
Protestant Mission in Northern Siam: Foundation and Confrontation

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THE COMING OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES

In the first quarter of the 19th century, foreign powers, Britain in particular, attempted to establish trade links with Siam. Both the Crawford (1822) and the Burney (1826) Missions demonstrated the eagerness of the British, through the East India Company, to establish trade relations with Siam. On the other hand, Siam was hoping to acquire guns and ammunition from the British in exchange for her goods in the Anglo-Siam foreign trade. The Missions paved the way for British traders to trade in Siam.

The opening of trade links between Siam and Britain, particularly through the Burney Treaty of 1826, had other advantages too. It paved the way for the arrival of Protestant missionaries.¹ In 1828 two of the first Protestant missionaries arrived in Siam.² In August 1828, Rev. Charles Gutzlaff and Jacob Tomlin arrived in Bangkok. Charles Gutzlaff, previously of the Netherlands Missionary Society, had severed his ties with the society and came to Siam under the sponsorship of the London Missionary Society (LMS).³ Jacob Tomlin, an Englishman, was also a representative of the LMS.⁴

In Siam, Gutzlaff and Tomlin evangelized mainly, among the Chinese in Bangkok. Both these Protestant missionaries adopted an aggressive style of evangelisation and this did not help the growth of the LMS in Siam. Within

two months after their arrival in Siam, the entire stock of bibles in Chinese that Gutzlaff and Tomlin brought had been distributed among the Chinese population in Bangkok.⁵ The Siamese government did not take too kindly to this kind of evangelisation. In the 1830's the *Phra Khlang* (Siamese Foreign Minister) requested Robert Hunter, a much trusted British merchant among the Siamese court circle, to take the Protestants out of the country.⁶ The two LMS representatives appealed to the *Phra Khlang* and asked that the reasons for which they were being expelled should be given in writing. The Siamese government then admonished them and asked them "to be more sparing in the distribution of their books"⁷ but allowed them to remain in Siam.

In 1829, Gutzlaff and Tomlin wrote to the churches in America, appealing for more missionaries to join them.⁸ Gutzlaff also wrote to the Baptist missionaries in Burma, urging them to send someone to take up mission work in Siam.⁹ But, not long after, the LMS representatives left Siam. Tomlin left the field owing to ill health in 1831, followed by Gutzlaff in 1832.

The American Protestant missionaries responded to the call from Gutzlaff and Tomlin. In 1831, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) opened a mission station in Siam.¹⁰

In response to the appeal made to the Baptist missionaries in Burma, the Rev. John Taylor Jones and Mrs. Jones were transferred to Siam. The Baptist Mission's work in Siam thus began with their arrival in March 1833.¹¹ In Siam, the Baptists concentrated their work among the Teochiu Chinese.

The most eminent of the ABCFM missionaries in Siam was the Rev. Dan Beach Bradley,¹² a Presbyterian and a trained medical missionary. He left for Siam from Boston on the *Cashmere* in 1834 and, after a long delay in Singapore, arrived in Bangkok on 18 July 1835.¹³ In Singapore, Bradley purchased the first Siamese printing press which had been brought to Singapore from Serampore, India.¹⁴

Then came the Rev. Jesse Caswell who arrived in Siam in 1840. In 1845, Prince Mongkut, who was then in the priesthood, invited Caswell to teach him English and Science, for which Caswell was given a room where he could preach and distribute tracts.¹⁵ A friendly relation blossomed between Caswell and Mongkut. Mongkut's appreciation of the services of his teacher and the knowledge gained from him was well demonstrated when, in September 1848, he attended the latter's funeral. Mongkut also presented Caswell's widow with a gift of white silk. Later, he erected a monument over Caswell's grave.¹⁶

Meanwhile, Bradley's medical work among the Siamese gained prominence and received support from the King, the noblemen, and the people in general. In 1847, Bradley left for America and severed his ties with the

ABCFM. In 1850, Bradley returned to Siam but worked under the auspices of the American Missionary Association (AMA) until his death in June, 1873. Bradley's medical qualifications facilitated the operation of a Protestant mission in Bangkok. Through his medical services and the profits, primarily from the printing press, he became a self-supporting missionary in Bangkok,¹⁷ thus relieving the AMA of the need to support financially its mission in Siam.

It was also through the initiative of the industrious Bradley that the first two missionary run newspapers were founded in Siam. The *Bangkok Calendar*, an annual journal (1848-1873) and the *Bangkok Recorder*, a bi-monthly journal (1865-1866), were both printed in Bangkok. Missionaries in Siam contributed articles and reports to both the papers. Their writings included accounts of their lives in Siam and the politics and administration of Siam. They also publicised their observations of Siamese lifestyle. Bradley himself was a prolific writer. His detailed and voluminous diary of his life in Siam is an invaluable source for the writing of Thai history.

The American Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church, United States (BOFM), was another group which sent missionaries to Siam in the 19th century. Among the first to arrive under the auspices of the BOFM were the Rev. and Mrs. Mattoon and Dr. Samuel R. House. These three missionaries arrived in March 1847. The BOFM (Siam) remained small until reinforced in June 1858 with the arrival of Daniel McGilvary and Jonathan Wilson.

Daniel McGilvary was born into a staunch Scottish Presbyterian family in Moore County, North Carolina, in 1828.¹⁸ He had a strict Presbyterian up-bringing. His father had served as a ruling elder in the church that the McGilvarys attended, namely, the Buffalo Presbyterian Church in Sanford.¹⁹ He received his high school education at the famous Bingham School at Oakes, North Carolina. Its principal, William J. Bingham, played an important role in McGilvary's mastering of Latin and Greek. Upon graduating from Bingham in May, 1849,²⁰ McGilvary became a teacher. He taught for five years before "he felt called to the ministry".²¹ In 1853, McGilvary entered the Princeton Theological Seminary in the United States. It was at Princeton that he became acquainted with Jonathan Wilson who was later to become his colleague in Siam. Upon graduation, McGilvary served a year as a pastor in his native state, North Carolina, and subsequently applied to join the Siam Mission. He sailed on the *David Brown* which was bound for Singapore on 11 March, 1858,²² and arrived in Siam three months later.

