

At The Headwaters

**The Beginning of Christianity
in Siam's Northern Dependencies, 1867-1887**

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Abbreviations

BFM Board of Foreign Missions, Presbyterian Church U.S.A.

FM *Foreign Missionary*

NCP *North Carolina Presbyterian*

WWW *Women's Work for Women*

Foreword

At some point around 2000, I began working on a history of Christianity in northern Siam, which was intended to replace the incomplete, inadequate book I had published on the subject in 1984—*Khrischak Muang Nua* [*The Church in the North*]. It soon became clear that I would have enough material for two volumes, the first volume running from 1867 to roughly 1890 and the second from there to 1921. For that entire period, 1867 to 1921 and beyond, there were only two Protestant denominations in the North, Presbyterian and Baptist, of which the Presbyterian was far and away the more significant. The Baptists had no missionaries in the North and only a handful of Karen tribal churches. The Presbyterians, meanwhile, “occupied” every one of the five Northern States and developed a relatively imposing infrastructure of churches, schools, hospitals, a press, and other work.

At the time, I was the head of the Office of History of the Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT), and I had to squeeze my research and writing for this project in between other duties and research projects. That being said, I did make fairly steady progress and by late 2004 had completed about 75% to 80% of the text for the first volume. And, then, my life took a serious turn, which ended up with my returning to the United States to resume my “other calling” of pastoral ministry. When I finally retired in 2016 and returned to Thailand in 2017, I considered starting in on the two volumes again, but by that time I had lost many of the threads of the research, some of my computer files had become corrupted and useless, and I had already taken up another research interest (Orientalism). For the next nearly three years (2017-2019), I continued to ignore this text, but now I have decided to get the completed part of the it into shape believing that it will be of value to the community of researchers who will come across it on this website (herbSwanson.com).

The story contained here is a fascinating one. It is as much political and social as it is religious. It focuses on a crucial moment in northern Thai history and delves into the actions, the thinking, and the motivations of key historical figures in that moment. On a personal note, I remain thankful for the opportunity the CCT afforded me to do this kind of research, for the role of my colleagues in the Office of History as sounding boards and, at times, research assistants, and I am thankful for the good folks of the Suwan Duang Rit Church, Ban Dok Daeng (Amphur Doi Saket, Chiang Mai Province), for allowing my family and I to be part of a living northern Thai Christian community. Above all else, I remain profoundly thankful for my dear wife, Warunee (Nee), who has walked with me on the journey now for over four decades.

I trust that you, dear reader, will find the story herein as fascinating and as important as I have. Enjoy!

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Introduction

The very idea that American Protestant missionaries could change the religious beliefs of a people who lived literally at the ends of their Earth in the middle-late nineteenth century is preposterous on the face of it. Religion¹ is by its very nature both powerful and conservative. It so fundamentally shapes the thinking of societies that when some doubt it or even reject it, the deeper contours of its influence linger on. The popular Buddhism-animism of the nineteenth-century northern Thai² was no less powerful, no less deeply imbedded into their lifeways than that of other peoples. It blended the tenets of classical Buddhism with spirit worship into a worldview and moral system that made perfectly good sense to the people of the North and had not been challenged in living memory. Why then did a few Presbyterian missionaries from places like North Carolina and Pennsylvania think that they could change all of that? No less astonishing was the equally firm conviction held by a still smaller number of American Baptist missionaries that they, working from Burma, could somehow change the long-held system of beliefs and behavior of the Karen tribal peoples living in the North.

The historical fact is that those Presbyterian and Baptist missionaries *did* believe that the peoples living in Siam's northern dependencies could, should, and would become followers of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ. They were convinced that it was God's will that they do so. And while the "will of God" is in and of itself not something open to historical inquiry, the belief historical actors had in God's will is open to such inspection. That belief, that faith indeed has its own contingent power that can influence the very course of history, which is exactly what it did in the North.

This study tells the story of a time when the power of the American Protestant faith in God and the power of northern Thai and of Karen trust in the faiths of their parents' parents first collided. This story takes place in the two decades from 1867 to 1887, and while it is certainly a religious story, it is much more than that. Without claiming that the American missionaries, primarily the Presbyterians, caused the westernization of Siam's northern dependencies, they were there in the beginning of that momentous social change

¹ I use the term "religion" here with some trepidation. Most definitions of it inevitably tie it to, among other things, beliefs and doctrines about a supreme being, assumed to have a personal nature. In our modern world, religion is also considered to be one part of society—and in many parts of the world no longer the most important part. It is debatable whether or not the complex of Buddhist and long-held sets of animistic rituals, beliefs, and practices that suffused northern Thai life in the nineteenth century was a "religion" in this Western sense of the notion. The Presbyterians, of course, did see Buddhism-animism as a religion, a false one at that. I seriously doubt that the people of the North did so until after the missionaries arrived, introduced Christianity as a competing "religion," and thus more-or-less required the northern Thai to think of their Buddhism as also a religion. I still use the term "religion" here but with misgivings and avoid it when I can.

² The people of today's northern Thailand are still a distinct ethnic Thai group known historically by several different designations including Thai Yuan and Siamese Shan. They call themselves, *khon muang*, a term difficult to translate exactly but which underscores that they are the people (*khon*) who reside in civilized, organized communities (*muang*) in distinction to hill people who are primitive and live in forests (*khon pa*). Here we will use the term "northern Thai" as being most readily understood today.

in northern Thai life. They played a significant role in the introduction of Western thinking, medicine, education, printing, and other Western ways into the North.

The story of the founding of northern Thai and Karen Christianity in the northern dependencies is, therefore, not “just” about religion as some isolated phenomenon, such as we treat it in the secularizing West today. The secular-sacred divide did not exist in nineteenth-century northern Thai thinking. Trust in the institutions of the Dhamma and an equally profound belief in the reality of spiritual presences (animism) was seamlessly enmeshed in life to the extent that life *was* dharmic and animistic. The American missionaries, on the other hand, would have acknowledged that the institutions of religion should not play an official role in politics. As Americans, they honored the institutional separation of church and state, but as convicted followers of Jesus they believed that faith in him should suffuse the life of the whole nation including its political institutions. That may sound like a fine distinction, but if so it is one that caused a good deal of confusion and tension in the first years of the missionary presence in the North—and led to bloodshed. Two men, at least, died and many others suffered social and political ostracization because of it.

The story of Christianity in Siam's five northern dependencies began in April 1867 when the Rev. Daniel and Mrs. Sophia McGilvary and their two children, Catherine (aged 5) and Evander (aged 2) took up residence in the city of Chiang Mai, located in the semi-independent state of the same name. They went to Chiang Mai as representatives of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA) to establish the Laos Mission. The Laos Mission ceased to exist officially in 1921, fifty-four years' later. During those five-plus decades, the Northern States underwent massive political, economic, and social change. In 1867 the five so-called "principalities" of the North—Chiang Mai, Lampang, Lamphun, Nan, and Phrae—were semi-autonomous “dependencies” of Siam, and Bangkok's authority in the North was largely symbolic and nominal. By 1921, Siam had successfully incorporated them into the Siamese nation-state; they had become a region properly known as "northern Siam," an appellation inappropriate fifty years' earlier. The Laos Mission itself, at the insistence of the Siamese government, changed its name in 1913 to the "North Siam Mission."

Over the course of its history, thus, the Laos Mission worked in two quite different "places," the first being a set of semi-independent states loosely associated with Siam and the second being Siam itself. The transformation of the Northern States into a fully integrated region of Siam took place only gradually, but by the late 1880s the five northern states were well on the way to becoming a part of Siam. The “Laos” Mission was already actually working in Siam, which was largely a much more socially and politically stable place in which to carry out their mission.

Our story here thus ends in the mid-1880s when the Laos Mission still worked in a place that was more than merely a region of a larger nation. It is that “preposterous” story of a relatively small number of American missionaries who sought to turn the people of the North into followers of Jesus and, in the process, played a significant historical role in the early stages of their modernization.

CHAPTER ONE **A Single Taper**

A Day in April

Heat. The story of the origins of northern Thai Christianity began in the hottest days of the year in a country where "snow" is a fairy tale foreigners tell to children to amaze and puzzle them. It began on a late Saturday afternoon in late March or early April 1867**, on a dense, green bank of the Mae Ping River under a huge banyan tree. An American Presbyterian missionary couple, the Rev. Daniel and Sophia McGilvary—and their children Catherine, aged five, and Evander, two—debarked from their "Lao river boats" after a leisurely trip of three months on the river. Their destination was Chiang Mai, the largest city of Siam's northern dependencies, which lay just a few miles further upriver. Under normal circumstances, the McGilvays could have reached the city easily the next morning, but they were of a generation of pious evangelical American Christians who kept the Sabbath holy by, among other things, refraining from travel on Sundays. They, instead, spent a quiet day in worship, prayer, and anticipation of the immediate future.³ It was a typically human moment, one of high ideals and great dreams clothed in sweat and punctuated by the hum of insects.

One might think of what was about to happen between the McGilvary Family and the people of Chiang Mai as the beginning of a dialogue, one that would eventually embrace dozens of missionaries and much of the North, rural as well as urban. Chiang Mai, the grand dame of the region, was a city that had known both bright glory and deep suffering. The McGilvays brought with them the traditions, values, and beliefs of their own American, evangelical Protestant culture. At times, of course, the relationship that grew out of the encounter between the Asian Northern States and Western Protestant missionaries was anything but dialogical. It was more like a shouting match. On the other hand, each partner in this dialogue learned from the other, had to accommodate themselves to the other, and changed the other. Each also had something the other wanted. On the missionary side, the McGilvays viewed the North as a vast reservoir of "heathens" in desperate need of the Christian message. They came with one purpose, the introduction of Christianity into the North. Dr. Samuel R. House, a Presbyterian missionary in Bangkok, put the matter best. In 1854, after he visited Korat, House wrote to the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions in New York City that "Laos" (by which he meant northern as well as northeastern Siam) was open to missionary work and declared, "...it will be a reproach on the enterprise of the Christian Church if she leaves the moral darkness of the region...much longer uncheered by a single taper of divine

** Many years later, McGilvary remembered that Saturday as being 1 April 1867, but he had his days wrong: 1 April 1867 was not a Saturday. It was a Monday. If we grant that he correctly remembered that they arrived right around April 1st, it is possible that the McGilvays camped outside of the city on Saturday evening, 30 March 1867, rested on Sunday the 31st, and landed in the city the next day, that is on April 1st. One has to wonder, however, if McGilvary was "off" by only two days or if his recollection was even faultier than that. In this narrative, I give him the benefit of the doubt.

³Daniel McGilvary, *Half Century Among the Siamese and the Lao* (New York: Revell, 1912), 76.

truth."⁴ The McGilvays and those who joined them in the first decade of the Laos Mission went to Chiang Mai to light that "single taper." They hoped, of course, that it would soon become a blazing inferno of religious change. For the Northern States' part, the missionaries brought with them "modern" ideas, practices, methods, and technologies that both princes and commoners came to value. They wanted missionary medicine and, eventually, some of them wanted their children to receive a missionary education. And if the vast majority of northern Thais showed little interest in Christianity, it is still clear that for some it was a sought after alternative to inherited religious practices.

This was a dialogue, then, that involved complex historical forces. The nineteenth century Protestant missionary movement rode the crest of nearly two thousand years of Christian history. That history lived in the McGilvays and profoundly influenced the course of the Christian movement in northern Thailand throughout the period under study. Chiang Mai in April 1867 was equally the product of a long history that had an even greater impact upon the emergence of northern Thai Christianity. The looming presence of Siam with its geopolitical pressures, aspirations, and policies provided an important element of the context in which the northern Thai-missionary dialogue took place. Just over the horizon, British India was beginning to push and prod at its eastern border with the Northern States, a border only recently established after the Second Anglo-Burmese War (1852-1853). The northern Thai convert community soon took its place in this complex process as both a product of and a partner in a multi-polar dialogue between West and East.

None of this was clear on that hot Sabbath day on the Mae Ping. It lay in the future. What was obvious then was only what had been. What was to be was nothing more than visions, hopes, and policies to be pursued.

Bangkok Prelude

The first Protestant missionaries to Siam arrived in Bangkok in 1828. They soon learned that Siam was a hard place to plant churches. Catholic work, which began in 1567, had little to show for its efforts⁵, and at first the Protestants fared no better. During the 1830s, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) and the American Baptist Foreign Missionary Union (ABFMU) established small missions in Bangkok. By 1849 the ABCFM left a nearly hopeless situation in Siam to concentrate on work in China. The Baptists struggled on until the end of the century. The American Missionary Association (AMA), a spin-off from the ABCFM mission under the leadership of Dr. Dan Beach Bradley, maintained a small, poorly financed presence until the 1870s. That left the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA).

⁴House to Lowrie, 6 October 1854, v. 2, BFM.

⁵For the history of early Catholic missions, see, Surachai Chumsirphan, "The Great Role of Jean-Louise Vey, Apostolic Vicar of Siam (1875-1909), in the Church History of Thailand During the Reformation Period of King Rama V, The Great (1868-1910), " (Ph.D. diss., Pontificae Universitatis Gregorianae, 1990), 69-96. See also *A Dictionary of Asian Christianity*, ed. Scott W. Sunquist (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), s.v. "Thailand, Roman Catholic Church."

