

Creative Tribute or Cheap Copy? The Ubiquitous, Controversial *Copy Thachin* In Myanmar

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Abstract: The genre *copy thachin* or “copy song” pervades the popular music scene in Myanmar. These songs are akin to cover versions of existing international hits, but with new lyrics in the Burmese language, and performed by Burmese musicians. These songs can have incredible genre-crossing capabilities, from blues to rap, heavy metal to salsa. The current situation for popular music production in Myanmar, as elsewhere, is connected with the country’s history of military rule and years of censorship and economic difficulties. Advocates for the genre of *copy thachin* argue that borrowing international songs allowed local artists to learn about global popular music, and the numerous popular musicians and songwriters in Myanmar are testament to this. On the other hand, with the removal of the stringent censorship regime and the increasing contact with international consumer culture, groups of Myanmar music fans are increasingly critical of *copy thachin*, seeing the practice as derivative and an embarrassment. This article will explore the history of the genre, notions of authenticity, and discuss Myanmar’s changing relationship with the symbolic capital of its own culture industry and its relationship with international popular culture.

Keywords: Popular Music; Myanmar; Authorship; Mimesis; Authenticity;

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The popular music genre in Myanmar called *copy thachin* is intentionally hybrid, starting with its name: the term is derived from the English word ‘copy,’ and the Burmese word for song, ‘*thachin*.’ *Copy thachin* consists of internationally-famous popular songs which have been re-fitted with Burmese language lyrics, played by Burmese bands, and sung by Burmese singers. These songs are prominent on the music scene in the country, their recordings are practically ubiquitous, are featured on the radio, television, and YouTube. These songs are popular in the country not just because they are played by well-known and beloved music stars, but also because they often contain lyrics composed by

nationally famous Burmese poets. People throughout Myanmar often socialize through playing and singing *copy thachin* as part of informal jam sessions.

Not everyone in Myanmar, though, is a fan of the genre. International tourists might find it quaint that old hits from the 1970s 1980s and 1990s are given new life as songs in the Burmese language; there can be a serendipity of recognition when foreigners are able to identify familiar melodies such as those of Elton John, Bon Jovi, Madonna, or Shaggy, only with lyrics in Burmese. For some Burmese artists, they find the dominance of *copy thachin* to be an embarrassment. One interlocutor even called it serious ethical issue. As he argued, “Myanmar artists should not be copying Western songs and then passing them off as their own. They should write their own songs; it’s terrible that they think so poorly of their own culture that they do not write their own songs.” There are also rock bands that adamantly refuse to play *copy thachin*, again taking it as a creative stance to avoid the genre entirely.

It is in this complex Burmese milieu of trans-national musical authorship and consumption that this paper explores the meaning ascribed to, and re-signified from, the *copy thachin* genre. As this paper will demonstrate, *copy thachin* offers not only an important and insightful platform for studying the popular music industry in Myanmar, but also a challenging artifact for investigating cultural notions of cosmopolitanism and cultural authorship within a rapidly changing political economy in Southeast Asia. International borrowing of existing hits is explicit in the genre, but as this paper will discuss, there is a theoretical and paradigmatic underpinning to ideas of copying, mimesis, and authenticity to be explored critically in studies of transnational popular culture flows. In sum: *Copy thachin*, together with the controversy it attracts, offers a

complex angle to studying larger issues of cultural production and consumption in Myanmar and beyond.

To investigate the phenomenon of popular culture authorship, fandom and *copy thachin* resistance in Myanmar, this paper is structured according to three major sections: first, it will offer an overview of the music industry itself, and the ways in which *copy thachin* evolved as a way for Burmese musicians during the Burmese Socialist Programme Party years of economic and cultural censorship to engage with a burgeoning cosmopolitan rock scene. Second, the paper will discuss the theoretical notions of authenticity and memesis and consider what they might mean in the context of *copy thachin* production and audience engagement. Finally, this paper will look at audience feedback and critique of *copy thachin* and consider what this aesthetic resistance might mean within the social milieu in contemporary Myanmar, a country which increasingly perceives itself to be opening up to, and engaging with, the international community. As we will see, there are dynamic ways in which communities of Burmese music fans gather around and express their criticism of the *copy thachin* genre.