Jonathan Wilson was born in western Pennsylvania in 1830.²³ He entered Princeton Seminary in the same year as McGilvary. But it was only

in their final year at Princeton that the two became friends. That year, Dr. Samuel R. House of the Siam Mission visited Princeton. When addressing the seminary students, House spoke of the Presbyterian Mission in Siam and encouraged Princeton seminarians to join the Mission. Upon graduation, Wilson spent a year as a missionary to the Choctaw Indians of Oklahoma and taught at a mission school called the Spencer Academy.²⁴ Following the one-year stint in Oklahoma, he joined McGilvary on board the *David Brown* enroute to Siam.

The ABCFM and the AMA stationed themselves in the capital city. Their initial outreach comprised mostly the people living in the capital and its suburbs. They worked among the Thais of the central region and the Chinese community living in Bangkok and the surrounding areas. It was typical of most Protestant missions in the 19th century to focus their evangelizing activities on the Chinese. Some of the missionaries had spent years studying the Chinese language prior to their arrival in Asia. Gutzlaff of the LMS is one such example. He considered his work in Siam as transitory and aimed principally to bring the gospel to China.²⁵

Southeast Asian countries like Siam and even Malacca²⁶ were in fact considered a stepping stone to China by most of the early 19th century Protestant missions. This phenomenon, which has been referred to as "waiting for China", indicates that most of the early mission stations in Southeast Asia, particularly those located at the Chinese settlements in these countries, served as preparatory launching sites for the Protestant mission to China. In Siam, they worked among the Thais and the Chinese and, in the meantime, waited for an opportunity to enter the "walled empire". This was particularly true of the Baptist Mission in Siam.²⁷ It was only after China's defeat by Britain, in the Opium War in 1842, that the doors were officially opened to missionaries. Thereafter, mission work in Siam ceased to be a stepping stone to China. Most of the mission groups in Siam in the 1840's concentrated on their work locally and aimed for a wider outreach among the local population.

It is significant to note here that, as in Burma, mission activity in Siam during the early years of the Presbyterian Siam Mission (1830 to 1840's) was restricted by the court. Rama III, the King of Siam then, suspected that the American missionaries were foreign political agents and he curtailed their work accordingly. From the start, Rama III's reign (1824-1851) was marked by internal feuds, uprisings, suspicions and anxieties. Firstly, he had not ascended the throne through the traditionally-adhered system of status by birth. His half-brothers were of higher princely rank; the eldest among them (Mongkut) was thought to be the rightful heir. Secondly, he had inherited from his father the problems that came after the invasion of the Malay

dependency to the south (Kedah) in 1821. Kedah's location, adjacent to the British settlement of Penang, alerted Rama III to the threat of British intervention in Siamese territories should Kedah's political problems affect Britain's commercial interests in Penang. To the northeast, Rama III was engaged in a war with Chao Anu, the Chief of Vientiane, a Lao tributary of Siam (1826-27). From the west, the looming threat of Burmese attacks persisted. Lastly, Siam's fear of the British was probably never stronger than after the British occupation of the Burmese territories of Arakan and Tenasserim in 1826.

The court was suspicious of all foreigners, missionaries included. Not surprisingly, the Protestant mission stations in Siam in the early 19th century were located mostly in the capital city and their activities came under the scrutiny of the court. Likewise, in Burma, the court in the centre was highly suspicious of the missionaries and feared the implication of allowing them to teach religion and carry out social work among the local people. The Protestant (particularly Anglican and Methodist) missionaries in Burma, in addition, arrived at an inopportune time; it co-incided with the British expansion into Burma. As such, the Burmese suspected the Christian missionaries of being agents and allies of the British. After the annexation of Burmese territories by Britain, mission activity in Burma, indeed, began to receive support from the colonial powers.²⁸

Siam's policy changed when Mongkut ascended the throne in 1851. During his reign, the Siamese court in Bangkok adopted a policy of tolerance towards the missionaries. Mongkut's outlook was different from that of his predecessor. Firstly, he was a devout Buddhist and had served as a monk in the Buddhist monastery. Secondly, he was the founder of the *Thammayut* order in Thai Buddhism. While in the monastery, Mongkut became disillusioned with the mechanical learning of most of the Buddhist texts and practices with no understanding of their inner meaning and purpose. One of the reforms he introduced was the presentation of sermons in Siamese in place of the traditional custom of merely reciting texts in Pali.²⁹ Through this order and his role in it, Mongkut contributed greatly to enhancing the status of Thai Buddhism. Thirdly, like the Kings before him, Mongkut embodied the powerful link between the monarchy and Thai Buddhism. Yet, Mongkut was tolerant of the missionaries and actually found their activities and services useful to Siam. For example, he found the missionaries competent as English language teachers. His own knowledge of English was mostly obtained through the teaching of the missionaries. Later, Mongkut employed some of the wives of the missionaries to teach English to the ladies in the palace. He also used the services of the missionaries to teach English and other secular subjects to the children of the royal household.