The first Presbyterian couple, the Buells, arrived in Bangkok in 1840, but by 1844 they had to leave for reasons of health. After a brief hiatus and some hesitation, the PCUSA's Board of Foreign Missions sent three more missionaries, who arrived in 1847. They labored under trying circumstances with limited resources in a climate that was wearing and sometimes deadly. The Siamese government treated them with suspicion, and the people of Bangkok showed no interest in conversion. At one point, the Presbyterian mission gave serious thought to shutting down its operation, and the only thing that ultimately prevented it from withdrawing was the accession of King Mongkut (Rama IV) to the throne in 1851. In a departure from the recent past, the new king pursued an "open door" policy with the West, which among other things encouraged the presence and work of Christian missionaries. Mongkut wanted the medical, educational, and other modernizing expertise they offered.

All of this early Protestant work was located in Bangkok, but from the very first various individual missionaries dreamed of opening a mission on Siam's northern frontier. Carl Friedrich Gutzlaff, one of the first two missionaries to arrive in Bangkok in 1828, established contact with camps of war captives from Wiang Chun (Vientiane) and even translated portions of the Bible and other religious tracts into their language. He also started but did not complete a Lao-English dictionary.⁶ The Buells themselves had laid plans to start a new mission upriver from Bangkok, but political conditions in the early 1840s prevented them from doing so. Over a decade later, in 1854, Dr. House toured the Korat area of the Northeast and returned to Bangkok with the urge to open missionary work in the "unreached" regions to the north and northeast of Bangkok.⁷

It was Dr. Dan Beach Bradley, Siam's leading nineteenth-century Protestant missionary, who first attempted to turn these visions of a northern mission into a reality. The northern princes (*chao*), on their triennial trips to Bangkok to reaffirm their allegiance to the King of Siam, lodged at Wat Cheng, a temple on the river not far from Bradley's home. He became acquainted with them and spent some time discussing religion with them. In 1859, when the Prince (*chao luang* or *chao muang*) of Chiang Mai, Chao Kawilorot, visited Bangkok he attended an English-language Christian service Bradley conducted, and Bradley found the Prince very agreeable and his children "really beautiful." After the service and again the next day, Bradley took the opportunity to explain something of Christianity to Chao Kawilorot.⁸ He went so far as to prepare a printed tract in northern Thai.

Bradley's hope for a northern mission also led him to begin work with groups of "Laos" war captives in Phet Buri. He and the Presbyterians who later worked with these war captives made no distinction between the Phet Buri "Laos" and the Chiang Mai "Laos." An 1865 letter from McGilvary states that his work with the Laos in Phet Buri made him excited about working with them in their own country. He clearly means Chiang Mai.

⁶Breazeale, "English Missionaries," 220.

⁷William P. Buell to Lowrie, 10 September 1840 and 5 December 1840, v. 1, BFM.; and House to Lowrie, 6 October 1854, v. 2, BFM.

⁸Journal of Dan Beach Bradley, 20 October 1859; and 21 October 1859. See also 4 December 1859 when Bradley again preached to the "company of Cheang Mai Laos."

He seems to have assumed that the war captives were northern Thai. In fact, they were from modern-day Laos and captives from the Siamese war with Wiang Chan who were resettled in Phet Buri. Bradley, in any event, visited Phet Buri three times during 1859 and conducted evangelism among the Laotian people there on at least two of those three trips.⁹

His visits to Phet Buri so whetted his appetite for the North that he proposed to his sending board, the American Missionary Association, that they fund the establishment of a "Laos Mission." The A.M.A. was sympathetic, but it did not have the financial resources to undertake such a project and turned down his request.¹⁰

Failing to obtain for himself the financial support he needed to start a northern mission, Bradley turned to his daughter, Sophia, and her fiance, the Rev. Daniel McGilvary, a Presbyterian missionary who had arrived in Bangkok in 1858. He shared his vision with them, and McGilvary quickly took that vision over as his own. Although Sophia must have already been acquainted with her father's northern visitors, McGilvary met them for the first time at his and Sophia's wedding on 6 December 1860. Chao Kawilorot and his party had arrived at Wat Cheng just before hand, and McGilvary wrote, "The day after our marriage, in response to a present of some wedding cake, the Prince himself, with his two daughters and a large train of attendants, called on us in our new home."¹¹ In subsequent visits that December, McGilvary and Kawilorot discussed a possible mission station in Chiang Mai. The Prince seemed to approve of the venture. More immediately, these encounters led McGilvary to share in his father-in-law's interest in the Laotian war captives of Phet Buri.¹²

No others were so intimately connected with the history of northern Thai Protestantism as were Daniel and Sophia McGilvary. Of the two, Sophia was far more the veteran in terms of Siam, having been born in Bangkok on 8 October 1839, the daughter of Dr. Dan Beach and Emelie Royce Bradley. She lived most of her life in Bangkok, except for a period of some two years after her mother died in 1845 when she traveled with her family to the United States. On that trip, her father married Sarah Blachly in November 1848, and it was Sarah who subsequently saw to Sophia's upbringing and education. Sarah Bradley had the distinction of being among the first women in the United States to graduate with a bachelor's degree, which she received from Oberlin College in 1845. In Siam, she gained a reputation for being a competent, clever woman of "unusual intellectual attainment." She provided both her step-children and her own children with a classical education that included Hebrew as well as Greek and Latin.¹³ Which is to say

⁹Journal of Dan Beach Bradley, 27 November 1859; 29 November 1859; and 30 November 1859; and Bradley to Whipple, 6 December 1859, Records of the American Missionary Association. See McGilvary to Lowrie, 4 February 1865, v. 3, BFM.

¹⁰Whipple to Bradley, 2 July 1861, Bradley Papers; and McGilvary to Executive Committee, 10 February 1864, v. 2, BFM.

¹¹McGilvary, *Half Century*, 57.

¹²McGilvary, *Half Century*, 57.

¹³Bertha Blount McFarland, *McFarland of Siam* (New York: Vantage Press, 1958), 28, 290. See also Donald C. Lord, *Mo Bradley and Thailand* (Grand Rapids, Michigan:

that when Sophia moved to Chiang Mai in 1867, she took with her an unusually high level of educational training for an American woman of her generation, which as we will see in subsequent chapters she put to use in the introduction of Western learning as well as central Thai literacy to northern Thai women and girls.

Daniel McGilvary was born in North Carolina on 16 May 1828 to an immigrant family of devout Presbyterian Scottish Highlanders. In his autobiography, McGilvary tells how he was raised in a strict home by a strong, rigid father. His mother died when he was an infant, and after his father died when he was 13 McGilvary was apprenticed to a tailor. He graduated from the well-known Bingham School in 1849 and became a teacher in Pittsboro, North Carolina, where he served the local Presbyterian Church as an elder, meaning that he was an elected member of the church's governing board. In 1853 he entered Princeton Theological Seminary and studied under the leading Presbyterian theologian of his day, Dr. Charles Hodge. During his time at Princeton, Dr. House from the Siam Mission addressed the student body concerning the desperate need for missionaries in Siam, and McGilvary and a classmate, Jonathan Wilson, both decided independently of each other to heed this call for help. McGilvary graduated in 1856 and then worked briefly as pastor of two rural North Carolina churches. It was there he reaffirmed his commitment to become a missionary.¹⁴

McGilvary's trips to Phet Buri, beginning in 1859, brought him into contact with Phraphatphisaisawat (Thuam Bunnag), the recently appointed *pra palat*, or "lieutenant governor" as McGilvary styled him, of Phet Buri. As it happened, Phraphatphisaisawat had studied under Emilie Royce Bradley, Sophia McGilvary's mother, as a boy: and he and McGilvary quickly became good friends. He soon issued an invitation to the McGilvarys to come and work in Phet Buri and was even willing to furnish them with a house, financial assistance, and to help McGilvary open a school if McGilvary would teach his son English. This friendship would serve the McGilvarys and the Laos Mission well in later years when Phraphatphisaisawat became, as Chaophraya Phanuwong Mahakosathibodi, the Phrakhleng, a central government office responsible for both financial and foreign affairs. He assumed that office in May 1869 and remained in it until 1885. He not only established for himself an enviable reputation and wide respect for fair, competent administration, but he also provided the McGilvarys with a highly influential friend in the Bangkok government.¹⁵ The Siam Mission, after some delay,

William B. Eerdmans, 1969), 130-131. For details of Sarah Blachly Bradley's life and her relationship with Sophia Bradley McGilvary, see Herb Swanson, "Sophia Bradley McGilvary & Sarah Blachly Bradley: Notes Towards a Family Biography," *HeRB: HeRB's Research Bulletin*, 8 (December 2003) at herbSwanson.com.

¹⁴McGilvary, *Half Century*, 19-42. For an excellent description of McGilvary's pastoral experience, see David Bebbington, *Victorian Religious Revivals: Culture and Piety in Local and Global Contexts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 131-158.

¹⁵McGilvary, *Half Century*, 19-42, 48-50; McGilvary, "Interesting Notices from Petchaburi," excerpts of a letter dated 9 Oct 1862, *Foreign Missionary* 21, 10 (March 1863): 289-90; and Phiyanat, *Bunnag Clan*, 34-37. See also David K Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History* (Bangkok: Thai Watana Panich, 1984), 120-127 concerning the role of the Bunnage family in 19th century Thai politics.

accepted this invitation in June 1861 when the McGilvays and another missionary couple, the S. G. McFarlands, moved to Phet Buri and opened the first Protestant missionary station outside of Bangkok.¹⁶

McGilvary's vision for a northern mission, however, persisted. He and the Rev. Jonathan Wilson, his Princeton classmate and companion on the trip out to Siam, took an important step towards realizing that dream when they set out in November 1863 on an exploratory trip to Chiang Mai. Passing through Lampang ("Lakawn" in the missionary records) and Lamphun, they reached Chiang Mai on 7 January 1864. From McGilvary's later correspondence, it is clear that he and Wilson gained a first hand knowledge of northern Thai government, geography, and relations between the states they had previously lacked. Chao Kawilorot was himself on yet another trip down to Bangkok and had left a nephew, Noi Pen Far, in charge. That worthy and the other leading figures of the city, particularly Chao Kawilorot's chief wife and younger daughter, made the two missionaries welcome. Chiang Mai impressed McGilvary. The people seemed to him more sincerely religious than the Siamese; their Buddhism, he thought, had more meaning and substance. He found the city itself progressive, neat and regular, and its people law-abiding. He assessed Chao Kawilorot's rule as firm but not tyrannical. Wilson and McGilvary spent only ten days in Chiang Mai, and when he returned to Phet Buri McGilvary expressed himself as well-satisfied with what he had seen. The prospect of a Laos Mission excited him more than ever.¹⁷

The official report of his trip that McGilvary sent to the Board of Foreign Missions articulated that excitement with a ringing call for a northern mission. He emphasized that the Board had an "open door" in the North and a clear responsibility to take up the proposed mission. McGilvary lamented the guilt the Board would incur if it did not meet its obligations both quickly and positively. He asserted that there was a special, providential "call" to the missionaries to occupy Chiang Mai. Now, he urged, was "God's time" and God's time was the best time for action. A whole nation, a race depended on that action.¹⁸

McGilvary's report is rich in the vocabulary of missionary thinking: open doors, responsibilities, guilt, expansion, obligations, providential calls, and a demand for immediate action. Its themes are, by extension, a compendium of the ideological and religious foundations of American evangelical Protestant missionary expansionism.¹⁹

¹⁶McGilvary, *Half Century*, 50-53.

¹⁷McGilvary, *Half Century*, 63-4; McGilvary, "Chieng Mai Trip," *NCP* 9, 42(24 October 1866): 1; McGilvary., "Chieng Mai Trip," *NCP* 9, 43 (31 October 1866): 1; McGilvary to Executive Committee, 10 February 1864, v. 2, BFM; McGilvary to Lowrie, 13 February 1864, v. 2, BFM; and, Nigel J. Brailey, "The Origins of the Siamese Forward Movement in Western Laos, 1850-92" (Ph.D. diss., University of London, 1968), 117-118.

¹⁸McGilvary to Executive Committee, 10 February 1864, v. 2, BFM; and, McGilvary to Lowrie, 13 February 1864, v. 2, BFM.

¹⁹ The term "evangelical" when applied to nineteenth-century American Protestants is notoriously difficult to define especially since the great bulk of American Protestants were evangelicals. In general, evangelical Protestants affirmed the importance of

The evangelical ideology of expansion began with a belief that only Protestant Christianity provides assurance of salvation from sin and thus Christians are responsible for leading others to salvation. American historians frequently term the idea that Christians are responsible for the eternal fate of others "benevolence" and see in it a central characteristic and source of motivation for nineteenth-century American evangelicalism. Beginning in the late eighteenth century, American evangelicals, including most especially Congregationalists and Presbyterians, created a maze of local, regional, and national "benevolence associations" that targeted various groups—such as laborers, prostitutes, Jews, Catholic immigrants, and Mormons—for particular attention. These associations conducted both evangelistic and humanitarian activities to convert these groups to Protestantism. Their ultimate goal was to transform the United States into a fully Christian nation.²⁰ The American evangelical benevolence movement was at heart a missionary movement, and those who went overseas shared the same set of concerns for lost souls. It is appropriate, thus, to view the future Laos Mission as a transplanted evangelical benevolence association whose "target group" was the northern Thai people. It eventually conducted all of the activities of an American benevolence association, including evangelism, education, translation and printing, humanitarian aid, and massive public relations campaigns. It worked, too, towards the same end. It sought both to "save the lost" and to transform Siam's northern dependencies into a "Christian nation."

