

Aminton Arrington. *Songs of the Lisu Hills: Practicing Christianity in Southwest China*. Philadelphia, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2020. 253 pages. \$29.00. ISBN-10: 027108507X

The Lisu people are one of the Tibeto-Burman ethnic groups who reside in the mountainous regions of China, Thailand, Myanmar (Burma), and India. The Lisu dominantly practiced swidden agriculture and hunting for livelihood, and they worshipped animism until Christianity came into the picture around a hundred years ago. Aminta Arrington's book, *Songs of the Lisu Hills*, is a thorough historical and scholarly account of the Lisu Christianity of southwest China. Arrington attempts to bring the well-researched history of how Christianity contextually took its roots in the Lisuland and continues to blossom throughout the years though it encountered two decades of religious persecution imposed by the Chinese government, till today into the light. She did it by giving us insight into the diverse and unique oral tradition and community-oriented Christian practices of the Lisu which she believes to be "the narrative lens that they interpret reality, even theology" (38) and recounting the documentaries of the pioneer missionaries embracing these diversities to evangelize them.

The book consists of nine chapters, and the first three tells the formation of Lisu Christian society through perceptive and detailed stories of the celebrated pioneer missionaries such as James Outram Fraser, Allyn Cooke, John and Isobel Kuhn, and the Morse family and their adventurous and overlapped evangelical and literature works among the Lisu. Among the missionaries, Fraser was the first British Protestant Christian missionary to evangelize the Lisu in China's Yunnan province and his successors were the Cooke couple. The first Restoration Movement missionaries to the Lisu in China and Myanmar were Russell Morse and his wife, Gertrude Morse. Fraser, along with Saw Ba Thaw who was a Karen missionary to the Lisu in Myanmar, created the Lisu alphabet in 1914. In the chapters, the author portrayed the dedication, commitment, and passion of foreign and local missionaries toward God and the Lisu were resulted in not only religion, but also in other areas of life such as education, literature, health, agriculture, business, and so on.

Moving onto chapter 4, Arrington presents a mindful theological and anthropological shaping of the new living standard marks by prohibiting alcohol and smoking of Lisu Christian community amid their traditional rituals to understand the role of practices among them. She best describes this practice by commenting, "by accepting the drinking/smoking ban, one was symbolically identifying with the historic Lisu Church. By not smoking and not drinking, new converts were not just accepting Christ; they were grafted into the historical identity of the Lisu Church and inducted into its community." (127) In chapter 5, the author recounts her experiences of the Lisu Christian festivals during her visit and seeks to connect them to the testimonies of the local church members about China's communist government and their religious persecutions among the Lisu minority.

In chapters 6 and 7, Arrington deals with Christian communal practices of the Lisu through theological perspective and the continuing preservations and developments of Lisu literature and biblical institutes throughout the middle to late centuries. The introduction of hymns and the positive response of the Lisu toward it was discussed in chapter 8. Here, Arrington beautifully and effectively describes hymns as "the rhythm of life for the Lisu Christians." (203) which marks as the central theme of her book. In the last final chapter, she presents the architectural testimony of the Lisu church, saying, "each Lisu house of prayer servers as a cohesive structure organizing relations between the self, the community, and God." (223)

Arrington's volume is a valuable resource in preserving the history of southwest China's Lisu Christianity and other Lisu in different countries as mentioned above. She offers a graceful yet transparent look into the history, and it is empowering to relearn the history through a fresh perspective. It is also impressive the way how individual stories and hymns are woven into the narration. By doing so, the author acknowledges the unique identity of Lisu Christianity.

Personally, I found her historical book empowering as it reminds me of the origin of my people and their moral compass. Arrington describes the Lisu as the people of independent according to Fraser and the legacies of their bravery for their faith in her book. Reading this in the light of what is happening in Myanmar, where thousands of people sacrifice their lives and freedom to speak against the illegitimate Myanmar military coup, I felt empowered and challenged to continue walking in the tradition of my ancestors who fought for their beliefs and freedom. Nonetheless, she challenges all of her readers, especially her kind, the Westerners, throughout the book. She challenges them to embrace the collaborative practices of Lisu Christians and learn from them. The book is no doubt a must-read if one wants to learn about the Lisu and their anthropology.

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