Some of the missionaries who were able to speak Siamese later, served as American diplomatic representatives and interpreters to the government of Siam. Rev. Stephen Mattoon of the Presbyterian Mission was appointed the first United States Consul in Siam. He served as a Resident Counsel (1856 and 1859) and, at the same time, worked for the Presbyterian Mission. J.H. Chandler, a missionary with the Baptist Mission, is another example of a missionary turned diplomat. He was Resident US Consul from 1859 to 1862.³⁰ Both Mattoon and Chandler had served as advisers to the governments of Siam and the United States during the US-Siam treaty negotiations in 1856.³¹ Another member of the Presbyterian Mission in Siam, N.A. McDonald, served as Acting US Consul from 1868-1869, 1881-1882 and, finally 1885-1886.³²

Missionaries, serving in an official capacity with the government of Siam, had both regular and close contacts with important Siamese officials. These missionaries gradually won the trust of the King and officers of the highest rank in the administration of Siam. Through this trust, the Presbyterian mission in Siam was able to expand and reach out to the provincial and peripheral areas of Siam.

It was during the reign of King Mongkut that a Presbyterian mission was established by the BOFM of the Presbyterian Church, USA, in a region distant from the capital. Indeed, the first group of Europeans to become residents among the northern Thai in Chiang Mai were members of the BOFM.³³

In 1865, Daniel McGilvary and Jonathan Wilson journeyed from Bangkok to Chiang Mai (a semi-autonomous dependency of Siam in the 19th century). Two years later, in 1867, a Presbyterian mission station was established in Chiang Mai with the consent of Chao Kawilorot, the *Chao luang* (hereditary Prince-ruler) of Chiang Mai. This mission station was named the Laos Mission (also called the North Lao Mission or North Siam Mission).

There are two important aspects of the early history of the Laos Mission: firstly, its initial contact with the northern Thai and its ruling class and, secondly, its social work in the field of medicine, education and printing. Its activities, especially in the field of education, helped in the socio-economic transformation of northern Siam in the 19th century. Furthermore, through its activities and, subsequently, the demands the missionaries made on Bangkok, the subject of religious tolerance was addressed for the first time in northern Siam.

THE NATURE OF MISSIONARY ACTIVITIES

Mission work in northern Siam can be divided into two categories: evangelistic and social. In the first category, missionaries embarked on tours to

places far away from the mission station in Chiang Mai in order to reach out to a broad spectrum of the local people. During such trips, the missionaries distributed medicine and Christian literature to spread the "word of God". The reports they wrote introduced these hitherto unknown places to the Western world and informed interested traders, British in particular, of the trade routes. They are also an invaluable source of information on the northern Thai society of the 19th century.

European traders as a whole interested in the trade between Burma and China benefited from the missionary reports which gave details of the most travelled trade routes, important trade stations, and information on river routes as well as the customs and beliefs of the people living in the northern countryside. When Holt Hallett, a British surveyor, toured the northern region for the proposed railway between Moulmein and Yunnan, McGilvary and Rev. J.N. Cushing of the American Baptist Mission accompanied him and acted as interpreters for the greater part of the journey.³⁴ McGilvary and Cushing were well versed in the Lao and Shan languages respectively. Their knowledge of local languages helped the traders and surveyors whom they accompanied in various ways, for example, the rental of elephants, the purchase of foodstuffs along the journey and, most important of all, the acquisition of information on trade and travelling routes from the locals.

Mission activity in the field of social work also had a major impact on the small Christian community and the larger northern Thai society in that it introduced modern education, medical facilities and printing to the people. The introduction of such social work indeed set in motion some important aspects of modernization which, in due course, came to be accepted by the central government in Bangkok.

It was at a time when Bradley was actively pursuing mission work in Siam that Daniel McGilvary and Jonathan Wilson, on 20 June 1858, arrived in Bangkok.³⁵ McGilvary did not stay long in Bangkok. He soon joined fellow missionaries, Samuel McFarland and his wife, at a new mission station at Phetburi (Petchaburi). The Governor of Phetburi had extended an invitation to McGilvary to live there and teach as much Christianity as he pleased if only "you will teach my son English".³⁶

In Phetburi, McGilvary began to work with a group of war captives from Korat, men whom he called Laos. These people were brought down to work on various public works for the government.³⁷ The captives were housed in camps at Phetburi. McGilvary and his missionary friends used this opportunity to spread the gospel among these men from the north. He built a bamboo school house and used it to preach to the workers. His work among them was a useful introduction to what awaited him in the north. His

evangelising work among the northerners in Phetburi, although of short duration, had far-reaching implications. Both McGilvary and his wife (Sophia) were convinced that the northerners were very likely to accept the gospel. In a letter to her brother-in-law, Sophia McGilvary remarked that the northerners were "much interested, and some of them profess to believe in the Christian religion".³⁸ Thus, long after the departure of these workers, McGilvary pursued, tenaciously, the idea of establishing a mission among the northern Thai.

Encouraged by their work among the northern Thai, Daniel McGilvary and his colleague, Jonathan Wilson, embarked on a trip to the northern region on 20 November 1863.³⁹ They travelled by boat and on elephants, arriving at Chiang Mai on 7 January 1864. At the time of their arrival, the *Chao luang* had left for Bangkok. McGilvary and Wilson were received by the high officials of Chiang Mai. Both the missionaries did not remain long in Chiang Mai as it was their first visit there and the trip was meant to be an exploratory survey of the northern region. Upon his return to Phetburi, McGilvary began harbouring hopes of establishing a mission in Chiang Mai or what was known to him then as the Lao country.

An opportunity to establish a mission in Chiang Mai offered itself when, in 1866, the ruling prince of Chiang Mai made his tri-annual tribute-paying trip to Bangkok. The missionaries, led by D.B. Bradley and fellow missionaries, D. McGilvary, N.A. McDonald and S.C. George, through the good offices of the American Consul, J.H. Hood, had, in the meanwhile, approached the Siamese King for permission to establish a mission in northern Siam.⁴⁰ The Siamese King replied that the decision, laid not with him but with the *Chao luang* of Chiang Mai and suggested an audience with Chao Kawlorot, the *Chao luang* (1856-1870).