The "Great Northern Benevolence Campaign," however, had to wait a few years. At first it looked as if the Siam Mission might send a team to Chiang Mai in 1864, the year that McGilvary and Wilson returned from that city. The Board in New York granted them permission to do so, and McGilvary discussed plans for the move. Events conspired to prevent it. Sophia fell ill. Other mission families left the Siam Mission shorthanded by going on furlough. The following year, 1865, proved no better as the mission also faced severe financial restrictions. The dream was not forgotten, however. McGilvary's work with the Laotian war captives in Phet Buri kept him excited at the prospect of moving to Chiang Mai, and he and Wilson even made plans for a second tour to Chiang Mai in

revivals; showed confidence in the human ability to know God and, to a degree, to participate in their own salvation; and believed that God is known primarily through a literally interpreted Bible and secondarily through human consciousness. Old School Presbyterians, such as Daniel McGilvary, promoted a more emotionally restrained form of revivalism and in a formal sense emphasized the divine role in human salvation, while agreeing—perhaps somewhat paradoxically—that humans can know God as God is. The classical statement of Old School evangelical Calvinism is Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols (New York: Charles Scribner and Company, 1872). A more popular, widely read statement is found in Charles Hodge, *The Way of Life*, ed. Mark Noll (New York: Paulist Press, 1987).

²⁰Lord, *Mo Bradley and Thailand*, 38-39. See Griffin, Clifford S. "Religious Benevolence as Social Control, 1815-1860." *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 44, 3 (1957): 423-444; and Charles I. Foster, *An Errand of Mercy: The Evangelical United Front, 1790-1837*. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1960.

February 1865, although, as it turned out, they did not go.²¹ As the months passed McGilvary and the Siam Mission continued to seek the means to plant a Chiang Mai mission. At mid-year in 1866, McGilvary notified the Board that the Siam Mission was making definite plans for at least one family, possibly two, to move to Chiang Mai latter in 1866. It looked at that point that Wilson, rather than McGilvary might head up the proposed mission. He was in the United States at that time on furlough, hoping to recruit a physician for the projected mission and, thus, take charge of the Chiang Mai mission. Wilson, however, returned without a doctor, and McGilvary saw it as his duty to "reenlist" for the North. Sophia wrote that, "the old desire has returned and taken possession of Daniel."²²

After years of false starts and waiting, a dramatic change in the prospects for work in Chiang Mai took place in August 1866. The Bangkok government had called Chao Kawilorot down from Chiang Mai to explain charges that he was planning to transfer his allegiance to the King of Burma, and it looked like he would be in Bangkok for an extended stay. McGilvary planned at some point to get Kawilorot's permission for a mission to Chiang Mai, but he saw no need to hurry. Then, suddenly, the news reached him that Kawilorot had been cleared of the charges against him and was about to return to Chiang Mai.²³ That news set McGilvary in motion. He rushed from Phet Buri to Bangkok, where he arrived on Tuesday evening, 28 August 1866, and lodged with his in-laws, the Bradleys.²⁴ They agreed that evening that the McGilvarys should go to Chiang

²¹"The New Mission among the Laos," *FM* 25, 8 (January 1867): 215-216; McGilvary to Lowrie, 10 May 1864, v. 2, BFM; Mattoon to Lowrie, 1 September 1864, v. 2, BFM; McGilvary to Lowrie, 4 February 1865, v. 3, BFM.; and McGilvary to Irving, 28 July 1866, v. 3, BFM.

²² McGilvary to Irving, 28 July 1866, v. 3, BFM. The quotation is from Sophia McGilvary to Evander McGilvary, extracts, 10 August 1866, *NCP* 10, 38 (25 Sept. 1867): 1.

²³McGilvary, "The New Mission among the Laos," excerpts of a letter, *FM* 25, 8 (Jan 1867): 215-16. See Sarasawadee, Oongsakul *History of Lan Na* (Chiang Maai: Silkworm Books, 2005), 62; and, Ratanaphorn Sethakul. "Political, Social, and Economic Changes in the Northern States of Thailand Resulting from the Chiang Mai Treaties of 1874 and 1883." (Ph.D. diss., Northern Illinois University, 1989), 157-59. Years later McGilvary explained this trip by recounting the story of "Chaw Fa Kolan." Chao Fa Kolan was a Northern Shan "prince" who had fallen into disfavor in Burma and fled across the Salween to Chiang Mai territory. The King of Burma, according to McGilvary, sent an embassy to Chao Kawilorot to ask him to recapture Kolan and send him back to Burma. This embassy brought valuable gifts along. Kawilorot agreed to help and accepted the gifts, and it was the acceptance of the gifts which brought charges of disloyalty. McGilvary to Irving, 24 March 1870, v. 3, BFM.

²⁴Journal of Dan Beach Bradley, 28 August 1866. Bradley wrote, "[McGilvary] came on the interesting business of making arrangement with the king of Cheang Mai and the Siamese government for himself and Mr. Wilson and their families to remove to Cheang Mai with the view of establishing a Presb. Mission in that city." Evidently, McGilvary planned from the beginning to establish a separate mission in Chiang Mai rather than found simply another station of the Siam Mission.

Mai, and Dr. Bradley accompanied McGilvary when he went to see Chao Kawilorot the next morning, the 29th. Kawilorot gave his consent and offered them land, timber for a house, and temporary housing while they were building a permanent house. That evening McGilvary met with a hastily called rump session of the Siam Mission and received formal permission to withdraw from Phet Buri and establish a new station in Chiang Mai. He then met with the U.S. Consul, who agreed to write a formal letter asking the permission of the Bangkok government.²⁵ This final hurdle took some time. A high government representative first visited Chao Kawilorot on Saturday, 8 September 1866, with McGilvary and others in tow, to ascertain his feelings officially, and then the government had to process the paperwork before everything was official. Eventually the Siamese government did give the McGilvarys permission to move to Chiang Mai.²⁶

In light of later events that led Chao Kawilorot, finally, to execute two Christian converts and attempt to rid himself of the missionaries, it is worth wondering why he so readily agreed in 1866 to allow the McGilvarys to move to Chiang Mai. Indeed, up to this point in 1866 he had affirmed his whole-hearted willingness several times. No clear answer is possible, but there are hints from McGilvary himself. He records that when Bradley first introduced small pox vaccination to the visiting northerners some years earlier they were quite taken with it. At the time Chao Kawilorot granted permission for the station, just described, he understood that the McGilvarys would teach religion, open schools, and care for the sick. In 1869, at a time of the crisis between Chao Kawilorot and the missionaries, he stated that they could stay on in Chiang Mai only if they would just heal the sick and not teach religion.²⁷ In all probability, Chao Kawilorot wanted the benefits of Western medicine for his people and, perhaps, Western education as well. He could not but have observed the failure of the missionaries in Bangkok to convert people to Christianity, and it is likely that he assumed they would be no more successful in Chiang Mai. Whatever his motivation, Chao Kawilorot did consent, much to his later regret.

²⁵Bradley's journal does not entirely confirm this "official" chronology taken from McGilvary's own writings. Bradley makes no mention of going to visit Chao Kawilorot on Wednesday, 29 August 1866, which he almost certainly would have done. He also recorded two visits to the American Consul, Mr. Hood, one on August 30th and the second on the 31st. On both occasions, Hood, according to Bradley, flew into a great rage over petty matters not directly related to McGilvary's request. According to Bradley, Hood refused to give assistance to McGilvary both times. *Journal of Dan Beach Bradley*, 29-31 August 1866.

²⁶*Journal of Dan Beach Bradley*, 8 September 1866. Bradley records that there was a mix up in this event. No one had informed Chao Kawilorot that an official delegation of Siamese, American, and missionary officials would call on him. It took some time to locate him, and before he was found Hood, the American Consul, left in impatience. See also McGilvary to Irving, 10 September 1866, v. 3, BFM; McGilvary, note appended to Sophia McGilvary to Evander McGilvary, extracts, 10 August 1866, *NCP* 10, 38 (25 Sept. 1867): 1; and McGilvary, *Half Century*, 67-70.

²⁷McGilvary, *Half Century*, 57, 69, 125.

McGilvary himself ascribed that consent and the whole sequence of events leading to it to the gracious providence of God.²⁸

All that was left, then, was the trip North. The McGilvarys left on 3 January 1867. Plans called for the Wilsons to leave the following dry season.²⁹ Bradley's vision for a northern mission was about to become a reality.

Into the North

Siam's northern dependencies in 1867 comprised five tributary states, most of which were separated from each other by mountains and forest and were often known as "Western" and "Eastern Laos". Western Laos included Chiang Mai, Lamphun, and Lampang. Eastern Laos included Nan and Phrae, as well as territories in what is the modern nation of Laos, territories that are beyond our concern here. Although Chiang Mai was the largest of the five principalities, the mountainous terrain of the region allowed each of the others to enjoy a large degree of independence from Chiang Mai as well as from Bangkok. The people were mostly rural peasants, called *phrai*, who cultivated rice, engaged in some trade, and enjoyed a degree of personal freedom because of the scarcity of labor.³⁰

Although something of a backwater in the 1860s, Chiang Mai and her sister states had a proud tradition that dated back five hundred years. Recorded history began in the region in the eighth century when the Mon first introduced "higher" civilization. Their capital and cultural center was Haripunjaya, the modern Lamphun. It was only subsequently that the northern Thai appeared, beginning in about the twelfth century.³¹ They belonged to the great family of Tai peoples that spread itself from Ahom in northeast India through parts of Burma and southern China to modern day Thailand, Laos, and northern Vietnam. Little is known about the history of the Tais, including the northern Thai, before the thirteenth century. They seem to have been an upland people living in small *muang*, that is city states, on the fringes of the great Southeast Asian empires of that era. They were already Theravada Buddhists who had religious links with Singhalese Buddhism. During the thirteenth century, a group of Tai states emerged including, prominently, the Kingdom of Lan Na (*lan na* meaning "a million fields") which was founded by King Mangrai beginning in 1259 when he became king of Chiang Saen. Mangrai created a large unified state through the conquest of his neighbors that culminated in the capture of the Mon capital, Haripunjaya, in 1281. In 1296 he began construction of his *chiang mai*, "New City," which became the capital of the Lan Na Kingdom.³² Later generations revered him as a great law-giver and the author of the *mangraisat*, the laws of Mangrai.

²⁸McGilvary, "The New Mission among the Laos," excerpts of a letter, *FM 25*, 8 (Jan 1867): 215-16.

²⁹N. A. McDonald to Irving, 10 September 1866, v. 3, BFM; and Wilson to Irving, 20 October 1866, v. 3, BFM.

³⁰Ratanaphorn, "Chiang Mai Treaties," 12-3; McGilvary, "The New Mission among the Laos," excerpts of a letter, *FM 25*, 8 (Jan 1867): 215-16

³¹Penth, "Lan Na Thai Past," 4-11.

³²Wyatt, *Thailand*, 31, 36-39, 44-50.

After Mangrai died in 1317, the Lan Na Kingdom experienced dizzying rounds of advance and decline. Three reigns stand out as golden eras of the Lan Na Kingdom. Under the able rule of King Kü Na (1355-85) the kingdom finally recovered from the death of Mangrai. Among his notable achievements, Kü Na established a new, scholarly sect of monks that became a leading intellectual and cultural force for over two hundred years. King Tilokaracha (1441-87) is generally considered the greatest of the Lan Na kings, in large measure because he expanded the kingdom's influence until it became a major power in the region. The reign of King Müang Kao (1495-1526) was a glorious time culturally although not militarily. In particular, Müang Kao reaffirmed the intellectual leadership of the monk order introduced by Kü Na over a century earlier. Wyatt notes that this policy "reaffirmed the dominance of a scholarly, textually oriented school of Buddhism whose informed, educated monks would long provide the society of Lan Na with vigorous intellectual leadership."³³

After Müang Kao's death in 1526, the Lan Na Kingdom rapidly declined because of its own weak rulers and because of the rising power of Burma. The Burmese successfully captured Chiang Mai in 1558, bringing Lan Na independence to a permanent end. The future Northern States entered into more than two centuries of chaos as increasingly harsh Burmese rule led to numerous revolts. Armies marched frequently. The populous suffered under misrule, heavy taxes, the depopulation of urban centers, and political and economic instability. Burmese policy promoted the separation of the kingdom into smaller, more easily managed mini-states. By the early eighteenth century, continuing massive dislocation had weakened the Lan Na cultural heritage, leaving it a shadow of its former greatness.³⁴ For much of the eighteenth century a reduced Chiang Mai state maintained a semblance of independence, although the rest of the northern Thai states remained firmly under Burmese control. Matters came to a head in the 1770s when the *chao muang* of Lampang and Chiang Mai joined forces with King Taksin of Siam to drive the Burmese out of their two states in 1776.³⁵ Northern Thai forces finally evicted the Burmese permanently from all five northern states in 1804.

