

6 HISTORY OF THE THAI PROTESTANT CHURCH

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I. Introduction¹

The first two Protestant missionaries, Rev. Augustus Friedrich Gutzlaff and Rev. Jacob Tomlin, arrived in Thailand on August 23, 1828. They started working among the Chinese. After that, other missionaries from the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission, American Baptist Mission, American Presbyterian Mission and the American Missionary Association came and worked among the Thais. Of these missions, the American Presbyterian Mission is the only one that is still working in Thailand.

The American Presbyterian Mission started its work in Thailand in 1840. Evangelistic, educational and medical work constitute the main aspects of the work of this mission. The Presbytery of Siam² was established in 1858. In 1861 the APM opened Petbury Station. The Chiangmain Station was opened in 1867. In 1885 the Presbytery of the North Laos³ Mission was established. Many stations and churches were established by the Presbytery of the North Laos Mission. In 1920 the North Laos Mission was merged with the Siam Mission. By the end of the 19th century other missions such as the United Christian Missionary Society, the Seventh-Day Adventist Mission and the Christian and Missionary Alliance sent their missionaries to Siam. In 1930 the Siam National Christian Council and in 1934 the Church of Christ in Siam (Thailand) were established. The members of the American Presbyterian Mission, the United Christian Missionary Society, the Marburger Mission and American Baptist (Chinese) churches became members of the Church of Christ in Thailand. Other missions still worked independently.

In 1957 the American Presbyterian Mission was dissolved and its members were integrated into the Thai Church.

In 1970 the Evangelical Fellowship of Thailand was established⁴. Members of other missions such as the Christian and Missionary Alliance

and the Overseas Missionary Fellowship, which were not the members of the Church of Christ in Thailand, became members of this organization.

II. Periodization

George B. McFarland divided Thai church history into two periods on the basis of the development of the mission work.

1. The Pioneer period (1828 to 1860): The first two Protestant missionaries, Rev. Carl Augustus Friedrich Gutzlaff and Rev. Jacob Tomlin, arrived at Bangkok on the 23th August 1828. The missionaries of other missions that followed them worked mostly in Bangkok. The American Baptist Mission press was established there in 1836. In 1861 the Presbyterians also set up their press in Bangkok.

2. The Expansion period (1861 to 1919): By 1860 the 'Pioneer period' closed as the missionaries started working from 1861 outside Bangkok at Petchaburi, Chiangmain and Chiengrai. The King was favourable to the work of the missionaries in Bangkok and gave a piece of land for building a chapel. McFarland believed that this period would continue until the whole of Siam heard the Good News⁵.

Alex G. Smith⁶ divided Church history into 6 periods according to church growth (based on the increase or the decrease in membership)

1. Beginning of the Protestant Missions (1816-1851)
2. Period of struggle (1851-1883)
3. Period of expansion (1884-1914)
4. Period of retarded growth (1914-1940)
5. Apostacy and loyalty under persecution (1941-1945)
6. Post war recovery and growth (1946-1980)

Philip J. Hughes⁷ divided the study of the church history of northern Thailand into 3 periods on the basis of the missionary attitudes to Christianity and culture.

1. The pioneer period (1867-1915)
2. The paternal period (1916-1946)
3. Since World War II (1946-1982)

Herbert R. Swanson⁸ suggests the division of the church history of northern Thailand into 5 periods on the basis of the situation of the churches.

1. The early years (1867-1869)
2. The hard years (1870-1889)
3. Expansion (1890-1900)
4. Retrenchment (1901-1910)
5. The stagnation (1911-1920)

There is no consensus among church historians regarding periodization. The very study of Thai Church history is a new subject. There is also the problem of lack of adequate sources.

Many Protestant missionaries sent by different missions to Thailand worked independently. In 1978 the Manuscript Division (Payap University Archives) was established by Payap University. The Payap University Archives aim to collect historical records of Protestant missions in Thailand. However, the historical records of only some Protestant missions which are working under the Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT.), including groups like the American Presbyterian Mission, the United Christian Missionary Society and the Thailand Baptist Missionary Fellowship, are collected. Even then all of their records are not available as some of them have been destroyed and others have been sent to mission headquarters abroad or taken by the retired missionaries when they returned.

There are few Thai Christian church historians and none seem to have made a serious study of the periodization of the Thai Protestant church history. Despite all these limitations the following periodization can be suggested for the writing of the history of Christianity in Thailand. Thai Protestant church history may be divided into two periods as follows:

I. Missionary period (1828-1933):

This period can be sub-divided into 3 phases.

1. Pioneer Phase (1828-1860) In 1828 the first two Protestant missionaries arrived at Bangkok and started their work among the Chinese. Other missionaries who followed worked only in Bangkok. The other missions had stopped, firstly, because they did not get much success in their work and secondly, because of restrictions imposed by the Thai government.