At the meeting with the *Chao luang*, Bradley explained that the purpose of the mission was "to teach religion, establish schools and care for the sick".⁴¹ Chao Kawlorot not only agreed but offered a plot of land and timber to build the mission house. The Prince also remarked that "he had always said that he was willing to grant the permission sought to reside there", a statement which the missionaries understood as an unconditional sanction to take residence in Chiang Mai.⁴²

Having completed the initial formal procedure, the Board of Foreign Missions was convinced that the idea of a new mission, away from the Siamese capital, was indeed the "call of God". In April 1867, the Laos Mission was established in Chiang Mai.

Funds to set up the mission were raised from the foreign community in Bangkok. The provision of land and timber by the *Chao luang* partially

relieved the missionaries of the financial burden incurred in the setting up of the mission. Contributions in cash and kind were received by the missionaries. Dr. James Campbell, a doctor with the British Consulate in Bangkok, supplied the missionaries with medicine and a book of medical instructions. The Ladies Sewing Society, presumably a support group, led by Mrs. Campbell, contributed 600 ticals. A rifle was given by the German Consul in Bangkok for the protection of the missionaries.⁴³ Soon afterwards, on 3 January 1867, Daniel McGilvary and his family left for Chfang Mai and arrived 89 days later in the northern capital city.

It is not clear why the *Chao luang* was willing to allow the establishment of a mission in northern Siam. Perhaps, it was an opportune request by the missionaries, made at a time when the *Chao luang* was in Bangkok to pay tribute to the King of Siam. The friendship between the missionaries and the King might have influenced the *Chao luang* to agree to the request from the foreigners. But his initial kindness towards the missionaries later changed to one of hostility.

Why was there a change in the *Chao luang's* attitude towards the missionaries? What took place in northern Siam as a result of the exchanges between the *Chao luang* and the missionaries? And, how did Bangkok respond to the missionaries' plea for help. To answer these questions, it is necessary to look at the impact of the Laos Mission through the interaction among the missionaries, the ruling class and the northern Thai. The interaction among these groups and the interplay of traditional and new elements led to changes in the northern Thai society.

STRUGGLE AGAINST TRADITIONAL BELIEFS

The first convert to Christianity in northern Siam was a certain Nan Inta. He was baptized in 1868, two years after the Laos Mission had been established.⁴⁴

Nan Inta was a devout Buddhist and a respected abbot of a monastery. He accepted the teachings of Christianity when his long-held belief *vis-a-vis* the factors causing a solar eclipse was proven wrong by McGilvary. The locals believed that an eclipse was caused by the enraged spirit-god Rahu eating up the sun. Therefore, they were convinced that no one could predict the date and time of an eclipse. McGilvary set out to prove them wrong. On the day and time, as predicted by McGilvary, Nan Inta watched the eclipse using McGilvary's smoked-glass. This was a turning point in the life of Nan Inta and the Laos Mission. Nan Inta, finally convinced of the teaching of his Christian teacher, embraced the Christian faith. The Laos Mission had earned its first convert. Subsequently, Nan Inta went on to become the first native teacher and ruling elder.

The incident that led to Nan Inta's conversion is a typical example of one of the early situations confronting Christian missions in a non-Christian world, that of the struggle against traditional beliefs.⁴⁵ Widely practised spirit-worship was especially evident among tribal communities living in the mountainous areas of the northern region. These people made offerings to the spirits which they either worshipped or feared. Their act of offering alms was strictly conducted as a form of appeasing the spirits. This was to ensure that the spirits were not offended and would not bring misfortunes such as epidemics, droughts and famine. Thus Daniel McGilvary reported that:

The Lao as a race have been in bondage to the spirits No event in life from birth to the last offices for the dead, could be undertaken without consulting or appeasing the presiding spirits of the clan, the household or the country. Their anger is the fruitful cause of every disease and calamity⁴⁶

The Buddhists offer alms as a way of merit-making, hoping, in return, that their sins will be appropriately reduced. Through their merit-making activities, they hope for a better rebirth and eventually the attainment of nirvana.⁴⁷

The ethnic Karens, who lived along the frontier between Burma and Siam, were known to attribute the outbreak of an epidemic, cholera or smallpox, to the act of the spirits. The Karens and other people in the north were fearful of smallpox and when it afflicted their villages, they all fled to the mountains. Other similar spirit-related stories also claimed that when a village was afflicted by cholera or malaria, the persons practising witchcraft or *phi ka* in the village were the ones responsible. There had been incidents where, upon the Chief's order, the entire family suspected of practising witchcraft were chased away and their house and belongings burnt.

People condemned for practising witchcraft feared persecution. Many from this group of people sought refuge and were given protection by the church. An article in the *North Carolina Presbyterian* for the year 1886 narrated an incident which led a family in Lamphun, accused of practising witchcraft, to convert to Christianity. The incident took place in 1885. It involved a wealthy man from a place called Baan Paan in Lamphun. He and his family were accused of witchcraft and, as a result, were forced to leave their village. Before leaving Baan Paan, the wealthy man was forced to tear down his house. This man later became acquainted with one of the elders from the mission and, soon after, he and his family embraced Christianity. The missionaries not only provided temporary relief to the accused but later sought and obtained permission from the Governor of Lamphun for the reconstruction of the person's family house. The house was rebuilt at the

expense of the wealthy man and it was later used as a chapel.⁴⁸ Indeed, witchcrafters proved to be prospective converts and a substantial number became part of the church congregation.