There is a growing corpus of critical work on cover songs, their semantic meaning, and relationship with new forms of expression and audiences (Bailey 2003; Coyle 2002; Cusic 2005; Griffiths 2002; Horton and McDougal 1998; Plasketes 2010). In her discussion of the popular American R & B song, “Respect,” originally written and recorded by Otis Redding in 1965, then re-released in 1967 by Aretha Franklin, Malawey (2014) argues that, because of the extensive re-authoring of the song done by the latter, Franklin may be granted ownership status of the song (Malawey 2014: 186). Although Malawey’s article is

radical in its suggestion that such authoring and rendering can transfer song ownership, and she offers substantial evidence to describe the ways in which Franklin's recording differs from that of Redding, there still is not a precise identifiable boundary between ownership. Furthermore, I have of yet to find work on communities of listeners who compare copies with previous renditions of popular songs. In this sense, groups of Myanmar music fans offer a unique window to looking at notions of cultural authorship, copyright, authenticity and copying within the global flows of popular music. Therefore, this paper will examine how some music fans use *copy thachin* as a vector or measure for evaluating what they perceive to be the poor state of popular culture production in Myanmar. For some, there is a sense of anxiety that there is a true creativity that has been suppressed not by political and economic woes, but rather the tendency to imitate rather than innovate.

Verse 1: Situating *copy thachin* within Myanmar's political economy

Although work in social science and the humanities has been taking popular culture as a serious subject for study for decades, the limited access that international scholars have had to Myanmar during the Burmese Socialist Programme Party and the State Peace and Development Council years has impeded not just scholarship on the subject of the country's creative industries, not to mention constrained the industries themselves. Whereas Post-WWII Burma had a thriving media scene with a highly literate population, the decades following Ne Win's 1962 coup and the installation of the Burmese Socialist Programme Party government kept a tight grip on the creative industries. Initially, the importation of musical instruments, recording equipment, long-play

discs and music magazines were officially banned (Aung Zaw 2004: 41). An underground movement called stereo music persisted through these years, and when the music was legalized (and used for propaganda purposes) songs had to pass through the government censor board. By the 1990s, there were a handful of bands that dominated the music scene, and as such, artists in Yangon were quite well connected with each other. A few main bands served as back up for individual singers (Douglas 2005: 201).

As such, many of the songs produced would fit into the Burmese hybrid genre of *copy thachin*. Here, poets would be commissioned to write new Burmese lyrics for existing international hit songs, and these new songs would have varying degrees of semantic fidelity to the themes of the previous songs. In this sense, *copy thachin* is not necessarily a direct translation. Then, back up bands and Burmese artists would record the songs, perform them, and sell inexpensive lyric sheets with chord progressions so that fans could sing and play guitar to new releases. It has been also argued that *copy thachin* constitutes ...

... an example of popular music *par excellence* in that it simultaneously invokes, yet does not always reveal, the international origins of the melody while maintaining an intimate relationship with local audiences in its choice of language and poetic meanings (Ferguson 2013: 222).

For many musicians, *copy thachin* is necessary to establish a music career; this is similar to bands in the West that get gigs playing at pubs or at weddings: they play popular songs to earn a living, and if they are fortunate enough to get a recording break themselves, then they choose to play more of their own songs. Although questions of authorship are not the same as musical genre, the genre of *copy thachin* does force us to question the boundaries between musical markets. It has also been pointed out that audiences will often ascribe ownership of a song

to musicians when their particular performance of a song is so compelling that it makes them more famous than the original songwriter or performer. In Myanmar, many music fans are much more familiar with local musicians than they are with the international artists from which *copy thachin* songs are derived. For many popular artists, recording *copy thachin* was an important way to become established on the music scene, although this has started to change. Whereas in the 1990s, it has been estimated that *copy thachin* constituted about fifty per cent of the songs on the market, today they comprise only about thirty per cent of them (Zon Pann Pwint 2015).

Phyu Phyu Kyaw Thein is considered to be one of Myanmar's most prominent singers at the moment. One fan even suggested that she is Myanmar's Lady Gaga. She often has flamboyant, yet culturally appropriate outfits, and is known for her strong soprano voice. From a privileged background, she entered medical school at the age of 19, but still held onto her aspiration to become a singer. It was when the rock band Iron Cross allowed her to join a stage show of theirs in 2003, and sing three songs, that she impressed audiences and later got recording contracts.