2. Expansion Phase (1861-1919) In 1861 the American Presbyterian Mission started its work outside Bangkok and in northern Thailand. As its works grew the missionaries came to be organised into two missions—Siam Mission and Laos Mission. In the early 20th century other missions sent their workers to Thailand. The missionaries came to be regarded as those who brought modern medical work, education and modern inventions.

3. Union of Presbyterian Missions (1920-1933) In 1920 the Laos Mission was merged with the Siam Mission. There was a movement to organise all of the Protestant missions working in Thailand into one group, but it failed.

II Thai Protestant Church (1934-1984):

This period can be studied in two parts:

1. The Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT)
2. The Evangelical Fellowship of Thailand (EFT)

For the study of Church of Christ in Thailand there are 2 phases:

1. Thai Church under Presbyterian Mission (1934-1956)

In 1934 the Church of Christ in Thailand was established as a legal body by the Board of Foreign Mission, in view of the growing Thai nationalism. Administration and finance were still controlled by the missionaries. In institutions and regional churches the missionaries still functioned as powerful administrators. Thai churches continued to depend upon foreign missions for financial help.

2. Thai Church under Thai Leaders (1957-1984)

In 1957 the American Presbyterian Mission was dissolved and its members were integrated into the Thai Church. Administration and finance departments of this Church were transferred to the Church of Christ in Thailand. The Church of Christ is in the process of becoming self reliant by itself taking up the tasks of administration, raising finance and evangelisation.

The Evangelical Fellowship in Thailand works independently and the historical records available about that church are inadequate. Its history can be studied in two phases.

1. Independent Groups or Missions (1934-1969)

From 1934 to 1969 other missions which were not part of the Church of Christ in Thailand worked independently. These churches, being dependent upon mission help, were under the control of the foreign mission bodies.

2. The Evangelical Fellowship of Thailand (1970-1984)

In 1970 the Evangelical Fellowship of Thailand was established. Most other missions which are not a part of the CCT are members of this organization. They are organized into one body to satisfy legal requirements. The members of the EFT are recognized by the Thai Government. Their missionaries are permitted to stay and work for a certain period in Thailand. Its structure is different from the structure of the CCT. Each mission has some autonomy in its work. Though some Thai leaders are trained to shoulder responsibilities in the Church, the missionaries are still in control.

III. Historiography

Church history is one of the courses taught in the Seminaries of Thailand for a long time. The course content somehow lays less emphasis on the study of the Thai church history⁹. While Seminary students are taught the church history of Europe in depth, they are taught Thai church history in one lecture. They have not been taught the methodology of historical research. From 1828 to 1977 there have not been any historical papers or books written on Thai church history by Thai church historians.

But there are a few books and papers on Thai church history mostly written in English by the missionaries. Some of these works are *History of Protestant work in Thailand 1828-1958* by K.E. Wells, *Historical Sketch of Protestant Mission in Siam 1828-1928* by G.B. McFarland, *A Half Century among the Siamese and the Lao* by Daniel McGilvary and *Missionary Autobiography* by Hugh Taylor. These books were written from the missionary view point. There are works with some errors such as *History of Protestant work in Thailand 1828-1958* by K.E. Wells.¹⁰

A historian has to use such works with great care. Before 1978, Thai church historians were handicapped by a lack of historical sources. Moreover, historical records concerned with the Thai Church history were not properly preserved. Some of them were damaged or destroyed by weather, negligence and war. Some of them were scattered in many places.

The Church of Christ in Thailand has become conscious of the importance of Thai church history since 1978. The Church records are collected and sent to the Manuscript Division (Payap University Archives) at Payap University. Payap University Archives have received records from CCT's institutes, mission organizations, individuals and individual churches.

Payap University Archives not only acquire and conserve the records but also help in their utilization. The Archives have offered Thai church historians the use of the Archival resources for their study of Thai church history. It is true to say that Payap University Archives provide the best sources for Thai Protestant church history, especially the history of the Church of Christ and the history of the American Presbyterian Mission in Thailand.

In 1981 the Church of Christ in Thailand launched a project to write its own history. The history of the Church of Christ in Thailand will see the light of day in October 1984. Mr. Herbert R. Swanson wrote a few papers on Thai church history and the most recent one is about the history of the churches in the northern part of Thailand. I myself also wrote a paper about the history of Sansai church and I am at present engaged in the writing of the history of Pang Pi Mon Thum church. It could be said that the Thai church historiography began in 1978.

The material for the writing of Thai church history can be found in the following sources:

1. Letters, minutes, personal reports and annual reports of missions and missionaries.
2. Records of Church organizations and institutes such as the Church of Christ in Thailand, its schools and hospitals. These organizations and institutes were administrated by missionaries and were

gradually transferred to Thai leaders. Some of the Thai church records were in the custody of Thai leaders like Rev. Lek Taiyong, Rev. Jurine Thocktang and Dr. Prasong Chairatana.