Unlike the Buddhists, the highland tribal minorities had not developed a well organized and sophisticated belief system at the time the Presbyterians established their mission in Chiang Mai. As such, the Christian missionaries were keen to devote their attention to evangelising among this group of people. Perhaps, it was this factor that initially encouraged the BOFM to establish a mission station away from the centre, that is, in a remote peripheral area. Even in Burma, the Protestant missionaries accomplished greater success among the tribal people living in the highlands and interiors of the country, these being places where Buddhism had not penetrated.⁴⁹

The provision of medical services by the missionaries, clearly, was a most effective method for the introduction of Christianity to the local population. McGilvary acknowledged the importance of medical facilities in assisting the work of a missionary when he wrote that:

... our little medicine chest gives up a favourable introduction to many of the people that would otherwise be indifferent to us.⁵⁰

It is not clear, however, whether the highland tribal minorities accepted Christianity primarily because of the medical and educational benefits they received as a "by-product"⁵¹ of their conversion to Christianity. Nonetheless, the medical facilities and opportunities for education they received were often the first that they were provided with.

The favourable disposition that the people developed towards a missionary offering medicine is perhaps best indicated by the title "moh" (doctor) that the natives conferred upon the latter. Societies plagued by cholera, malaria, smallpox and goitre were relieved by the medical help that the "mohs" offered them. Some of these people were later attracted to the teachings of the "mohs". In subsequent years, a significant number of the people who had benefited from the medical relief offered by the missionaries accepted the religious teachings of the missionaries.

THE NAN CHAI AND NOI SUNYA AFFAIR (1869)

Soon after Nan Inta converted to Christianity in January, 1869, six other persons namely Noi Sunya (a native doctor), Nai Kanta, Nan Chai, Boon Ma, Sen Ya Wichai and Ngiew joined the Presbyterian Church of Chiang Mai.⁵² But in March the same year, McGilvary, in obvious anxiety, wrote to Rev. Irving, the Secretary of the Mission Board stationed in New York, indicating the uncertainty that awaited the Laos Mission in Chiang Mai. McGilvary's

remark that "I have the impression that the New Year will be a crisis in the history of the Mission" was indeed a premonition of what was to come.⁵³ Given the increasing number of locals publicly professing Christianity, McGilvary and his colleague, Jonathan Wilson anticipated that there would soon be a reaction from the ruling class.

In April 1869, Dr. S.R. House wrote from Bangkok to notify Rev. Irving that the ruling Chiang Mai nobles had accused the missionaries of being the cause of various calamities in northern Siam. The famine due to rice shortage in northern Siam in 1869 was viewed as a direct result of the arrival and subsequent residence of foreigners in their country.⁵⁴ The United States Acting Consul, N.A. McDonald, who was also an interpreter for the Siamese government and a missionary in Bangkok, clarified, and later, resolved the matter. In his reply to the Board, McDonald wrote:

... there must be some mistake about Mr. McGilvary's being the cause of the scarcity of rice in the first year named, in as much as he had not even left Bangkok at the time that year's scant harvest was gathered, and now this year [1869], though he is still there it is understood the harvest is quite abundant.⁵⁵

McDonald further reminded the authorities of the famine that befell Korat not too long ago and added that no foreigners had until then ever resided in Korat. For that reason, a similar calamity in Chiang Mai could not be attributed to the presence of foreigners.⁵⁶

The matter was resolved following McDonald's explanation but further tension developed between the *Chao luang* and the missionaries. This time the problem that arose in Chiang Mai led to intervention from Bangkok. The incident was, at any rate, the first of many more incidents that saw Bangkok gradually extending its hitherto invisible but henceforth increasingly visible influence in the north.

The fact that the missionaries could command respect and support from the Chief's own subjects threatened the position of the *Chao luang* who was practically the absolute ruler in Chiang Mai. The growing popularity and influence of the Christian mission and its evangelical work among his subjects also threatened the *Chao luang's* venerable position as the defender of Buddhism.

Using the pretext that his subjects failed to perform corvée labour and had abstained from work on a Sunday, Chao Kawilorot ordered the two converts, Nan Chai and Noi Sunya, to be detained. In spite of the fact that their respective masters had exempted Nan Chai and Noi Sunya from work on Sunday to enable them to attend Sunday worship, the *Chao luang* ordered

their detention. Then, in September 1869, the *Chao luang* ordered the execution of Nan Chai and Noi Sunya without a trial.⁵⁷

This incident, subsequently, led to a series of communications involving Bangkok, the missionaries and the *Chao luang*. The missionaries had contacted N.A. McDonald in Bangkok to seek assistance and protection from the Siamese government. Soon afterwards, Bangkok sent an official royal messenger to Chiang Mai, accompanied by McDonald and S.C. George, both from the Presbyterian Mission in Bangkok. However, the letter from Bangkok carried by the messenger to the northern *Chao luang* did not refer to the September, 1869 execution at all.⁵⁸ Instead, in a private note addressed to the missionaries and carried by the Siamese messenger, the Siamese Regent said with regard to the executed persons that:

[the] Laos Christians were the King's [*Chao luang* of Chiang Mai] own slaves, if he chose to kill them we have no right to interfere. ⁵⁹

The Regent's note to the missionaries indicated that he was reluctant to sour the traditional cordial relations between the centre and the northern tributary states. Bangkok, until then, respected the autonomy of the *Chao luang*. At this juncture, Bangkok refrained from giving direct orders or instructions to the *Chao luang* of Chiang Mai. McDonald's conclusion was that Bangkok's attitude resulted from the "slight" hold that the Siamese government had upon the Chief of Chiang Mai. He further added that the Siamese government feared getting into any difficulty with the *Chao luang* "lest he should cause them trouble".⁶⁰ Bangkok's unwillingness to confront the *Chao luang* of Chiang Mai over the 1869 issue left McDonald with little choice but to "try and smooth matters over so that the missionaries might remain there".⁶¹

An audience with the *Chao luang*, attended by the prince and princess and officers in his *muang* (state/principality), was held on 28 December, 1869.⁶² At first, the *Chao luang* said that the execution took place not because the accused were Christians but because they had refused to do government work (*corvee*). McGilvary, insensitive to the dangerous situation, accused the *Chao luang* of pretense and conceit. Worse still, he called the *Chao luang* a liar. The enraged *Chao luang* declared that he "would kill every man that should dare to become a Christian, that he regarded every man who rebelled against his god as rebel against himself".⁶³

This must have been the first time that the *Chao luang* had ever been challenged in the presence of his subjects. He became more hostile and very determined to prevent the spread of Christianity.⁶⁴ Furthermore, the *Chao luang* cautioned that any person "who visited, dealt with or in any way aided

or assisted" the missionaries would be duly punished.⁶⁵ Servants employed by the missionaries, fearing the *Chao luang's* wrath left the employ of their masters in haste. No one among the northern Thai would readily sell or supply the missionaries with provisions or any other necessities. The missionaries began to live in fear of violence.