With the defeat of the Burmese by the combined forces of the North and Bangkok, the five states entered a new era by becoming semi-independent tributaries (*prathetsarat*) of Siam. Chao Kawila of Lampang, emerged as the dominant leader of the North and became the *chao muang* of Chiang Mai. He and his six brothers, known collectively as the "Seven Princes," ruled Chiang Mai, Lamphun, and Lampang, and initiated a period of restoration under Kawila's leadership. Chief among their activities were raids on neighboring peoples, which they used as a means for importing captive populations into the North to re-populate their weakened, depleted states. In this new era, family and personal rather than bureaucratic relationships dominated northern Thai life. Political control was loosely structured, local leaders appear to have had a degree of autonomy and

³³Wyatt, *Thailand*, 74-81. The quotation is from p. 81.

³⁴Sarasawadi, *Lan Na History*, 39-46; and, Wyatt, *Thailand*, 118-120. For a detailed account of the Burmese occupation of the North, see Laddawan Saesieo, *200 pi phamanailanna* [200 Years: Burma in Lan Na] (Bangkok: Five Regions Study Center, 2545 [2002]).

³⁵Wyatt, *Thailand*, 123-124, 133ff.

power, and the *phrai*, common people, also enjoyed a relatively secure place in society. For the next century the clan of the Seven Princes dominated northern Thai politics, particularly in the three states of Chiang Mai, Lampang, and Lamphun, and provided the region with badly needed stability.³⁶

Nineteenth-century northern Thai society was a generally hierarchical society based on patron-client relationships. It was divided into the three large classes, *chao* (rulers), *phrai* (commoners), and slaves of various categories. These classes appear to have been somewhat loosely defined so that it could be difficult, for example, to distinguish between the lower levels of *chao* and the better-off *phrai*. Some of the *phrai* comprised a "middle-class" of educated and trained scholars, artisans, and doctors. Every *phrai*, however, owed allegiance to a one *chao* or another and owed that *chao* free labor, corvee, on a regular basis.³⁷

Although badly muddled by the chaos of the preceding centuries, then, the five Northern States were still dynamic, changing societies. They maintained extensive relations with other regions, and northern Thai traders evidently ranged far and wide across the larger region. The Northern States were also, and had been from the beginning of the Lan Na Kingdom, multi-ethnic societies encompassing several different Tai peoples as well as tribal groups, notably the Karen. It would be misleading, then, to speak of these states as being "traditional" given all of the political and social change and upheaval they had experienced in the recent and not so recent past. It is also a mistake to think that their encounter with the Presbyterian missionaries was entirely unique. Yes, the missionaries were unusually alien, but they were hardly the first foreigners many northern Thais had met.

With the assistance of their Bangkok overlords, these states were enjoying a measure of peace and cultural resurgence that reflected some part of their rich cultural heritage. But even as the McGilvary's camped on the banks of the Mae Ping in 1867, the Northern States were already experiencing the first tremors of even greater economic, political, and social changes to come. Bangkok was beginning to take a more active hand in the appointing of northern *chao luang*, even for Chiang Mai. British lumber interests, meanwhile, were moving into the North more aggressively and bringing with them important economic changes. The four McGilvays, the first permanent Western residents of Chiang Mai, themselves heralded and participated in this great change that is labeled variously as the "modernization," "Westernization," "centralization," "Siamese-ization," or even "bureaucratization" of northern Thailand.

As important, however, as is the theme of change to the history of the Northern States and to northern Thai Christianity, the persistence of an identifiable northern Thai culture throughout the period under study is equally important to our story. Some twenty years

³⁶Ratanaphorn, "Chiang Mai Treaties," 24; Sarasawadee, *Lanna History*, 53ff. and, Rujaya Abhakorn. "Changes in the Administrative System of Northern Siam, 1884 - 1933." In *Changes in Northern Thailand and the Shan States 1886-1940*. Edited by Prakai Nontawasee, 63-108 (Singapore: Southeast Asian Studies Program, 1988), 66-67.

³⁷Ratanaphorn, "Chiang Mai Treaties," 30-32.

ago, Richard Davis identified several elements of that culture. First, the northern Thai region has a common topography, that we have already described as a number of valleys surrounded by mountains. Second, northern Thai women traditionally have had more power in domestic life, courtship was more open, and virginity was less prized than among the central Thai. Third, northern Thai social relations have tended to be relatively relaxed and egalitarian, especially again in comparison to central Thailand. Davis noted, furthermore, that the northern Thai possess their own literary and religious ritual tradition. Finally, he argued that the northern Thai language, or *kham muang*, was a distinct language and not simply a dialect of central Thai.³⁸ As Brailey notes, northern Thai also had its own distinctive script and the northern and Siamese languages were not mutually intelligible. Among all the Tai peoples, Davis observes, the northern Thai are unique in that they trace ancestral descent through maternal lines. They are also unique in that newly wedded couples initially reside, for varying periods, with the wife's parents.³⁹

Religiously, the people of the Northern Thai States relied on a mixture of Theravada Buddhism, derived primarily from Sri Lanka, and older indigenous religious practices having to do with powerful local spirits, that is animism. It is also not helpful to think of the religious beliefs of the people in the North during the 1860s to the 1880s as being "traditional," in any meaningful sense of the word. Those beliefs, rather, represented a dynamic blend of older indigenous and somewhat more recent Buddhist teachings that blended a number of traditions into what was for local people a meaningful religious heritage. The situation in the Northern States and throughout Southeast Asia differed from the United States in that the states such as Chiang Mai were in no sense "secular." The mixture of Buddhism and animism provided the moral and spiritual underpinnings for the political power of the kings and ruling classes. At the same time, that mixture was the popular religion of the northern Thai people, combining as it did the formal tenets of Buddhism with the practices of what the missionaries called, "witchcraft," which included various rites and practices for the propitiation of a variety of spiritual entities.⁴⁰

Intertwined layers of change and persistence in the North, thus, confronted the McGilvary Family in April 1867 with a particularly complex political situation involving local and international forces. By the 1850s, Siam's northern dependencies showed, if anything, an increasing attitude of independence from a Siam that appeared to be at least temporarily weakened by accession of a new king in 1851, the growing dominance of Britain in

³⁸Richard Davis, *Muang Metaphysics: A Study of Northern Thai Myth and Ritual*. (Bangkok: Pandora, 1984), 26-27.

³⁹Davis, *Muang Metaphysics*, 63. The technical terms Davis uses are "matriliny" and "initial uxori-local residence." Nigel J. Brailey, "Chiengmai and the Inception of an Administrative Centralization Policy in Siam (I)." *Southeast Asian Studies* 11, 3 (December 1973): 303.

⁴⁰See Donald K. Swearer, "Buddhism in Southeast Asia." In *The Religious Tradition of Asia: Religion, History, and Culture*, Edited by Joseph M. Kitagawa. (London and New York: Routledge Curzon, 1987): 119-141. See also Donald K. Swearer, "Huypostasizing the Buddha: Buddha Image "onsecration in Northern Thailand." *History of Religions* 34, 3 (February 1995): 263-280.

Burma, and an embarrassing failure of Siamese arms to capture the city of Kengtung during three major campaigns in 1850, 1853, and 1854. They remained largely loyal to Bangkok as a matter of practical self-interest rather than any firm commitment to the Siamese nation-state. Chao Kawilorot came to power in 1856, and with his accession Chiang Mai attained a pinnacle of self-determination. He ruled the city with a firm hand, supported by a clique of close personal supporters two of whom figured in the struggles of the Presbyterian missionaries to establish a Christian presence in the North. The first was the Chao Ho Muang Kao, who would succeed Kawilorot in 1871 as Chao Inthawichaiyon, or, more simply, Chao Intanon. He would prove to be a sometime friend of the mission. The second was Chao Buntuwongse, who for more than a decade became the missionaries' chief adversary in the North.⁴¹

By the 1860s, then, Chiang Mai and most of the North was outwardly peaceful and relatively prosperous. Chao Kawilorot, however, felt increasing pressure on his status and the independence of Chiang Mai, particularly from the growing encroachment of Burmese and Shan teak foresters who were legally British subjects. There were constant tensions concerning land that Kawilorot leased to these foresters, resulting in numerous court cases against the *chao luang*. In 1860, the British consul in Bangkok had visited Chiang Mai and heard numerous complaints against Kawilorot. In 1863, King Mongkut intervened in one of the more important resulting court cases, which were heard in a Siamese court in Bangkok, to reverse a previous decision favorable to Kawilorot. Mongkut also opened certain doors for further expansion of British teak interests in the North. All of this irritated Kawilorot, who was further indisposed by charges that he was contemplating rebellion against Siam, which charges brought him to Bangkok in 1866, as we saw above.⁴²

Moving to Chiang Mai in 1867, thus, brought the McGilvarys into a new political and socio-cultural world. It had its own systems of intrigue, rituals, social ways, and cultural heritage. Within that world, they would seek to craft a new church.

The Missionaries

It's clear that the northern Thai of 1867 had a rich history and had attained a high culture that the centuries of Burmese domination and warfare disrupted but did not destroy. What is not clear is the extent to which the missionaries appreciated this history.⁴³ Their

⁴¹ Brailey, "Siamese Forward Movement," 83ff, 114-117

⁴² Brailey, "Siamese Forward Movement," 123-152.

⁴³ Lilliam Johnson Curtis, *The Laos of North Siam* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1903), 5-7, gives a brief account of "Laos" history which she views as an adjunct to Siam's history. She notes that the northern Thai told "many a wonderful tale" about the Lan Na Kingdom's history, but she treats these as fabulous and passes on to events of the 18th century. Carl Alfred Bock, *Temples and Elephants* (London: Sampson Low & Co., 1884) 28, (an account of a trip to the North in 1881-82) in a one paragraph history of the North makes no mention of Lan Na history at all. When McGilvary first arrived in Chiang Mai, the name "Lan Na" was unknown to him and he went so far as to describe it as peculiar in that it had been a kingdom without a name. See McGilvary, "For the Little

writings, at least, betray little knowledge of Lan Na history although some of them were ardent collectors of old northern Thai manuscripts. The history that clearly did matter to them was their own. They were Presbyterians at a time when one's denominational affiliation meant a great deal. Most of them grew up in the womb of local Presbyterian churches and Presbyterian educational institutions, and whatever else they learned at mother's knee they certainly learned the distinct worldview of the Presbyterian church.

Webster's helpful study of two American Presbyterian missions in nineteenth-century northern India points out that the Presbyterian missionaries who served in those missions shared a common cultural heritage rooted in their Presbyterianism. They were mostly rural Americans from the Middle Atlantic states or the Midwest. They attended Presbyterian colleges and universities and Presbyterian seminaries.⁴⁴ Webster's observations fit the missionaries of northern Thailand perfectly. According to data collected by Paul Eakin in the late 1950s from Board of Foreign Missions' records⁴⁵ 127 men and women served in northern Thailand between 1867 and 1920. Of them, 71 (55.9%) were women, 95 (74.8%) came from rural or small town backgrounds, and 75 of the 113 (66.4%) for whom data on place of birth exists were born either in the Midwest (42 individuals) or Mid-Atlantic states (33). Only 27 (21.3%) had no higher education or equivalent training. Of these 127 individuals 37 (29.1%) received theological training, and of these 37 only 8 studied at seminaries not affiliated with the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. and two of those studied at a Southern Presbyterian (Presbyterian Church U. S.) seminary. While missionaries to northern Siam attended a total of 41 undergraduate colleges and universities only 11 missionaries attended state universities while 32 attended Park College (15), Wooster College (7), Grove City College (5), or Princeton University (5), all originally Presbyterian institutions. Individual biographies of leading missionaries such as Daniel McGilvary, Jonathan Wilson, Edna Cole, William Harris, Howard Campbell, Hugh Taylor, and William C. Dodd indicate that American Presbyterian culture enveloped them from infancy to the grave.⁴⁶

The American Presbyterian culture of these missionaries was middle class and middle American. It was patriotic and emphasized education. It was also conservative and took a generally paternalistic attitude towards its own larger culture. That is to say, most Presbyterians believed that they had a mission to keep America free of destructive social forces. These Presbyterians held to a rational faith that some have described as "scholastic," meaning they thought religion had to be rationally persuasive to the human mind before the human heart could safely affirm it. American Presbyterians had a deep

Folks," *NCP New Series* 1, 5 (5 February 1868): 4; Hallett (published in 1890) makes brief mention that Lampang once formed part of the "ancient kingdom of Zimme," that is Chiang Mai. Hallett, *Thousand Miles*, 268.

⁴⁴John Crosby Brown Webster, "The Christian Community and Change in North India: a History of the Punjab and North India Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. 1834 -1914" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1971), 28-35.

⁴⁵Eakin Family Papers. At the Payap University Archives, Chiang Mai.

⁴⁶See "This Heathen People: The Cognitive Sources of American Missionary Westernizing Activities in Northern Siam, 1867-1889." M.A. thesis, University of Maryland, 1987.36ff.

faith in science, which before the 1860s they frequently termed "Baconianism", as the "handmaiden" of Christian faith. Their most important theologian of the nineteenth century, Dr. Charles C. Hodge of Princeton Seminary, affirmed that for him theology itself was a science—the careful accumulation of biblical "facts" until a rational system of true doctrine emerged. In a century when emotionally charged revivals from time to time swept the American landscape, these "Old School" Presbyterians remained emotionally restrained and suspicious of "New School" revivalists. They most certainly believed in the superiority of American Christian culture to that of Europe, excepting only Britain. They viewed the Catholic Church with deep suspicion and held it to be nearly as spiritually moribund as "heathen" religions such as Buddhism.

