Age of World Christianity*, ed. Robert Danielson (Wilmore, KY: First Fruits, 2017), 71–88.
[44] Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), 53–54.
[45] Walls, 54.

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