In 2013, she decided to release a new album which would be locally composed pop songs or "own tunes" instead of *copy thachin*. According to her response in an interview, the endeavor was a success, "It was difficult and time-consuming but it was rewarding because those songs are great favourites with my fans and they appreciate them (Zon Pann Pwint 2015)." Nevertheless, her *copy thachin* hits are continually requested at her live performances.

Although the strict censorship regime required "culturally appropriate" dress and comportment in music videos and live performances, the songs and

their presentation evidenced Burmese appropriation of various musical genres such as country, punk, heavy metal, reggae, and hip hop, to name but a few.

How these various genres are used in Myanmar and what they mean to local audiences has begun to be explored as well. In his article on Burmese rap, Anthropologist Ward Keeler observes, “To anyone familiar with rap music in the West, the content of Burmese rap is striking primarily for its blandness (Keeler 2009: 3).” Indeed it is the movement of the genre, but not necessarily the intentions of the social milieu from whence it came, that results in a transformation of how the music is used by its performers as well as what the genre means to its fans. As we will see later in this paper, just because a genre or a form is big business, does not mean that audiences all buy into it, hook, line and sinker.

Verse 2: Authenticity, mimesis and the genuine *thachin*

But if the Burmese music industry establishes the copy, what does that say about the so-called original, or its predecessor? Within work on popular music, authenticity has been described as a “contingent, ascribed, socially constructed and mediated value (Malawey 2014: 197).” So for such scholars of popular music, the onus is located less on the intrinsic qualities of the work itself, but more so on the social values which are placed on the object. Finding the authentic is a discourse which is constantly re-invented. The *real* hardly exists as an original entity, but it is repeatedly created through measure against things that are judged not to be real.

As a point of contrast, archeologists of material art place the burden of proof on the creation of the object. As such, “authenticity is located not in the

artifacts per se or in the models on which they are based but in the *methods* by which they were made – in a way of doing, which is a way of knowing, in a performance (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 196).” The Burmese verb for ‘to mimic’ is *atu loub* အတုလုပ် which means literally ‘to make the same.’ Because the critical literature on cover songs and aesthetic copies has been heavily based on Western philosophical traditions regarding artistic authorship, it is also important to consider local philosophical traditions and notions of aesthetic authorship and originality.

In his introduction to the edited volume, *The Zen arts: An anthropological study of the culture of aesthetic form in Japan* anthropologist Rupert Cox challenges the artificially juxtaposed notions of Japanese copying and Japanese creativity with the objective, as he states, “to identify and critically evaluate negative Western perceptions of copying in Japan and Japanese theories that emphasise the positive ‘cultural value of imitation’ (Cox 2013: 3).” This presents a bifurcation of values toward notions of the copy that are unlikely to be shared across a population. In this paper, therefore, I will look at the tensions within communities of Burmese music fans regarding the notion of cultural authorship, authenticity and originality. In this sense, it is not enough simply to examine the popular texts as autonomous or discrete entities, but rather to understand more fully the frameworks in which they are produced, circulated, and consumed (Jenkins, McPherson and Shattuc 2002: 17). As we will see, critics of *copy thachin* tend to position the genre in relation to a global pop, finding their national artists not having an important role on the global stage. For these critics, there is an underlying feeling that their artists will be viewed by others as derivative, or thieves, rather than skilled in their own right. The incorporation of the English

word, “copy” as the descriptor of the *copy thachin* genre is particularly meaningful in this context, as the use of the English semantically distances the genre from being understood as a local creation, although millions of people in Myanmar participate in its transmission.

In thinking about the methods of *copy thachin* production within the popular music industry in Myanmar, there are political and cultural forces which strive to infuse new and local meanings onto the existing popular songs. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that just because the instrumentation and the melody of the popular songs travel unaltered, or rather are methodically copied, that Burmese audiences will infuse new meanings and cultural understandings onto the songs. The authentic will automatically be assumed to be the previous international popular song, simply because it is dictated as such by the conventions of the *copy thachin* genre.