3. Records left by non-Christians who had some relationship with the church. Writing Thai church history would mean the writing of the history of the Thai Christian community.

Oral history is another important source and has many advantages¹¹

1. Oral history can help us to understand the background of a historical event. For example, a church in Chiangmai province was called "Sri Lom Ki Ti Khun" and later its name was changed to "Pang Pi Mon Tum". There is no record of the reason for the change of name other than the oral history.¹²

2. The circumstances and the atmosphere of a historical event when it occurred as well as some historical incidents are not found in any other records except in oral history. For example, the first General Assembly of the Church of Christ in Thailand was held at Bangkok Christian College.¹³

Oral history has its own limitations as follows:

1. Accuracy and validity of information gained from oral history must be counter checked with the information from other persons and records. It may be possible that an interviewee may be an old person and his/her memory may not be accurate.

2. Information given by an interviewee is mostly subjective.

3. An interviewee may not reveal information which affects him or his family.

Thai church historians should write Thai church history which is free from the bias of the local church or missionaries or an institute. It should be objective.

Thai Church records, oral historical sources and other primary sources must be used in writing the history of the Thai Church.

The local churches, church institutes and other organizations should send their records to Payap University Archives. This would help to preserve Church records for future research.

The Church institutes and organizations should lend all possible support to Thai church historians in writing the church history.

FOOT NOTES

1. It is based on the *History of the Protestant work in Thailand 1828-1958* by K. E. Wells and *Historical Sketch of Protestant Mission in Siam 1828-1928* by G. B. McFarland.
2. In the former time, Thailand was known as "Siam"
3. Mistakenly, the missionaries called the people who live in the northern part of Thailand as "Laos"
4. Suthep Chaviwan, *1974 Christian Directory to Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, Khmer Republic and Malaysia*, Bangkok, 1974 p. 9.
5. George B. McFarland, *Historical Sketch of Protestant Mission in Siam 1828-1928*, Bangkok, 1928. p. 68.
6. Alex G. Smith, *Siamese Gold; A History of Church growth in Thailand*, Bangkok, 1982.
7. Philip J. Hughes, *Christianity and Culture: A case study in northern Thailand*, Australia, 1982.
8. Herbert R. Swanson, *Khrischak Maung Nua*, Bangkok, 1984.
9. Interviewing of Prasert Intrapan, 1984
Interviewing of Boonma Wannalai, 1984
Interviewing of Maen Pongudom, 1984
Thailand Theological Seminary's Curriculums from 1970-1978.
10. Thai version page 241 "The Church of Christ in Thailand became a member of WCC. in 1958..." the English version is different from the Thai version, it says "In 1958 the Church of Christ in Thailand, a member of the World Council of Churches, continued to participate in ecumenical councils." CCT became a member of WCC in 1948. In the English version on page 96-97 Wells says Lampun was established in 1889 (about) but the correct year for Lampun was 1891.
11. My three year's experience in the use of Oral history for the study of Thai church, especially, for the churches which are under CCT shows that Oral history is an important source for writing Church history.
12. Interview of Inlaol Yaintorn, 1979. Payap University Archives.
13. Interview of Boonme Rungrungwong, 1979. Payap University Archives.

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TOWARDS CHURCH HISTORY IN MALAYSIA

John Roxborough

Introduction

Malaysia is a multi-cultural, multi-lingual and multi-religious society whose economy, now increasingly diversified, has traditionally been dependent on tin and rubber. It comprises West or Peninsular Malaysia and the Eastern Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak. The country shares a background of British colonial administration some of the legacy of which is still reflected in the economic base, social institutions and secondary language. Steady progress is being made with the wider use of Bahasa Malaysia as the national language. Government is by parliamentary democracy with a constitutional monarchy in which the "Yang Di Pertuan Agong" is elected from among Sultans every five years. It is a secular state in which the official religion is Islam and where other religions enjoy considerable freedom. Christians are represented through their own denominations, the Council of Churches of Malaysia, the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship and the National Christian Assembly of Malaysia formed by the two ecumenical bodies and the Roman Catholic Church.

Population

Malaysia had a total population of 13.7 million in 1980 in the whole of Malaysia, including Sabah, Sarwak and Peninsular Malaysia.¹

Church History

A number of factors combine to make the consideration of Malaysian Church History important at this time. Apart from some short survey articles (1) no comprehensive history of the churches has been written. There is an urgent need for some means by which Malaysian Christians can have access to the story of their own past to satisfy their sense of identity and guide them in shaping the mission of the Church in the future. This has relevance also as a means of providing an interpretative framework for further research and a stimulus to the preservation of archival records and the recording of oral history.