American Presbyterian culture rooted itself in the Scottish Enlightenment philosophy of common sense realism, which affirms the substantial, independent reality of the world of the senses and claims that there is an innate "common sense" found in all of humanity. This God-given common sense informs us of the basic truths of reality which we need in order to function in daily life. Nineteenth-century Presbyterians believed that the doctrines of the Christian religion, contained in the Bible, are among these basic truths. All peoples of all nations and ethnicities, thus, share a common religious "sense" that enables them to perceive intuitively the truth of the Christian religion. The Presbyterians considered any religious systems that failed to affirm Christian truth to be mere superstition, because they contradicted both reason and common sense. The missionaries in the Northern States, living as they did in the midst of an alien society, were in many ways even more Presbyterian than Presbyterians at home. They took it as their God-given mission to bring the Christian truth to the Northern States and spread it among the northern Thai until the whole region became Christian. They sought nothing less than a Christian North.

That is to say, the Presbyterian missionaries sought to build in the Northern States precisely what generations of American Presbyterians had long sought for their own nation, that is a Protestant Christian culture and society faithful to the Christian God. They wanted to liberate the people's common sense, which meant that they would keep the Sabbath, devote themselves to studying the Bible, spread Christianity to others, help relieve the physical and social suffering of others, and live moral lives in harmony with God. The Presbyterians also came equipped with a naturalistic, rather than supernaturalistic orientation towards reality. They rejected animism out of hand and often derided northern Thai religion for its "superstitious" qualities. They relied on science, medicine, and rational education to spread their religious message. The ideas and the consequent methods that they brought with them, in sum, had a profound impact on what they did in the North.

We can be sure that the McGilvary family, as they waited expectantly through that quiet day on the banks of the Mae Ping River before they entered the city of Chiant Mai, spent time reading the Bible and praying. It could be that they took time to talk about religion with their boatmen, since this would be their last chance to convince any of them of the truths of Christianity. Daniel McGilvary was a man who often went off by himself at important times in his life and prayed alone, and we can imagine him doing just that as his family stood on the precipice of their new life. It is likely that he rededicated himself

and his family to the mission they would take up on Monday and prayed for the successful conversion of the northern Thai people to Christianity. The next five decades would see no little drama as Daniel and Sophia McGilvary and 125 other Presbyterian missionaries strained to change the religious beliefs and cultural ways of the northern Thai.

Getting Established

The four McGilvarys had a pleasant trip upriver from Bangkok. They had travelled at a leisurely pace, primarily for the sake of the children. McGilvary later reported that they felt that they "were literally pioneers" who were leaving an old life behind them as they worked their way slowly towards Chiang Mai.⁴⁷ On their arrival, they found that Chao Kawilorot was absent on a military expedition, and they had to put up in temporary quarters in a recently built *sala* (a pavilion or shelter) located just outside Taphae Gate, the eastern gate of the city. The *sala* was only 12 feet wide by 20 feet long (3.7 m. x 6 m), and into it they had to pile their many possessions. When it became clear they would be living in it for some time they constructed a bamboo addition to give themselves more room.⁴⁸

They received a generally warm welcome from people of every social level. Their *sala* was located on a main road in and out of the city, which meant that large numbers of people passed by them all day. People often stood crowded around the *sala*, and they even came up onto the front veranda to pick up objects and to get a closer view. A couple of years later, when the mission baptized one of its first converts, McGilvary wrote that, "It called up our arrival in Chiengmai, when we were huddled together in what was then a small open sala, in the hot season, crowded with visitors till our whole nervous system was most shattered."⁴⁹ The McGilvarys tolerated these conditions as the price they had to pay to project a friendly, open appearance in order to win a hearing for their religious message, and they took every opportunity to turn their visitors' questions and interest towards discussions about the relative merits of Buddhism and Christianity.⁵⁰

In these opening days and months of the northern Thai-missionary dialogue, the contrast between the two sides was striking. The McGilvarys could hardly have been more alien to the people of Chiang Mai if they had dropped in from Mars: their physical appearance; the ways in which they ate, clothed themselves, and acted; their blunt attacks on merit-making and the "worship of idols"; and Sophia, a woman, teaching religion and reading. The McGilvarys went out of their way to accent these differences as they strove to communicate a new world view to the people. McGilvary described how he often

⁴⁷McGilvary, "For the Little Folks," *NCP* New Series 1, 6 (12 Feb. 1868): 4; and McGilvary to Irving, 19 April 1867, v. 3, BFM.

⁴⁸McGilvary, *Half Century*, 77.

⁴⁹McGilvary, "For the Little Folks," dated July 1869, *NCP* New Series 3, 107 (19 January 1870): 4.

⁵⁰McGilvary, *Half Century*, 78-79.

employed a globe they had brought along to teach people the rudiments of Western geography and astronomy. Sophia used a small pump organ to attract crowds, and she was invariably successful as people found the sounds it produced fascinating. People asked them endless questions about their former life in America—the customs and manners of people there and its distance from Chiang Mai.⁵¹

The intensity of northern Thai curiosity diminished over time as the outside world increasingly penetrated the North, but it never entirely ceased even in later years. Mary Campbell reported not long after her arrival twelve years later, in April 1879, that the McGilvary house had callers every day, sometimes as many as 20 at a time.⁵² Many northern Thai, indeed, first encountered the West in the person of the missionary. The manner of that encounter points to what may have been the Laos Mission's most important role in northern Thai social change. It introduced new ideas and a radically different world view while at the same time openly attacking the traditional northern Thai world view of its audiences. A number of the missionaries spoke northern Thai proficiently and could communicate their alternative values and beliefs directly. Moreover, they physically embodied a different culture, and they acted out their beliefs. Thus, as a key example, Sophia McGilvary's role as a religious teacher proclaimed a radically different relationship of women to religion than that known in the North. She was literate and taught reading to others, which only enhanced the alienness of her function as a religious teacher.

The processes of northern Thai modernization and centralization that began about the time the McGilvarys arrived in Chiang Mai encompassed something more than just political and economic change. They involved changes in world view as well. The precise nature and extent of the missionary role as "cognitive modernizers" remains unclear, but it included a number of elements. First, they successfully established a competitive alternative religion and, thereby, initiated the process of northern Thai secularization by introducing the possibility of religious choice. They, at the same time, engaged in Christian evangelism, the Northern States' first mass media, multi-media public advertising campaign. Second, they were the first to introduce Western science, technology, and learning into the North. Third, they created a set of institutions—schools, clinics, hospitals, and a printing press—that mediated Western ways and ideas to thousands and tens of thousands of northern Thai. Fourth, they founded northern Thai Christian communities that experienced secularization and modernization more immediately, intimately, and earlier than did most other northern Thais. Those converts who lived and worked in missionary homes or who boarded and studied in their schools, in particular, experienced first hand new attitudes about time, work, personal grooming, health, dress, and manners. Fifth, the Laos Mission had special impact on the lives of northern Thai women. It introduced women's education into both rural and urban northern Thailand, and it employed as teachers the first northern Thai women professionals. Finally, as we shall see, the Laos Mission challenged certain injustices in the northern Thai social system, most notably the prejudices directed at those accused of demon possession (*phi ka*).

⁵¹McGilvary, *Half Century*, 77-80.

⁵²Campbell, undated letter, *WWW* 9, 12 (December 1879): 424-25.

One way to view the role of the Presbyterian missionaries in northern Thai social change is through the contrast between a "naturalistic" and a "supernaturalistic" world view. McGilvary and company articulated a world view that explained the world and events as natural causes and effect. They assigned natural causes to most events. Thus, for example, they did not attribute sickness and disease to supernatural causes, such as being caused by one's karma or by demon possession, but to natural ones. Although the missionaries acknowledged the lordship of their God over all of nature and all human events, they believed that divine action, as a rule, takes place through natural causes. While Christ and the early church, for example, affected miraculous healings as a means for reaching peoples' hearts, McGilvary argued that in modern times, "...the extraordinary and temporary have given place to the permanent and ordinary means which God has ordained to employ and bless for the temporal and spiritual welfare of man."⁵³ By "ordinary means," he meant the world view and technologies of his own society, which were fundamentally at odds with the supernaturalism of contemporary northern Thai cosmology. The missionaries held a much more "secular" belief system and, in a sense, one far less "religious" than northern Thai cosmology.⁵⁴

The missionaries, thus, initiated social change in the arena of ideas, beliefs, attitudes, and values. They introduced Western and Protestant perceptions of reality and of religion. Their presence, as we will see, had some political impact that was at times significant. They played a lesser role in promoting economic change. Of all of the non-governmental agents of change, however, they were premiere in the more subtle but no less significant fields of cognitive, values, and religious change. As the vast forces of social change gained momentum, the missionary role became less significant and it cannot be claimed that later social change took place *because* of the missionaries. Social change was coming in any event. The missionaries, rather, appeared in the earliest stages of northern Thai modernization and Westernization as carriers of the new world view. They foreshadowed the future and played an important early role in bringing it to pass.

Fast forwarding for a moment, events between December 1868 and June 1869 provide a particularly striking example of the impact the McGilvarys and Wilsons (who arrived in early 1868) had on the people of Chiang Mai. At that time, Chao Kawilorot initiated three major public works projects and called men from villages throughout the state into Chiang Mai to work on them. Since all three projects were located near the missionaries' premises, both the Wilsons and McGilvarys constantly hosted curious groups of workers. For several months, every evening both homes held special services that included music, prayers, and brief homilies. The evenings usually ended with individual and group

⁵³McGilvary, "Medical Missions and Missionary Physicians—No. I," *NCP New Series* 2, 77(23 June 1869): 1. McGilvary's mentor and the guiding light of American Presbyterian theology in the middle decades of the 19th century, Dr. Charles Hodge, affirmed the importance of naturalistic sources of knowledge including human nature and the nature of the external world for knowledge. See John C. Vander Stelt, *Philosophy and Scripture: A Study in Old Princeton and Westminster Theology* (Marlton, New Jersey: Mack, 1978), 123-24.

⁵⁴See Elmer S. Miller, "The Christian Missionary: Agent of Secularization," *Missiology* 1, 1(January 1973): 99-107.

discussions that would last until 9:00 or 10:00 PM. McGilvary found their audiences unusually attentive and interested even in the face of blunt attacks on their own northern Thai religious beliefs.⁵⁵ He wrote, "Our sala has been daily at some hour crowded with visitors of all ranks; and we always receive a warm welcome when we call to their homes. I have been astonished myself to see the hold that we seem to have on the good will of the people in so short a time."⁵⁶ In events such as this, we glimpse some of the very earliest rivulets of the massive social, political, and economic changes to come to Chiang Mai and the other Northern States. Many of the good citizens of Chiang Mai got their first extended view of a new world, new ways of thinking and acting, and a new religion as they crowded around for a peek at these exotic aliens from the West. As we shall see, the missionaries had sufficient impact on those crowds to drive Chao Kawilorot into extreme counter-measures before 30 months had passed.

In the meantime, Chao Kawilorot returned from his military excursion and exchanged pleasant visits with the McGilvarys. Before his arrival, a rumor had spread among the people that anyone employed by the McGilvarys would be punished in some unknown but severe way, and their language teacher quit them in fear. Chao Kawilorot, however, showed them nothing but kindness. He took McGilvary to a site he was willing to give to them as a mission compound, and he personally secured a new language teacher for them.⁵⁷ In spite of the support they received from Chao Kawilorot, 1867 was a trying year for the McGilvary family. They found the climate both hotter and less healthy than Bangkok. The crowds continued to press in on them. They received no mail or word from the "outside world," a fact they found particularly depressing.⁵⁸

And in November 1867, they reported that Chao Kawilorot had become less helpful than before, due to the influence of a foreign adviser, a Macao Portugese "adventurer" named Fonseca. Fonseca evidently viewed the missionaries as a potential threat to his own influence and thus worked on Chao Kawilorot to get rid of them. Tensions between Catholicism and Protestantism may have also been involved. Dr. Bradley noted that, "A Portuguese interpreter for the Prince (a Roman Catholic of course) has exerted himself mightily to prejudice the Prince against the objects of the Mission and it would seem that he has exerted a very pernicious influence in that direction..."⁵⁹ It wasn't until September 1868 that the missionaries reported that Fonseca had left Chiang Mai. He had meddled in certain lawsuits against his employer involving British teak interests. The British objected to his role, and the Siamese government ordered his return to Bangkok. The missionaries did not know until later that at some point prior to his departure Fonseca had instigated correspondence between Chiang Mai and Bangkok aimed at having them removed permanently on the charge that they were the cause of a rice shortage in the North.⁶⁰

⁵⁵McGilvary, undated letter, *FM* 28, 9 (February 1870): 212-17.

⁵⁶McGilvary, excerpts from a report, *FM* 28, 2 (July 1869): 29-32.

⁵⁷McGilvary, "Laos Mission," excerpts of a letter, *FM* 26, 10 (March 1868): 234-36.