The issue of prestige blends with authenticity in interesting ways; it has been noted that when Burmese rappers take on US performance styles, or alter their pronunciation of words to sound more like English, they are presenting themselves as more modern than their local contemporaries, and therefore of higher status (Keeler 2009: 6). However, how much is imitation, and therefore presenting high status, while how much might be derided as theft, taking the copy too far? A simple answer would simply be, it depends who you ask. But it is within this complicated milieu of borrowing, copying, and re-signifying that audiences appreciate, interpret, reject, and embrace the products of the popular culture industries. From here, it is necessary to consider the primary consumers of *copy thachin*: Burmese fans themselves. Do they see the *copy thachin* as a theft of copyright, simply replicating established hits of international artists?

Copy thachin can also be understood as a kind of mimetic transcription device, making a copy of an international song, but bringing it closer to audiences in Myanmar through the use of Burmese lyrics. As such, *copy thachin* presents a representation of the international song in a way which is both real (it is performed and sung by actual performers) but also illusionistic (it selectively reveals the authorship and performance of its previous rendition). Auerbach's seminal work *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* is key to contemporary understanding of the process in that he seeks to identify and describe the various ways in which important texts, from Homer's *Odyssey* to the Bible, to *Don Quixote* seek to present a reality, as a thing. There is a craft in the presentation involving grammar, style and syntax, yet for Auerbach the ultimate goal is to represent reality through mimicry (Auerbach 1953). The process of mimesis is therefore a process of representation, substituting for a previous reality or thing, and thus becoming a symbol of that previous thing for new audiences. Through their works, authors become representatives of ages, as it were, and the histories that they create are therefore embedded in their political and cultural milieu.

Whereas Auerbach's selection for analysis ends in the nineteenth century, his contemporary, Walter Benjamin looked at art and how industrial capitalism fundamentally alters the way in which society relates to these works. In other words, the mimetic experience, the ability for art to represent a certain milieu, is transformed as a result of the machinations of mechanical reproduction (Allen 1987: 229). Because industrial capitalism has the capacity to reproduce art, and commodify it and therefore what it represents, there is a greater capacity to reach greater audiences, but then how that art comes to represent a certain

reality (through mimesis) becomes distorted at an even greater scale. Different symbolic systems acquire greater distance from their consumers.

In the case of Burma and *copy thachin*, the conversation becomes increasingly one-sided, and has been as such for decades. While taking necessary caution in making any automatic transplant of Auerbach, Adorno, Horkheimer and Benjamin's theories to the context of Myanmar, there is an act of mimesis which is taking place when Burmese singers and musicians seek to replicate international popular music forms. The anthropologist Michael Taussig has noted that there is a magic of mimesis in that people are able to create resemblances between or identify with their object of representation. [T]he ability to mime, and to mime well ... is the capacity to Other (Taussig 1993: 19). This, however, presumes that *copy thachin* artists are intrinsically trying to mime the international artists, which is not always the case. Research has shown that many *copy thachin* songs represent complete semantic departures from the international songs they are ostensibly copied from; often it is the Burmese songwriters taking poetic license to come up with original content that is not translation at all (Ferguson 2013).

Chorus: Myanmar music fans' resistance to *copy thachin*

With the increasing availability of the Internet throughout Myanmar, music fans are making use of sites like YouTube, Facebook, as well as myriad blogs and file-sharing sites to listen to popular songs and share information and opinions about them. In comments sections on sites like Youtube, we can find some of the tensions in genre interpretation and appreciation as well. For example: the song, *Myaw Lin Kyin Gwin Pyin* "Field of Longing"

(မေ့ရှုလင့်ခြင်းကွင်းပြင်) written and sung by the singer Ah Nge, is a *copy thachin* rendition of the song, “Green Fields” by Brothers Four (See Appendix A for English lyrics, Burmese lyrics, and an English translation of the Burmese lyrics). There are several versions of Ah Nge’s song on YouTube, and the one with the most hits¹ had over 350,000. Nearly all of the comments were positive, and one reminded viewers that the previous rendition of the song was indeed “Green Fields.” On many YouTube videos of *copy thachin* songs, there often seems to be a commentator eager to point out the previous international song upon which that particular *copy thachin* is based.