The right of a patron to call his subjects (*phrad*) to serve him under the corvée system was a feature of the traditional social structure of Siam. The Christians' request to be exempted from work on Sundays demonstrated that their new faith meant more to them than the system to which they had traditionally adhered.⁶⁶ This re-directing of allegiance from the patron to the missionaries and their new faith threatened the traditional social structure of the northern states of Siam.

S.C. George who accompanied the Siamese Commissioner to Chiang Mai raised an important point in his letter to Rev. Irving. George explained that the Chief of Chiang Mai regarded the acceptance of Christianity among his subjects as an indication of disloyalty, firstly, to Lord Buddha and, secondly, to him. In S.C. George's words:

If his people wished to go with the foreigners they must go to a foreign country; but they could not do so in his country, that if his people would not worship the god Buddha, they would not likewise be loyal to him and that McGilvary had not told him at the first that he was going to make converts.⁶⁷

The point to be stressed here is that the missionaries failed to understand that the *Chao luang*, to the locals, embodied the virtues of Buddhism. He had the divine right to rule in his *muang*. The righteous virtues inherent in the ruling *Chao* guaranteed the well-being of his people. The *Chao luang*, who was also a *Chao Chivut* (Lord of Life) in his *muang*, elevated himself to a status similar to that of a *dharmaraja*. It was his duty to defend Buddhism and to provide for the welfare of his people. In return the people of his *muang* obeyed his rule and revered him.

Possibly the *Chao luang* was not fully aware of the implications and consequences when he agreed to the establishment of a Christian mission in Chiang Mai. When the missionaries approached him in Bangkok, in 1866, for permission to establish a mission in Chiang Mai, for the purpose of teaching religion, establishing schools and caring for the sick, he had readily consented. But, after the 1869 execution, the *Chao luang* claimed that he was not told that the missionaries were "going to make converts". The *Chao luang* appeared not to have understood the link between teaching Christianity and the conversion to Christianity of his people. To him, teaching the

religion was harmless, but for his people to accept a foreign religion was tantamount to disloyalty and disrespect to him.

The missionaries, on the other hand, McGilvary in particular, were anxious that the matter should be resolved in the northern court or the *saram*. McGilvary alleged that the *Chao luang* and the officers of the *saram* had denied the two converts a trial before the death sentence was passed and carried out. What McGilvary did not understand was that the concept of civil rights as advocated by him was of Western (American) origin. It was a concept that was in direct contrast to the concept of traditional hierarchical order as practised by Thai society. The northern Thais had their own system of administering justice. The *Chao luang* who was a *Chao Chitwit* (Lord of Life) had the power to pass judgements and his people were obliged to abide by his judgements. Challenging a judgement by the *Chao Chitwit* was unheard of during that time. This was particularly true of the reign of Chao Kawilorot (1856-1870).

Chao Kawilorot was not only a *Chao Chitwit*, he was renamed *Chao Chitwit Aw* or "Lord of Life Take" by the villagers. It seems that whenever Chao Kawilorot became angry with someone who had displeased him, he would say "ow" (or "aw") which means "take".⁶⁹ His guards would then seize the culprit and have him beheaded. If this was the case, then the execution of the converts, Nan Chal and Noi Sunya, was unlikely to be the first carried out without a trial. But it was, of course, the first that attracted the attention and became the concern of Americans. Given a situation where the *Chao*, traditionally, had been able to mete out, arbitrarily, capital punishment and the fact that his authority was challenged for the first time by a foreigner, the *Chao*, not surprisingly, refused to deliberate further on the issue.

McGilvary insisted on pursuing the matter and refused to abandon his mission station. His colleague, Wilson, as well as Revs. McDonald and George suggested withdrawing from Chiang Mai because it was no longer safe for the missionaries and their families to remain there. Wilson suggested that they re-establish the mission at Tak, a border town between the north and south. In the midst of the uncertainty that befell the Laos Mission in Chiang Mai, *Chao luang* Kawilorot was preparing to leave for Bangkok on a tribute paying mission. In a surprising turn of events, Kawilorot, just as he was leaving Chiang Mai, assured McGilvary that the missionaries could remain in Chiang Mai until he returned from Bangkok. Kawilorot's assurance came as a temporary relief but it gave little hope for the future of the Laos Mission in Chiang Mai.