⁵⁸McGilvary, *Half Century*, 91-92; and McGilvary, *FM* 26, 10 (March 1868): 234-36.

⁵⁹Journal of Dan Beach Bradley, 29 March 1868.

⁶⁰McGilvary to Dear Brethren, 20 November 1867, v. 3, BFM; and McGilvary, *Half Century*, 102-104. Regarding Foncesca's departure, Bradley reported in his journal for

After a time the crowds diminished, but many still visited the McGilvarys. Some came out of simple curiosity, but not a few sought out McGilvary as a doctor of growing repute. Throughout his missionary career, McGilvary demonstrated considerable skills as a lay physician, and he even conducted rudimentary experiments into treatments for such diseases as goitre. The mere introduction of quinine, which even in small doses accomplished seemingly miraculous cures, gave McGilvary quite a name. In March 1868, he introduced small pox vaccination including among Karen hill tribal people living near Chiang Mai. When Dr. Charles Vrooman, the first missionary doctor in the North, arrived in 1872 he inherited a thriving practice.⁶¹ McGilvary advocated medical missions as crucial to evangelism in northern Thailand, and his pioneering medical work foreshadowed the central role missionary medicine would play among the activities of the Laos Mission.

If the first annual report of the Laos Mission is any indication, McGilvary had a clear blueprint for the future of the mission even at this early date. In addition to medical missions, he foresaw the need for two other crucial "handmaidens" of missionary evangelism, schools and a printing press. In that report, he particularly featured the need for a press and a Christian literature, which he termed "one of the most prominent means of christianizing a people." He alluded to the practical problems the mission faced, especially in acquiring fonts in the northern Thai script.⁶² Those problems, in fact, prevented the Laos Mission from fulfilling McGilvary's dream of a mission press for a quarter of a century. Even the opening of the mission's first permanent school was delayed until 1879, more than a decade later.

McGilvary's plans for the future of the mission depended upon expanding the number of missionaries in the North. That expansion began with the arrival of the Rev. Jonathan and Kate Wilson arrived on 15 February 1868. Their arrival came none too soon as Kate Wilson gave birth to their daughter Margaret just three days later, on the 18th. Therein lies another tale. Sophia McGilvary was also pregnant and near term at that time (with their daughter Cornelia, who was born on March 11th). Dr. House of the Siam Mission in Bangkok felt he should travel to Chiang Mai to deliver these two babies and started up river on 17 January 1868. On March 2nd, just three days out from the city, House's elephant attacked him, threw him against a tree, and drove a tusk deep into his abdomen, leaving a gaping wound. House felt sure he would die, but he had the presence of mind to call for his bag and sew himself up using a small mirror to view his work. The men with him then made a litter and carried him for five hours to a nearby village. There he lay for 14 days. None of the four missionaries in Chiang Mai could come out to help

29 March 1868 that by a recent letter McGilvary had written that the Siamese government had called the Foncesca to Bangkok. According to McGilvary, the only person who would be sorry to see him leave was Chao Kawilorot. See also McGilvary, "Our First Convert," *NCP* New Series 2, 85 (18 August 1869): 4. See also McGilvary, "Letter from Rev. D. McGilvary," *FM* 27, 10 (March 1869): 242.

⁶¹McGilvary, *Half Century*, 86-90; McGilvary, "Medical Missions and Missionary Physicians—No. V," *NCP* NS 2, 81 (21 July 1869): 1; and C. W. Vrooman, letter dated 6 February 1872, *FM* 31, 2 (July 1872): 51-52.

⁶²McGilvary, "Laos Mission.—Chiengmai," *FM* 26, 12 (May 1868): 279-81.

him, but they sent Nai Chune, a Siamese Christian who came north with the Wilsons, to nurse him. House reported that Nai Chune took good care of him, and he finally arrived in Chiang Mai on March 18th. Even then he was still feverish, and it was another month before he recovered sufficiently to leave his room.⁶³

In the meantime and hard on the heels of the Wilsons' arrival, the mission received its first Western visitor, the Rev. J. F. Norris. Norris was an American Baptist missionary from Burma travelling with two Karen tribal evangelists. The Baptists had a large Christian constituency among the Karen in Burma, and Norris was exploring the possibility of expanding that work into the Northern States. He had not expected to find Presbyterian missionaries in Chiang Mai, and all he wrote about them was, "I found in Zemay [Chiang Mai] two American Presbyterian Mission families. These dear brethren 'showed me much kindness.'" He did observe, however, that the Presbyterians were interested in the Karen as well as the northern Thai, and that the Baptist denomination should carefully consider what that fact meant. Norris' letter argued strongly for expanding Baptist missions into the Northern States, and he used the threat of Presbyterian competition as an added jab at those who might hesitate at such an expansion. Although Norris himself quickly returned to Moulmein, his Karen companions remained for a time to preach and travel among the Karen.⁶⁴ While this visit left no immediate imprint on the work in Chiang Mai, it represented the first contact in the region between the Baptists and the Presbyterians, and while the story of early northern Thai Christianity is largely a Presbyterian one, the Baptists were always a nearby presence. By the early 1880s, as we shall see, they established Karen churches in the North, and a decade later the Presbyterian Laos Mission and the Baptist Shan Mission entered into a long territorial dispute over work in Kengtung. Presbyterians and Baptists had long competed for members on the American frontier, and in spite of good intentions on the part of several on both sides they became competitors on the borders of the Northern States and the Shan States of Burma as well. Which is to say that the story of early Christianity in the Northern States is not quite an exclusively Presbyterian one—although nearly so.

We left Dr. House recuperating from his wound. The moment he could leave his room, he joined the two mission families in constituting the First Presbyterian Church of Chiang Mai, the first church in northern Thailand. The new church's minutes state that:

The committee appointed by the Presbytery of Siam⁶⁵ to organize a church in Chiengmai met at the house of Rev. J. Wilson on the evening of

⁶³House, "Letter from Rev. S. R. House, M.D.," *FM 27*, 5 (October 1868): 113-15.

⁶⁴J. F. Norris, letter dated 17 March 1868, ABMFS; and Hovemyr, *Karen King*, 114-115. See also Journal of Dan Beach Bradley, 5 April 1868.

⁶⁵In Presbyterian church government, "presbytery" is the "judicatory" above local churches, which oversees their work and life in the manner of a bishop. Churches can only be formed (or disbanded) with the permission of presbytery. The Siam Presbytery had been established by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church

Saturday April 18th 1868. Prayer was offered by Rev. D. McGilvary, chairman of the committee. Rev. J. Wilson was appointed secretary. Mrs. Sophia Bradley McGilvary presented a letter of dismissal from the church in Petchaburi. And as Mrs. Kate M. Wilson is known to be a member of the church in good standing and though the letter of dismissal for which she applied to the church of Bethlehem Pa. has failed to reach her, on motion She and Mrs. McGilvary were received as members of the newly constituted church, to be known as The First Presbyterian of Chiangmai. It was resolved that the government and discipline of this church be for the present committed to the ordained members of the Chiangmai Mission.⁶⁶

The church worshipped officially for the first time the next day, April 19th, at which time the sacrament of baptism was administered to the two newly born missionary infants, Margaret Wilson and Cornelia McGilvary. Dr. House, who was also a clergyman, then conducted communion, "it being the first time the sacraments of the church were ever administered in this land."⁶⁷

The founding of "First Church" marked an important advance for the missionaries. It created the institutional and organizational framework for northern Thai Christianity. In the process, the Laos Mission established Christian sacramental ritual as an alternative to northern Thai Buddhist-animist rituals and thereby institutionalized Christianity as a religion. We have to remember that the Presbyterian missionaries identified their ritual with the church; and they, in particular, could not conduct the sacraments apart from an organized congregation. The founding of this new church, thus, legitimized their evangelistic efforts, because without it, the Laos Mission had no place locally in which to enroll its converts. It would have had to put their names on the roll of one of the Siam Mission's churches in Bangkok or Phetburi, an awkward arrangement at best. The establishment of "the First Presbyterian Church of Chiangmai," in one sense, marks the formal beginning of northern Thai Christianity in spite of the fact that there were as yet no northern Thais among its members.

Throughout the period from April 1867 until mid-1869, a period of some two years, McGilvary and Wilson worried themselves over the problem of acquiring a site for the mission. The McGilvays continued to live in the *sala* near the Tha Phae Gate while the Wilsons rented a somewhat more comfortable house elsewhere. What they wanted was a permanent site owned by the mission itself. At first Chao Kawilorot offered them a piece of property between the city gate and the Ping River, but by May 1868, he changed his mind and withdrew that property from consideration. When McGilvary raised the issue later in the year, Chao Kawilorot immediately secured another piece of property for the

U.S.A. to formally oversee the churches founded in Siam. Until the founding of the Laos Mission, the Chiang Mai church was a member of this presbytery.

⁶⁶Sessional Records, 1-2.

⁶⁷Sessional Records, 4-5.

missionaries, which he presented to them as a gift.⁶⁸ They were delighted with the new site, which was located on the opposite side of the Mae Ping River about one-half mile east of the city gate. The Wilsons moved onto the property sometime before June 1869, and in a letter to the Board Wilson wrote almost poetically about the natural beauty of the site with its view of the river, the city walls, and Doi Suthep looming in the background. The property was rich in trees and other greenery. Not unnaturally, Wilson also praised the property because it was strategically placed where many walked past every day. He wrote, "Many of them enter our house voluntarily, and others we lure into our presence, and before they leave, we can tell them about the blessed Saviour."⁶⁹ Chao Kawilorot's assistance in this matter seemed, to McGilvary at least, to signal a reconciliation between the missionaries and the *chao luang*, and McGilvary remarked that he seemed gracious and kind in all of his dealings with the missionaries.⁷⁰

Conclusion

As the months marched through 1868 and into 1869, the two mission families engaged in a variety of activities. They had five young children to look after including two infants. They had to "keep house" under trying, crowded circumstances. They had continuing streams of visitors, and McGilvary gave a great deal of time to medical work. All four of the adults instructed potential converts. Besides all of this, Wilson tinkered with a small lithographic press he had brought with him, but he found he could not get it to work. He required new parts for the press itself and printing supplies unavailable even downriver in Siam.⁷¹ In the midst of all of this activity, Sophia McGilvary quietly initiated yet another of those revolutionary activities the Laos Mission from time to time conducted. This time it was women's education. The Laos Mission reported in September 1868 that every Sunday morning she was teaching Christianity to a class of women.⁷² The months between December 1868 and February 1869, we will remember, were particularly busy months because of the many hundreds of people coming into Chiang Mai to work on the several government building projects. The missionaries spent nearly all of their evenings entertaining dozens of visitors. The two families directed all of this activity to that one ultimate end, the conversion of northern Thais to Christianity, and as the new year, 1869, dawned they obtained the "first fruits" of their efforts.

⁶⁸McGilvary to the Executive Committee, 30 September, v. 3, BFM; and, McGilvary, "Letter from Rev. D. McGilvary," *FM* 27, 10 (March 1869): 242.

⁶⁹Wilson, letter dated 7 July 1869, *FM* 28, 10(March 1870): 232-33. See also McGilvary, undated letter, *FM* 28, 9 (February 1870): 212-17; and McGilvary to the Executive Committee, 30 September, v. 3, BFM. On this property the Laos Mission later built two large "bungalows" on the style of the British Raj. They were long known as the "McGilvary house" and "Wilson house." The property is now the compound for First Church, Chiang Mai

⁷⁰McGilvary, "Letter from Rev. D. McGilvary," *FM* 27, 10 (March 1869): 242.

⁷¹Wilson to Irving, 24 July 1868 and 3 October 1868, v. 3, BFM.

⁷²Laos Mission to Executive Committee, 30 September 1868, v. 3, BFM.

CHAPTER TWO

A Delightful Season Turned Sour, 1867-1869

Introduction

Although we have already seen that the story of the founding of the Laos Mission was a complex one involving various political as well as social and culture forces, it can also be said that in the beginning this story is about two strong-willed individuals, the Rev. Daniel McGilvary and Chao Kawilorot. Until his death in 1870, Chao Kawilorot was actually the more significant of the two, because only he had the authority to send the McGilvarys and Wilsons packing if he so chose. And we have already seen that Chao Kawilorot's attitudes toward the missionaries was uncertain at best, and that uncertainly cast a shadow of doubt over everything they did.⁷³

The mission coped with these conditions as best it could, but it was hampered by the fact that it had no political base of its own and had to depend on winning the support of those who were powerful. In Bangkok, it depended on the McGilvarys' old friend from Phet Buri, Chaophraya Phanuwong, as well as the assistance of the American consulate. In Chiang Mai, McGilvary, in particular, maintained close relations with many of the leading *chao* with the specific purpose of gaining their support for the mission.⁷⁴ A pro-innovation, pro-missionary party quickly emerged with Chao Kawilorot's oldest daughter, Tipkasorn, as its key figure.

The Laos Mission was also hampered, perhaps more fundamentally, by a set of theological and ideological strictures that forced it to take a more politically intrusive and confrontational approach than was otherwise necessary. The missionaries thus required their converts to make a public declaration of their faith and prohibited them from obeying their patrons if they were called upon to work on Sundays, the Christian Sabbath. Conversion to Christianity was thus seen by most of its ruling powers as being a threat to social and political stability. It was tantamount to rebellion. From the beginning, then, the missionaries were on a collision course with those ruling powers. As we will see in what follows, that collision was all but inevitable once the first of Chao Kawilorot's subjects dared to convert and then, even more daringly, refused to work for his patron on a Sunday.