Another example is the music video² for the song *Lan Kwe* လမ်းခွဲ with lyrics written by the prolific *copy thachin* poet Myint Moe Aung, and sung by Phyu Phyu Kyaw Thein. At the time of viewing, this video had received 671,072 views, with 1,596 people clicking “thumbs up” while 130 clicked “thumbs down,” and 167 people left comments, most of which were in Burmese. In terms of content, one finds the vast majority of comments are positive, many offering effusive praise for the singer as well as the song itself. One person asks if it is an *own tune* or an English song. One commentator, though, has little praise to offer. Instead, s/he responds by admonishing the genre of *copy thachin*:

She sings *copy thachin*. I understand it as a form of deception. The audiences who like the music don’t feel it. Many Myanmar singers steal others’ sounds. If they continue to do this, more will hear of it, and their reputation will be ruined ... And so if they stop singing *copy thachin* Myanmar art will develop³.

¹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UMmL_XX8keU (Accessed: 23 June 2015)

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gpnm0gF9fMI&list=PL5BA07E894F12C39D> (Accessed: 23 June 2015)

³ ကော်ပီဆိုပြီး မာန်တက်နေတဲ့ ဟာမ ပါးတွေချည်း လိမ့်ရိုက်ရင် နာတော့မယ်။ သီချင်းကြိုက်တဲ့ ပရိတ်သတ်ကြီးဘက်က မခံသာလို့ပါဗျာ မြန်မာအဆိုတော်တွေ တော်တော်များများ ကော်ပီ သံဇဉ် သူနိုးတွေ ..ဆက်ဆိုရင် မူရင်း အဆိုတော်နဲ့ မင်းတို့ကို နာမည်ပေါက်နဲ့ အကြောင်းကြားတိုင်မယ်... အဲလို ကော်ပီမဆိုတော့မှ ငါတို့ မြန်မာ့အနုပညာတိုးတက်မှာ။

In another YouTube video⁴ featuring Phyu Phyu Kyaw Thein and fellow Myanmar rock diva Kaw Ni, Burmese commentators again express their views on the issue of *copy thachin*. This time, the song is *Atwin Kyaye* အတွင်းကြော့ which is the *copy thachin* version of “You Give Love a Bad Name,” written and popularized by the 1980s American rock band Bon Jovi (see Appendix B for some of the lyrics of both the Bon Jovi song and *Atwin Kyaye*).

Kaw Ni looks better than her. But seriously, they need to stop copying songs. Come on! Burmese people ... we have our own taste of music, right?

Bon Jovi – You Give Love A Bad Name. As this good song has been transferred from what was a foreigner’s great guitar solo, the Myanmar player can’t play it that way, so the song slowly deteriorates⁵.

Crap song and it’s a shame to copy such (a) great song!!!

Again, though the majority of comments are positive, with fans praising the stars and their skills, the only negative comments are those that criticize *copy thachin* as a musical genre. Interestingly, none of the songs praising the artists defends *copy thachin* writ large.

One netizen has gone to considerable effort to expose the genre of *copy thachin* as derivative. I came across the Facebook page, “Myanmar Music – who copied whose.” The profile pictures is a meme of a child holding up a sign, “Stop Stealing” and the site’s objective states,

Wall of Shame for Myanmar Music Industry! But don’t judge it wrong by looking at this page, there’re (sic) many original songs by Myanmar composers.

Well ... we all love Myanmar songs, don’t we? Yeah, because they are good, because they are emotional, because ... you say it! We love for many reasons and we support our

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1QdqtqL1nfk> (Accessed: 24 June 2015).

⁵ Bon Jovi - You Give Love A Bad Name

ဒီကောင်းတဲ့ သီချင်းတစ်ပုဒ်ကို ကူးချတာရက်ဖို့ ကောင်းတယ်
အထူးသဖြင့် ဝစ်တာပိုင်းဆိုင်ရာ တီးလုံးမှာ မြန်မာတွေကဟိုနိုင်ငံခြားကလူတွေလို
မတီးနိုင်လို့ သီချင်းတော်တော်ပျက်သွားတယ်

beloved singers/composers by buying their albums, in any forms' copy or original or whatever. But just wondering that shouldn't we be aware of the songs we are listening to come out from the composers' heart and soul or just from other composers and they "borrow" or in other word, "steal" it? Does it sound too harsh? If so, sorry for that, but we would feel more guilty if we hide the truth as if we were the composer. So here we are, in this place, we collect Burmese songs and international songs that are being copied together.

Last but not the least, we aren't dedicated to those who sings (sic) cover songs for fun though, please we encourage you all to sing, sing and sing. ☺ But be creative!