DIPLOMATIC INTERVENTION

Disappointed with the Bangkok government's reaction to the crisis, the American Consul, General J.W. Partridge, decided to deal with the problem. In 1870, Partridge urged Bangkok to fulfil the stipulations as agreed to in the treaty between the United States and Siam. He referred to the treaty which accorded protection rights to American citizens in Siam. Partridge wrote from Bangkok to the Department of State, and Washington's reply was that the Siamese government had clearly violated Articles (I) and (VI) of the United States-Siam Treaty of 29 May, 1856.⁶⁹ Article (I) of the treaty stated that:

...all American citizens, in that country, shall receive from its government full protection and assistance to enable them to reside there in security.⁷⁰

Article (VI), further, provided for freedom of religious worship. It called for the "free exercise of their religion, and for their right to employ Siamese subjects and servants".⁷¹

Partridge charged that the *Chao luang* of Chiang Mai had seized and beheaded the two servants of the American citizens despite the latter's protests and "without any notice whatever to the Consul of the United States in Siam".⁷² In a letter dated 15 April 1870, addressed to *Chow Phya Bhanuwongse*, the Siamese Minister of Foreign Affairs, Partridge requested, on behalf of the United States government, "indemnity for the past and security for the future".⁷³ Again, on 26 May 1870, Partridge wrote to the Foreign Minister and, this time, sounding very impatient, wished to know "definitely, whether the government of Siam will protect the two American citizens and their families resident at that city".⁷⁴

The reply from *Chow Phya Bhanuwongse* came within five days of Partridge's letter of 26 May 1870. *Bhanuwongse* had communicated with the Regent of Siam, who was the Chief Executive of the Siamese Kingdom vice Prince Chulalongkorn who was too young to assume the throne of Siam. The Regent cited the illness of *Chao Kawilorot* as a result for the delay in deciding on the case raised by the Consul. The Regent, however, assured that the *Chao Upparat* (second most important office after the Chief) of Chiang Mai, who was expected to succeed the ailing *Kawilorot*, had been assigned to "assist, nourish and protect them and suffer no more trouble to befall them as before".⁷⁵ Upon the death of *Kawilorot* on 29 June 1870,⁷⁶ the *Chao Upparat* by the name of *Chao Intarnon*, who was also the son-in-law of *Kawilorot*, assumed the chieftainship of Chiang Mai.

The pressure that the missionaries put on Bangkok through their diplomatic representatives forced Bangkok to assume a more assertive role

in the arbitration of the case involving the Laos missionaries and *Chao luang* Kawilorot. It was, at any rate, one of the earliest occasions for Bangkok to make its presence directly felt, albeit gradually, in the politics of the northern states of Siam, except that the Regent who was really in charge of the government affairs in Siam did not then envisage the establishment of a centralized nation as desired later by Chulalongkorn. Therefore, it was when Chulalongkorn ruled as the King (1873-1910) that Bangkok's policies towards the north became manifest.

What is clear from the 1869 incident is that the Siamese government preferred the missionaries to return to Bangkok to avoid a confrontation with the *Chao luang* of Chiang Mai. But the missionaries chose to remain where they were. Diplomatic intervention by the United States Consul in Bangkok, who invoked the U.S. -Siam Treaty of 1856, left Bangkok no choice but to interfere in the affairs of the north. And it opened the way for not only the consolidation of the Laos Mission but also eventual central government control of northern Siam.

NOTE

1. *The Foreign Missionary*, May 1882, Vol. 40, p. 509.
2. Kenneth E. Wells, *History of Protestant Work in Thailand, 1828-1958*, Bangkok: Church of Christ (Thailand), 1958, p. 5.
3. Kennon Breazeale, "English Missionaries Among the Thai", in Ronald Renard (ed.), *Anuson Walter Vella*, Chiang Mai: Fayap University, Walter F. Vella Fund, and Honolulu Centre for Asian and Pacific Studies, University of Hawaii, 1986, p. 209. Some books state that Gutzlaff came to Siam on his own after severing his ties with the Netherlands Missionary Society.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Kenneth E. Wells, *History of Protestant Work in Thailand*, p. 6. See also, G.B. McFarland (ed.), *Historical Sketch of Protestant Missions in Siam, 1828-1928*, Bangkok: Bangkok Times Press, 1928, p. 2.
6. For details on Robert Hunter see Adey Moore, "An Early British Merchant in Bangkok," in *Selected Articles from the Journal of Siam Society*, Vol. 8, Bangkok, 1959.
7. G.B. McFarland, (ed.), *Historical Sketch of Protestant Missions in Siam*, p. 3.
8. Kenneth E. Wells, *History of Protestant Work in Thailand*, p. 7.
9. G.B. McFarland (ed.), *Historical Sketch of Protestant Missions in Siam*, p. 9.
10. Cornelia Kneeder Hudson, "Daniel McGilvary in Siam: Foreign Missions, the Civil War, and Presbyterian Unity", in *American Presbyterian* 69:4, Winter 1991, p. 284. Cornelia Hudson is the great grand-daughter of Daniel McGilvary.
11. G.B. McFarland, (ed.), *Historical Sketch of Protestant Missions in Siam*, p. 27.
12. For an account of the life and work of D.B. Bradley see Donald C. Lord, *Mo Bradley and Thailand*, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1969.
13. Kenneth E. Wells, *History of Protestant Work in Thailand*, p. 10.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
15. G.B. McFarland (ed.), *Historical Sketch of Protestant Missions in Siam*, p. 19.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
17. See letter dated 10 Aug, 1866 from D.B. Bradley's daughter, Sophia McGilvary to her brother-in-law, in *North Carolina Presbyterian* [hereafter NCP], 25 Sept. 1867.
18. Herbert R. Swanson, *Khrischak Muang Nua: A Study in Northern Thai Church History*, Bangkok: Chuan Press, 1984, p. 7.
19. Cornelia K. Hudson, "Daniel McGilvary in Siam: Foreign Missions, the Civil War, and Presbyterian Unity", p. 283.
20. Daniel McGilvary, *A Half Century Among the Siamese and the Lao*, New York: Fleming H. Revel Company, 1912, p. 31.
21. Cornelia K. Hudson, "Daniel McGilvary in Siam: Foreign Missions, the Civil War, and Presbyterian Unity", p. 284.
22. Daniel McGilvary, *A Half Century Among the Siamese and the Lao*, p. 43.
23. Herbert R. Swanson, "This Heathen People: The Cognitive Sources of American Missionary Westernizing Activities in Northern Siam, 1867-1889", M.A. thesis, University of Maryland, 1987, p. 41.
24. Lillian J. Curtis, *The Laos of North Siam*, New York: Fleming H. Revel, 1903, p. 253.
25. Kennon Breazeale, "English Missionaries Among the Thai", p. 221.
26. For details on Malacca see Brian Harrison, *Waiting For China: The Anglo-Chinese College at Malacca, 1818-1843, and Early Nineteenth Century Missions*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1979.
27. G.B. McFarland (ed.), *Historical Sketch of Protestant Missions in Siam*, p. 28.
28. See Kawi Thang Vuta, "A Brief History of the Planting and Growth of the Church in Burma", D.Miss. thesis, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California, 1983, p. 59-79.
29. Abbot Low Moffat, *Mongkut: The King of Siam*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1961, p. 19.