⁷³ See Brailey, "Siamese Forward Movement," 83ff; and, Ratanaporn, "The Chiang Mai Treaties," 119ff, 160-161.

⁷⁴ McGilvary, *Half Century*, 144.

*The First Christian*⁷⁵

One day not long after the McGilvays arrived in Chiang Mai, probably in May 1867, a tall, handsome, thoughtful looking man named Nan Inta⁷⁶ visited them. Although a "commoner" or *phrai*, Nan Inta was an uncommon man. At that time he was about 49 years old, had a family with seven children, and had formerly been the abbot of a temple. He had a reputation for being a devoutly religious man and was well-known among the higher levels of the *chao*, his own patron being the son of Kawilorot's nephew and a high-ranking *chao* in his own right. McGilvary's letters portray him as an intelligent man with a studious, logical, active mind and a deep concern for religious and cosmological issues.

Nan Inta lived in a village some kilometers south of Chiang Mai, and he had heard from a neighbor about the foreign couple who were preaching strange doctrines that attacked merit-making and the worship of "idols". He decided that he wanted to hear about this new religion for himself, and as he had a cough anyway he went into town to get some medicine and to listen to what the foreigners had to say. He impressed the McGilvays as an honest, frank, and sincere man, and at the end of their first discussion McGilvary invited Nan Inta to come back again. After that, he stopped by frequently and also began to read manuscript copies of the few tracts that the missionaries had translated into northern Thai. McGilvary reported that Nan Inta was particularly impressed by the plausibility of the biblical account of the creation of the world but also found the Christian "plan of salvation" intriguing. McGilvary urged on him the truth of Christian Scriptures and the consequent falsity of Buddhism, and he argued that Christianity also provided a better understanding of the physical world. McGilvary reasoned that if he could prove this last point Nan Inta would accept the religious truth of Christianity as well. Nan Inta, however, could not decide for himself whether the Christian versions of creation and salvation were true or not.

Matters came to a head in August 1868. McGilvary's almanacs told him that the North would experience a solar eclipse on the 18th, and about a week prior to the event he informed Nan Inta of the coming eclipse. Nan Inta, as later reported by McGilvary, apparently felt surprised that McGilvary would dare to predict an event caused by "a huge monster devouring the sun," which could not possibly be foretold, and he agreed that a correct prediction would disprove his former beliefs about the nature of the world. He also allowed that a correctly predicted eclipse would suggest to him that he had been misled in religious as well as cosmological matters.

The almanac was correct, and McGilvary wrote the next time Nan Inta came to see him that, "...he seemed to be on a sea of uncertainty." McGilvary stated, "He had been one of the most diligent and conscientious in laying up a store of merit," and went on to note, "The probability now seemed to be that his foundation was swept away. It was not a

⁷⁵The following discussion is based on: McGilvary to Brother Sherwood, 31 December 1868, excerpts in *NCP* New Series 2, 77 (23 June 1869): 2; McGilvary, "Our First Convert," *NCP* New Series 2, 85 (18 Aug. 1869): 4; McGilvary, undated letter in *FM* 28, 3 (August 1869): 58-63; and McGilvary, *Half Century*, 96-99. See also Curtis, *Laos of North Siam*, 264-65.

⁷⁶The Northern Thai did not have family names, so his name was "Inta". "Nan" is an honorific for those who had achieved the highest+ level of ordination as a monk.

rock, but the drifting sand. Could he then repose on the one offered in the Gospel? That was the great question that he set about honestly to solve."⁷⁷

Applying that same diligence and conscientiousness to the study of Christianity, Nan Inta began to read all of the literature the missionaries could provide him, and he even learned to read Siamese so he could study the Bible and other volumes of missionary literature in central Thai. To facilitate the process, McGilvary hired Nan Inta as his northern Thai teacher, and in early November took him on an evangelistic trip to Lamphun during which time Nan Inta finally accepted the truth of the Christian religion. By his own account and apparently while he was still in Lamphun, he was walking in the rice fields one day pondering the whole question of Christianity when it suddenly became entirely plain to him. All his doubts vanished in that instant, and he exclaimed, "It's true!" (*maen ta*).

Nan Inta accepted Christianity, but that did not mean he was quite ready to announce the fact to the world. He, rather, approached McGilvary with the suggestion that he could be more valuable in bringing others to Christianity if he did not have to openly reject Buddhism. Among other things, he did not want to give up the advantages and special privileges that pertained to being a former abbot. It is difficult highly likely that Nan Inta was also worried about how Chao Kawilorot might react to this surprising turn of events.

McGilvary rejected this suggestion out of hand and later wrote "But the assurance that duty was his—the consequences God's—that he was able to take care of his own cause, decided him early in December to delay no longer."⁷⁸ The minutes for First Church, Chiang Mai record that McGilvary and Wilson examined Nan Inta on Saturday evening, 2 January 1869, at 7:30 PM at the Wilson residence. They found his examination thoroughly satisfactory and on Sunday, January 3rd, "The sacrament of baptism was administered to Nan Inta, the first known Laos convert, D. McGilvary performing the rite. After which the Lord's Supper was administered. [It was] a delightful season for which we thank God and take courage."⁷⁹ It was probably a cool, cloudless morning, and, according to the Presbyterian style, Nan Inta would have publicly declared his faith by answering a set of formal questions. He then knelt to receive the sacrament, which McGilvary would have administered by sprinkling drops of water on his head "in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." They, in all probability, sang a hymn, celebrated communion, and received the benediction.

Nan Inta, so far as we know, left no personal account of his conversion. We do not know what he himself thought, apart from McGilvary's various accounts, which emphasize the importance of Western science in convincing Nan Inta of the truth of Christianity and the consequent, necessary falsity of Buddhism. According to those accounts, he was so taken with Western science that, as he shared his new faith with others, he actually became as much of an evangelist for Newtonian physics as he did for Pauline Christianity.⁸⁰ One

⁷⁷McGilvary, undated letter in FM 28, 3 (August 1869): 59.

⁷⁸McGilvary, undated letter in FM 28, 3 (August 1869): 60.

⁷⁹Sessional Records of the First Presbyterian Church, Chiang Mai, 7-8. In the Records of the American Presbyterian Mission, Payap University Archives.

⁸⁰McGilvary, "For the Little Folks," 12 July 1869, NCP New Series 3, 106 (12 January 1870): 4.

cannot help but wonder about McGilvary's rendering of the event, which makes Nan Inta's thinking sound a bit too much like that of a rationalistic, Calvinistic Old School Presbyterian. What does seem certain is that Nan Inta risked a great deal by making a public decision for the Jesus religion. He surely understood the temper of the times as well as anyone else, and it was no small thing to tempt the wrath of Chao Kawilorot. Beyond that, he gave up his privileged status as a former abbot, which status exempted him from the demands of the *corvée* labor system. However he thought of the matter, clearly Christianity offered Nan Inta something that he did not find in his former religion and that was valuable enough to give up social status and, possibly, personal safety.

What McGilvary's account of Nan Inta's conversion also makes clear and surely can be accepted at face value, furthermore, is that Nan Inta brought considerable intellectual acumen and integrity to his decision to change religions. He engaged McGilvary in a religious and cosmological dialogue during which he made McGilvary prove his points, and even after it became clear to him that Newtonian physics provided a better explanation of physical events he continued to wrestle at length over the implications Western science had for his religious faith. We cannot, finally, discern with any clarity the motivations for Nan Inta's conversion to Christianity. McGilvary, certainly, felt an intellectual and religious affinity with Nan Inta that he shared with few other northern Thais, and we must assume that he had some insights into Nan Inta's thinking.⁸¹ We must also keep the fact of Nan Inta's conversion in an uncertain political environment before us as well. He was an unusual, brave man however we view the matter. His conversion, in any event, created an opportunity and, in a larger sense, a church. Once Nan Inta converted to Christianity, others began to consider that same choice as well.

The First Christian Community

If the fact of Nan Inta's conversion was a formative moment for the northern Thai church, it is more difficult to weight the impact of that conversion on his society. Chiang Mai was not a large city in 1868, and he was a man of some standing, known in the palace. McGilvary later claimed that Nan Inta's "...defection from Buddhism produced a profound impression among all classes. Emboldened by his example, secret believers became more open. Not the number alone, but the character of the enquirers attracted attention."⁸² Nan Inta himself was an active factor. He began to teach others with the zeal of the newly converted.⁸³ We will remember that during the last months of 1868 and the first half of 1869 hundreds of rural people came into Chiang Mai on a rotating basis to participate in several large public works projects. The McGilvarys and Wilsons were meeting with prospective converts and people with some interest in Christianity every night, and they evidently felt that there was a gathering momentum favorable to their cause. They reported that at the time Nan Inta received baptism, a *chao* who lived about five miles east of Chiang Mai named Chao Noi Cot had also expressed an interest in

⁸¹See Swanson, "Origins of the Nineteenth-Century Transformation of Cosmology in Northern Siam: The Nan Inta-McGilvary Debates on Science and Religion." *Journal of the Siam Society* 89, 1 & 2 (2001) 32-39.

⁸²McGilvary, *Half Century*, 99.

⁸³McGilvary, "For the Little Folks," dated 12 July 1869, *NCP New Series* 3, 106 (12 Jan 1870): 4.

Christianity. McGilvary had known him for sometime and in 1868 had vaccinated his children. According to McGilvary, Chao Noi Cot had little doubt about the truth of Christianity and had evidently lost interest in making merit. Indeed, the missionary message that merit making is done in vain was what originally attracted him to the new religion. McGilvary perceived clear interest in other localities, especially in the nearby city of Lampun. He hoped that the mission would soon have a piece of property and a house there. He also planned to visit Nan, a major northern Thai state to the east. Besides Chao Noi Cot, an unnamed "government officer" related in some way to the official court of Chiang Mai claimed to be taken with Christianity and a "princess," also nameless (possibly Tipkasorn, mentioned above), had shown a serious interest.⁸⁴ In addition to these worthies, McGilvary believed that two or more individuals in Nan Inta's own village as well as Wilson's language teacher were also considering conversion; and he even entertained a hope for converts in a Karen village he had visited in 1868.

Early 1869, thus, was a time of great hope for the McGilvarys and Wilsons, and it seemed to them that there was a budding interest in the Christian faith among many of the people of Chiang Mai. But one dark cloud still hovered on the horizon: no one knew how Chao Kawilorot would react. McGilvary took some comfort in the fact that during these months the *chao luang* treated the missionaries kindly and threw up no hinderances to their work, but he still felt that matters would come to a head in 1869.⁸⁵ McGilvary was more correct than he knew, and the fact is that Chao Kawilorot's brutal action to halt the spread of Christianity lends substantial credence to the missionaries' claim that a growing number of people were considering conversion.

Viewed from a missionary perspective, in sum, the times were exciting and hopeful. But there was also pain as well. In November 1868, the Wilsons' young son, Frank, died, and their daughter, Margaret, was seriously ill for some period of time after that. It looked as though she might die as well. Wilson himself was unwell.⁸⁶

Death and illness, however, did not dim the Laos Mission's prospects, which were brighter than anything ever seen by the struggling Protestant missions in Siam. From January through September 1869, six more men received baptism. On 2 May 1869 Boonma and Noi Suya were baptized, and they were followed by Saen Ya Wichai on June 27th, and Nan Chai, Noi Kanta, and Poo Sang on August 1st. McGilvary claimed that many others were giving serious consideration to conversion and watching events to see what Chao Kawilorot would do.⁸⁷ Of these six men, three deserve particular attention.

⁸⁴McGilvary, undated letter in *FM*, 28, 3 (August 1869): 62-63; and McGilvary, undated letter in *FM* 28, 4 (September 1869): 80-81.

⁸⁵McGilvary, undated letter in *FM*, 28, 3 (August 1869): 58-63; and McGilvary to Irving, 1 March 1869, v. 3, BFM.

⁸⁶McGilvary, undated letter in *FM*, 28, 3 (August 1869): 63; and Wilson to Irving, 27 January 1869, v. 3, BFM.

⁸⁷Sessional Records, 10, 12, 15; and McGilvary, "For the Little Folks," dated July 1869, *NCP* New Series 3, 109 (2 February 1870): 4.