PS: We have no reason to insult singers and composers. We just want to know the truth. That's it. As simple as that. We hope you all join with us and let's find out the truth .. Thanks! (<https://www.facebook.com/mmwcw>)

The owner of the site is clearly a fan of Burmese music, and the breadth of Youtube videos that are pasted onto the wall of the site is evidence as such. The reach is impressive, as the owner of this site includes Chinese, Japanese, and Korean pop songs in the repertoire of *copy thachin* counterparts. What is compelling, too, is the sympathetic stance toward the music industry, but the push to encourage people to appreciate that there are other forms of Burmese music on the market, not just *copy thachin*. The service that this site aims to provide, though, is a kind of de-frocking, or letting audiences know not to be deceived, as it were, that they might be listening to a *copy thachin* song rather than an *own tune*. As such, music videos of international songs are posted on the timeline, and the posts will also include the name of the Myanmar artist as well as the name of the particular *copy thachin* song counterpart to the international song.

For example: the song, "Eternal Flame," by the 1980s American pop group, The Bangles, is posted, with the subheading, "copied by *Alwan ya mi hlawn mya - Htoo Ein Thin*⁶," followed by another post containing the link to the Htoo Ein Thin Burmese language rendition of the song, replete with Karaoke

⁶ In Burmese: အလွမ်းရဲမီးလျှံများ - ထူးအိမ်သင်

music video. Of additional interest to this is the fact that the Youtube music video is presented by an individual called “Myanmar Songs (Cover & Copy).” So there is an Internet community, of sorts, of music fans seeking to organize and present *copy thachin* in a context of exposing it as a copy, rather than out of pure fandom.

In this fashion, *copy thachin* versions of songs are juxtaposed with their international counterparts, so that viewers can quickly access multiple interpretations of the same rhythm and melody.

However, in this analysis of those who are critical of *copy thachin* as a genre, I by no means want to suggest that fans of *copy thachin* songs are simply being duped by the culture industries. As shown above, there are thousands – if not millions – of fans in Burma who enjoy the vocal and instrumental abilities of their favourite musicians. The poets who write the Burmese lyrics to *copy thachin* are also stars; for example: Myint Moe Aung has been recently employed as a judge on a television singing competition similar to the American Idol series replicated around the world.

But what about *copy thachin* as a genre? In much of the discussion of individual artists, Burmese fans commented that they liked songs and liked singers, but seldom did they say they liked *copy thachin* as a musical genre. But they do exist:

In an extensive blog article, a Burmese music critic, using the pen name, “Dr. Truth,” offers a counter-argument to those who dislike *copy thachin*. As he writes, “When young people these days hear a song that they like, the first question they ask is, ‘Is it a copy or an own tune,’ and if it’s a copy, they think the songwriter and singers are no good (Dr Truth 2009).” As Dr. Truth goes on to argue, it is easier to write an own tune because there are no rules, and nothing

that it would be compared to. He mentions having tried himself to write Burmese lyrics to popular songs, and found himself unable to do it. The process of making a good *copy thachin*, he argues, is much more difficult because if the copy is a little bit wrong, the audience might notice.

Aesthetically as well, the author points out that there are some songs where he very much prefers the Burmese *copy thachin* rendition to the original English-language song. For example: the song “Long Gone” by Fair Warning became *Alwan Mya* in Burmese, written by Ah Nge and sung by Lay Phyu (လေးဖြူ - အလွမ်းများ). Another *copy thachin* version preferred by this blogger is the Burmese rendition of the Hanson song, “I Will Come To You,” or *Di Ka Saung Nay Thu* written by K.A.T. and sung by Myo Gyi (မျိုးကြီး - ဒီကစောင့်နေသူ). In this sense, there is more of a sympathetic reading toward the act of borrowing, in spite of the fact that some Burmese fans might find the *copy thachin* derivative or bland. The artistic value of the works is complex, and clearly depends very much on the taste of the beholder.