30. Benjamin A. Batson, "American Diplomats in Southeast Asia in the Nineteenth Century: The Case of Siam", in *JSS*, Vol. 64, 1976, p. 111. (See Appendix).
31. Cornelia K. Hudson, "Daniel McGilvary in Siam: Foreign Missions, the Civil War and Presbyterian Unity", p. 285.
32. Benjamin A. Batson, "American Diplomats in Southeast Asia", p. 111.
33. Herbert R. Swanson, *Khrischak Muang Nua*, p. 9.
34. Kenneth E. Wells, *History of Protestant Work in Thailand*, p. 68.
35. Daniel McGilvary, *A Half Century Among the Siamese and the Lao*, p. 45.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 58.
38. NCP, 25 Sept., 1867. See also Daniel McGilvary, "The Claims of the Laos Upon Our Church" and "Interest Among the Laos", in *The Foreign Missionary* Vol. 25, June 1866-May 1867, pp. 93-94.
39. Daniel McGilvary, *A Half Century Among the Siamese and the Lao*, p. 59.
40. Board of Foreign Missions (hereafter BOFM), McDonald to Irving, 20 Sept. 1866, Roll. 182, Vol. 3.
41. Cornelia K. Hudson, "Biography of Daniel McGilvary, unpublished typescript copy, Payap Archives, Chapter VI (no page). See also, Daniel McGilvary, *A Half Century Among the Siamese and the Lao*, p. 69.
42. BOFM, McGilvary to Irving, 20 Sept. 1866, Roll. 182, Vol. 3.
43. Cornelia K. Hudson, "Biography of Daniel McGilvary", Chapter VI (no page).
44. BOFM, McGilvary to Irving, 12 Jan. 1869, Roll. 182, Vol. 3.
45. Missionary reports commonly use the term paganism to refer to traditional or indigenous beliefs.
46. Daniel McGilvary, *A Half Century among the Siamese and the Lao*, p. 203.
47. Nirvana means the final emancipation of the soul by the extinction of all desire.
48. NCP, 3 Feb. 1886.
49. BOFM, McGilvary to Irving, 9 July, 1867, Roll. 182, Vol. 3. See also, NCP, 14 July, 1869.
50. Nicholas Tapp, "The Impact of Missionary Christianity Upon Marginalized Ethnic Minorities: The Case of the Hmong" in *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies (JSEAS)* Vol. 20, March, 1989, pp. 70-71.
51. Daniel McGilvary, *A Half Century Among the Siamese and the Lao*, pp. 99-100.
52. BOFM, McGilvary to Irving, 1 March 1869, Roll. 182, Vol. 3.
53. BOFM, S.R. House to Irving, 16 April, 1869, Roll. 182, Vol. 3.
54. *Ibid.*
55. *Ibid.*
56. Herbert R. Swanson, *Khrischak Muang Nua*, pp. 14-15.
57. BOFM, McDonald to Irving, 2 Feb. 1870, Roll. 182, Vol. 3.
58. BOFM, J. Wilson to Irving, 24 Jan. 1870, Roll. 182, Vol. 3.
59. BOFM, McDonald to Irving, 2 Feb. Roll. 182, Vol. 3.
60. *Ibid.*
61. NCP, 27 April 1870.
62. *Ibid.*
63. Jonathan Wilson wrote to the BOFM that the *chao luang* had made his stand clear when he remarked, "if the missionaries teach their religion and continue to make Christians we will banish them from the country". See BOFM, J. Wilson to Irving, 24 Jan. 1870, Roll. 182, Vol. 3.
64. Despatches of the United States Consuls in Bangkok (hereafter DUSCB), J.W. Partridge (U.S. Consul) to I.C.B. Davis (Assistant Secretary of State), No. 26, 21 July, 1870, Vol. 4.
65. Herbert R. Swanson, *Khrischak Muang Nua*, p. 13.
66. BOFM, S.C. George to Irving, 2 May, 1870, Roll. 182, Vol. 3.

68. Katherine Ann Bowie, 'Peasant Perspectives On the Political Economy of the Northern Thai Kingdom of Chiang Mai in the Nineteenth Century: Implications for the Understanding of Peasant Political Expression', Ph.D. thesis, University of Chicago, 1988, p. 304.
69. BOFM, Department of State, Washington to Partridge Esqr., 5 Oct. 1870, Roll. 182, Vol. 3.
70. *Ibid.*
71. *Ibid.*
72. DUSCB, J.W. Partridge (U.S. Consul) to the *Chow Phya Bhanuwongse* (Minister of Foreign Affairs), 15 April, 1870, Vol. 4.
73. *Ibid.*
74. DUSCB, J.W. Partridge to the *Phra Khlang*, Minister of Foreign Affairs, 26 May, 1870, Vol. 4.
75. DUSCB, "Reply of the Regent of Siam relative to Chiang Mai matters and protection to American citizens there", 31 May, 1870, Vol. 4.
76. Daniel McGilvary, *A Half Century Among the Siamese and the Lao*, p. 135.