Although this fan does not elaborate why he prefers the Burmese language renditions of these two songs more than their English originals, his stance taps into an important point regarding ideas of aesthetic appreciation and cultural intimacy. As a native speaker of Burmese, he is likely to be in a better position to appreciate the meaning of the lyrics in his own language as opposed to English (or another language.) While the English might carry symbolic cachet, this is different from carrying semantic meaning to the listener; the chances of successful intended affective communication through the music are therefore higher for *copy thachin* and Myanmar audiences than songs in English. And, as

has been shown through analysis of *copy thachin* lyrics, many of the international songs are not translated so much as they are re-signified with specific cultural cues so that the songs are thematically relevant to life in Myanmar (Ferguson 2013: 232). For those who are fans of Myanmar's poets, *copy thachin* offers another platform for them to appreciate the beauty of the language, and the ways in which the new lyrics can "create a Myanmar frame" for the popular international song (Dr Truth 2009).

Conclusion? Encore? (Once More?)

In this paper, I have chosen to look at the *copy thachin* subject not as something which one can really differentiate an authentic popular song from the copied or inauthentic, other than as moments in popular culture production. Importantly, and to study the work inductively it should be looked at as part of an aesthetic stance, and examined for how it circulates among ideas about the popular, the cosmopolitan and the global amongst audiences of both fans and critics in Myanmar. This is consistent with the theory of the simulacrum in which there is not a possibility to differentiate the true from the false, or any sort of prior authentic reality which could later be copied and falsified (Jappe 1999: 133). Within popular music, various songs constitute moments within ongoing flows of interpretation, performance, and symbolic meaning. During these past years of rapid political and cultural change, many people in Myanmar, particularly those in the middle classes are at once enthusiastic about the promise of 'development,' but at the same time, trying to cling to certain notions of what is culturally authentic. Although some music aficionados will admonish popular stars for supposedly aping international styles and forms, ironically they are

copying Western notions of cultural authenticity in order to judge their compatriots. The Western notion of individual authorship thus becomes the aesthetic ideal for Burmese “original” popular music. In terms of semiotics, we can locate any artistic work as having borrowed, adapted, re-interpreted, from previous cultural material at the bricoleur’s disposal.

Appendix A

English song lyrics	Myanmar Copy Thachin Lyrics	English translation of Copy Thachin lyrics
Terry Gilkyson, Frank Miller, and Richard Dehr, “Greenfields”	အင် မျှော်လင့်ခြင်းကွင်းပြင်	Ah Nge, “Field of Longings”
<p>Once there were green fields, kissed by the sun Once there were valleys where rivers used to run Once there were blue skies with white clouds high above Once they were part of an everlasting love We were the lovers who strolled through green fields</p> <p>Green fields are gone now, parched by the sun Gone from the valleys, where rivers used to run Gone with the cold wind, that swept into my heart Gone with the lovers, who let their dreams depart Where are the green fields that we used to roam?</p> <p>I’ll never know what made you run away How can I keep searching when dark clouds hide the day I only know there’s nothing here for me Nothing in this wide world left for me to see</p> <p>But I’ll keep on waiting until you return I’ll keep on waiting until the day you learn You can’t be happy while you’re heart’s on the roam You can’t be happy until you bring it home Home to the green fields and me once again</p>	<p>ဒီကွင်းပြင်ကြီးကို တို့.ဖြတ်ဖူးတယ် ဒီမြက်ပင် များအပေါ် တို့နှစ်ယောက်အတူ ဖြတ်ဖူးတယ်။ ဒီကောင်းကင်ကြီးထဲ မိုးတိမ်တွေ အမြဲပြန်သန်း ကြည့်နူးစရာဘဝပေါ့ မင်းလေးနဲ့.ဟို တစ်ချိန်က တို့.နှစ်ဦးသားအချစ်ကိုတန်ဖိုးထားကြတက် တို့.နှစ်ဦးသား အချစ်ကိုတန်ဖိုးထားကြတက်</p> <p>ဒီကွင်းပြင်ကြီးဟာ အခုဆိုလွမ်းစရာ ဒီမြက်ပင်စိမ်းတွေ ခြောက်သွေ့.ကာညိုမနေ ဒီကောင်းကင်ကြီးလည်းဟိုအရင်လိုမလှတော့ ဘူး ရင်ထဲမှာ အဆွေများ မင်းထားပစ်ကာ ထွက်သွား တို့.နှစ်ဦးသား ဘဝဟာ ကွာရှားကြီးခြားထားသလို</p> <p>တို့.မသိနိုင်ဘူး ကံတရားရဲ့ အင်အားကို အဝေးဆုံးချစ်သူတိုင်းပဲ ပြန်နီးဖို့.မျှော်လင့်နေ အချစ်ဆုံးချစ်သူတိုင်းအို အလွမ်းဆုံး ဘဝရှိမယ် အချစ်ဟာ ကြည့်နူးစရာ လွမ်းစရာ တစ်ခါဖြစ်မြဲ</p> <p>ကိုယ်လေ စောင့်မျှော်ဆဲပါ မင်းလာမယ့်နေ့. တကယ်နားလည်မှန်း.မင်းကိုယ့်ထံပြန်မယ့်နေ့. ကြေကွဲစရာများနဲ့.တခြားနေရာမှာမင်းပျော်မလ ဘူး ငါလွမ်းသလိုမင်းလည်း အမြဲတမ်းတနေမှာပဲ မျှော်မဆုံးသောကွင်းပြင်အရင်အတိုင်းလျှော့</p>	<p>We have crossed this great field We have walked on these green grasses Clouds always fly in this great sky Back then, with you, life was delightful We, the two of us, have valued our love.</p> <p>This great field provokes my nostalgia This basil is now brown and dry This great sky is no longer as beautiful as it once was Your departure made sorrows in my soul Our lives are worlds apart.</p> <p>We can’t know the power of fate All great lovers long for their faraway love to return near to them All great lovers have fond memories of love and life Love always begets benevolence and sentimental yearning, at least once.</p> <p>I await for the day you come back to me with understanding In sorrow, in another place, are you happy now? You would long as I do. Let’s walk in the never-ending field of longing as we did in the past.</p>

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Appendix B

English lyrics	Copy Thachin lyrics	English translation of copy thachin
Bon Jovi – You Give Love a Bad Name	အတွင်းကြော့ ကော်နီ ဖြူဖြူကျော်သိန်း မင်းချစ်သူ	“Injured Soul” Kaw Ni, Phyu Phyu Kyaw Thein, Min Chit Thu
<p>Shot through the heart, and you're to blame, darling You give love a bad name</p> <p>An angel's smile is what you sell You promise me heaven then put me through hell Chains of love, got a hold on me When passion's a prison you can't break free</p> <p>You're a loaded gun, yeah There's nowhere to run No-one can save me, the damage is done</p> <p>You paint your smile on your lips Blood red nails on your fingertips A school boys dream, you act so shy Your very first kiss was your first kiss goodbye</p>	<p>ရင်မှာခံစားသူမမြင်နိုင်တယ် ငါ့ရဲ့ အသည်းထဲက အတွင်းကြော့</p> <p>နတ်သမီးအပြုံး မာရ်နတ် အမုန်း အချိုးအကွေ့နဲ့တွေ့ကြုံ ဇာတ်လမ်းမျိုးစုံတဲ့ ရင်ထဲမှာလည်းတုန်ခါနေပြီ ထိခိုက်တဲ့အသည်းအိမ်မှာသွေးထွက်ပြီ</p> <p>အိုး ဝိုး ဝိုး ဒါအချစ်ပဲလား ဟင်း . . . အိုးဝိုးဝိုး ဒါရူးနိမ့်ပြီလား</p> <p>အသည်းနုလုံးထဲအဆိပ်တွေကို ဘယ်သူထည့်သွား</p> <p>ဒီအက်ရာများ လူတွေမသိနိုင်ပေ အသည်းထဲက အတွင်းကြော့</p> <p>အိုး . . . အသည်းထဲမှာ အတွင်းကြော့ လူတိုင်းရဲ့ အမြင်မှာလည်း တို့ဘဝက ပျော်ရွှင်ပြည်စုံနေ ဘယ်သူမှမသိ ဒီရင်ထဲ တဖြည့်ဖြည့်နဲ့ကျွမ်းလောင်နေဖွဲ့မီးလိုပဲ</p>	<p>You can't see my feelings inside, In my heart is an injured soul</p> <p>There are many stories and turning points, filled with an angel's smile and a devil's hatred, in my chest. On the inside, blood flows from my injured heart</p> <p>Oh-h-h-h-h Is this love? Huh ... Oh-h-h-h Is this defeat?</p> <p>Who has put poison in my heart?</p> <p>Others can't know about these injuries In my heart is an injured soul</p> <p>Ohhh.. in my heart is an injured soul People see my life as perfect. Nobody knows that inside, it's disintegrating, burning up.</p>

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