*Noi Sunya*⁸⁸ resided near the village of Mae Po Ka, some eight miles east of Chiang Mai. There he was "an independent farmer" who had charge of a herd of Chao Kawilorot's cattle and also practised medicine. He was 47 at the time of his baptism and had nine children. He originally went to see McGilvary for a cure for goitre, a swelling of the neck glands that was quite common in Chiang Mai. McGilvary described him as having a genial disposition and an optimistic, cheerful temper, and he became a favorite of McGilvary's because he embraced the missionary message at his first encounter with it and agreed to cease all "idolatrous" practices immediately. He attended mission worship services faithfully, and by June 1869 it appeared that his whole family might also convert to Christianity.⁸⁹

McGilvary many years later honored another of the converts, *Saen Ya Wichai*, with the title, "the first Laos believer" because he was the first northern Thai to avow acceptance of Christianity. As his title *saen* indicates, he was a village headman; and although he lived about five or six days journey to the north, near Muang Pan, he was a client of the *chao luang* of Lamphun. McGilvary reckoned that Saen Ya Wichai first visited the McGilvarys the first month they lived in Chiang Mai, that is in April 1867. He apparently accepted Christianity at that time, but he was on an annual visit to Lamphun and could not remain in Chiang Mai long enough to be baptized. He too was particularly struck by the missionary injunction against "idolatry" and stated that from the first time he heard the Christian message he ceased to participate in Buddhist ritual.⁹⁰

Nan Chai was a friend and neighbor of Noi Sunya. He had been the abbot of a monastery and therefore, like Nan Inta, was exempt from corvée labor. He was something of a scholar, and Wilson employed him as a language teacher and scribe. He had come to the McGilvarys, not long after their arrival in Chiang Mai, seeking quinine; thereafter, he

⁸⁸The spelling of this convert's name presents a problem. Later generations of Thai Christians know him as Noi "Suriya," a central Thai form that sounds more pleasant and impressive to the modern ear. Missionary sources from the period, however, usually spell his name either "Soonya" or "Sunya." See McGilvary, *Half Century*, 99 (Sunya) and Sessional Records, 9 (Soonya). For a somewhat later usage see McFarland, *Historical Sketch*, 118, 120. In at least one instance, a missionary source spells his name "Noi Su Ngyah." Helen Peabody, Mary Margaretta Campbell: A Brief Record of a Youthful Life (Cincinnati: Silvius and Smith, 1881), 64. A few later Thai sources and a penciled notation in northern Thai in "Sessional Records" spell his name "Suya" which was, apparently, a not uncommon northern Thai name. See Sessional Records, 16, and Khunwiworn Rokhaphat, *Short History*, 21. Our account here follows the common missionary usage, Sunya, as being most likely correct. The term "noi" is a honorific for a person who has achieved earlier stages in the monkhood but not been fully ordained as a *nan*.

⁸⁹McGilvary, "For the Little Folks," dated July 1869, *NCP* New Series 3, 107 (19 January 1870): 4; McGilvary undated letter, *FM* 28, 9 (February 1870): 212-17; and McGilvary, *Half Century*, 99-100.

⁹⁰McGilvary, "For the Little Folks," dated July 1869, *NCP* New Series 3, 108 (26 January 1870): 4; McGilvary, "For the Little Folks," dated 1 Sept 1869, *NCP* New Series 3, 110 (9 February 1870): 4; McGilvary, *Half Century*, 100; and McGilvary, "Long Ago—the First Laos Believer," *Laos News* 5, 2 (April 1908): 46-49.

was a regular visitor, and not long after that a mission employee. He was also a rice farmer. Like Nan Inta, Nan Chai initially wanted to accept Christianity only secretly so that he could retain his social standing in his community. McGilvary and Wilson firmly pointed him in the direction of his "duty," and he eventually gave a public profession of his new faith.⁹¹

Of the remaining three men, there is less to say. *Boonma* was a young man, aged 21, who was not in good health and was living with the missionaries. *Poo Sang* was blind and had come to the missionaries seeking a cure, one they could not give. He remained as a resident in the McGilvary compound, and McGilvary described him as having a good mind and memory. He was pleasant to have around. *Poo Sang* was not northern Thai. His father was a Chinese Haw and his mother was from the Shan States of Burma.⁹² Of *Noi Kanta*, we know only his name and date of baptism.

There were others in Chiang Mai in 1869 who were in a similar situation to Nan Inta, Saen Ya Wichai, Noi Sunya, and Nan Chai—that is individuals of some social standing who were considering conversion. We have mentioned Chao Noi Cot, who found missionary attacks on merit-making intriguing. We have not yet mentioned Nan Ta. When the McGilvays arrived in Chiang Mai in 1867, Nan Ta was a monk "in the king's monastery." Chao Kawilorot himself had sponsored Nan Ta, and this fact made him Chao Kawilorot's *luk keo* (jewel son), in effect his adopted son. Nan Ta fell into the habit of visiting the McGilvays to discuss religious topics and to study a little Siamese so he could read mission tracts. So close to conversion was he, that when the persecution came in September 1869, he fled in fear for his life. He reappeared a decade later and eventually assumed Nan Inta's mantle as the most important "native" Christian leader.⁹³ Both Chao Noi Cot and Nan Ta, we should note, were of even higher social standing than men such as Nan Inta and Nan Chai.

As 1869 progressed, McGilvary and Wilson sensed that the conversion of men such as Nan Inta and Nan Chai had stirred up a great interest in Christianity, and they felt that they were on the verge of a "people's movement." Many others, they claimed at the time, informed them that the people of Chiang Mai were waiting to see Chao Kawilorot's reaction, and they assured the missionaries that if he did not move against the incipient Christian community there would be many more conversions. The audiences they addressed impressed the missionaries as attentive and thoughtful. They felt the presence of God in their work, and McGilvary at one point enthused that northern Siam was possibly the most promising Presbyterian mission field in the world. By September 1869, they had asked the Siam Presbytery for permission to establish new churches at

⁹¹McGilvary, "For the Little Folks," dated 1 Sept 1869, *NCP* New Series 3, 111 (16 February 1870): 4; and McGilvary, *Half Century*, 100-101, 114.

⁹²McGilvary, "For the Little Folks," dated July 1869, *NCP* New Series 3, 107 (19 January 1870): 4; and McGilvary, "For the Little Folks," dated 1 September 1869, *NCP* New Series 3, 110 (9 February 1870): 4.

⁹³McGilvary, *Half Century*, 225ff.

their own discretion, an act that showed they were preparing to receive many new converts.⁹⁴

It is difficult to weigh how accurately missionary optimism reflected reality. Presbyterian missionaries in Siam made a habit of writing positive, optimistic letters to the Board and the Presbyterian press at home. They, in part, had a built in faith in their mission that allowed them to put a positive "spin" on even the most troubling events. They knew, as well, that expressions of optimism generated more funding, personnel, and interest than did pessimistic ones. Missionary correspondence by-and-large gave little attention to those who simply had no interest in Christianity or actually rejected it, although McGilvary did describe one such case. During that period when hundreds were coming into Chiang Mai to work on public works, one man came very close to conversion, but then nothing more was heard from him. Nan Inta went out to investigate and reported back that the man declared that he had decided he would never worship Jesus. He would be saved or lost with his own people. McGilvary reflected that, "Some, of course, have real doubts as to the entire falsity of Buddhism—some hold back to see if the authorities will make any opposition—while others cannot storm the opposition of their own families."⁹⁵ McGilvary seems to have missed the point the failed convert made, which was that Christianity was not the religion of his own people.

When weighed in the balance, however, something did seem to be going on that cannot be simply written off to optimism or attributed to missionary propoganda alone. First, the missionaries had made a strong impression on the people of Chiang Mai. They were a visible, vocal, and intriguing presence. Second, where the conversion of one or two men of substance to Christianity might be seen as of little consequence, it is difficult to simply write off the conversion of four such individuals and the reported interest of members of the ruling class, particularly Nan Ta. Third, McGilvary and Wilson would not have petitioned the Siam Presbytery for permission to form churches at their own discretion if they had not believed there could be a need to do so. Finally and perhaps most telling of all, Chao Kawilorot evidently agreed with the missionaries that large numbers of his subjects might become Christians. The events of September 1869, which we turn to now, make no sense otherwise. Something was, indeed, happening.

Black September

Viewed as a process in cross-cultural and inter-religious communications, the first eight months of 1869 are little short of remarkable. Nineteenth-century American missionary Presbyterianism was a relatively austere and scholastic form of Protestant Christianity, and the missionaries preached a message utterly alien in many ways to the indigenous religious traditions of the North. Their converts had to give up religious practices carried out by generations of their ancestors in a conservative society that put great store in those

⁹⁴McGilvary, "For the Little Folks," dated July 1869, *NCP* New Series 3, 109 (2 February 1870): 4; McGilvary, undated letter, *FM* 28, 9 (February 1870): 212-17; and *Siam Repository* 2, 1 (1870): 124. According to Presbyterian church polity, only a presbytery has the authority to establish and exercise oversight of local churches, and each of the Presbyterian missions in Siam had to arrange for the establishment of their own presbytery, Siam Presbytery and Laos Presbytery, for this purpose.

⁹⁵McGilvary, undated letter, *FM* 28, 9 (February 1870): 215.

practices for a new, untried religion. While some of the original seven converts may have converted for partly selfish reasons, they apparently found Christianity meaningful enough to prefer it to traditional northern Thai spiritualities. However alien and unpalatable the Christian message has appeared subsequently, in the late 1860s the missionary communication of that message was persuasive and meaningful to some, quite possibly to many.

Embedded within events of 1869, however, lay a fundamental, intransigent failure in cross-cultural and inter-religious communications between the American missionaries and Chiang Mai's rulers, particularly Chao Kawilorot. The point of miscommunication was in their profoundly different perceptions of the relationship of religion to the state. McGilvary and Wilson, as evangelical Protestants and as Americans, believed that religion is a personal matter in which the individual believer responds to a divine call to faith and service. They believed that on this matter of personal choice rests the eternal fate of each individual and that there can be no "middle way" between accepting or rejecting the Christian faith. They believed that faith must be publicly declared before a Christian assembly. They believed that the state has no right to interfere in matters of religious faith while also believing that people of faith make good, patriotic citizens. They believed, finally, that no state can be just and stable apart from the Christian faith.⁹⁶ In sum, the members of the Laos Mission felt that it was both imperative and proper that northern Thai Christians publicly declare that their faith in God and to declare, in affect, that their new faith took precedence over their allegiance to the state.

Chao Kawilorot lived in a very different religious and political world, one in which all of these missionary beliefs threatened to create political chaos and social disintegration at a time when Chiang Mai faced an international situation that challenged his own power as well as the independence and integrity of his state. He believed that Buddhism and maintaining a proper relationship with the spirits comprised one of the key pillars of political stability and social well-being. He believed that communal participation in Chiang Mai's traditional rites and rituals was necessary and right. He believed that anyone who refused to participate in the religious life of the temple and ceremonial practices of the state was a threat to him and to society.⁹⁷ The state, thus, has every right to exercise control over overt religious behavior for the good of the whole. In sum, when the converts declared their faith in the Christian religion they committed treason.

Brailey suggests that Christianity, with its alien beliefs and exclusivistic faith demands, threatened Chao Kawilorot and the rest of the upper strata of *chao* at two points. First, as we have seen four of the first seven converts were devout, capable, and well-known men.

⁹⁶ See Herbert R. Swanson, "Prelude to Irony: The Princeton Theology and the Practice of American Presbyterian Missions in Siam, 1867-1880" (Ph.D. diss., Melbourne College of Divinity, 2003), 119-131. For the nineteenth-century Presbyterian understanding of the relationship of church and state, see Alexander A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology*, 433.

⁹⁷ Ratanaphorn, "Chiang Mai Treaties," 22-23; Vachara Sindhuprama, "Modern Education and Socio-Cultural Change in Northern Thailand" (Ph.D. diss., University of Hawaii, 1988), 35-36; Davis, *Muang Metaphysics*, 37; and, Walter F. Vella, *Siam Under Rama III 1824-1851* (Locust Valley, New York: J. J. Augustin, 1957), 16.

Their conversions spoke well of the new religion, and it is likely that Chao Kawilorot was doubly shaken by how unexpected all of this was. In Siam proper, after forty years there had been hardly any Christian converts at all, except among the Chinese. Second, missionary strictures against working on the Sabbath, as Brailey states, "hit directly at corvée duties owed by the peasants to their patrons and the state."⁹⁸

From April 1867 through August 1869, the Laos Mission successfully engaged the people of Chiang Mai and Lamphun in an inter-religious dialogue, which resulted in considerable interest in the Christian religion by some, perhaps many people in those two states, especially in Chiang Mai. Dialogue broke down, however, when it entered the political arena. So far as the rulers of Chiang Mai could see, missionary religion threatened their political power directly and the social and economic well-being of their society generally.

It must have been difficult for Chao Kawilorot and his party, however, to judge in 1867 and 1868 precisely how dangerous the new religion was to their own standing and their society. They had to wait on developments. Nan Inta's baptism and public confession of faith in early January 1869 was surely a key moment in their growing uneasiness; and the subsequent baptisms of further converts in May, June, and August of that same year would have measurably compounded that uneasiness.

Another important defining event also took place in January 1869. Just two weeks after he was baptized in January 1869, Nan Inta's patron, Chao Tepawong, called him to work on a Sunday. Nan Inta sent word to his patron that he would be happy either to pay for a replacement or to come on Monday and give Chao Tepawong as many days service as he needed. He regretfully could not come on a Sunday. Monday, according to McGilvary, Nan Inta did go to see Chao Tepawong, who did not seem upset but discussed Nan Inta's new views on corvée labor with him in some depth. Chao Tepawong also visited McGilvary at a later date, and they discussed the Christian understanding of the Sabbath, again at length and in detail. McGilvary enthused, "It was a noble sight to see such a stand taken the first time for God and the Sabbath."⁹⁹ McGilvary seems to have felt that Chao Tepawong's interest was a positive thing, but one wonders whether he was not gathering information partly on behalf of Chao Kawilorot. He was a senior *chao* with close contacts to both Chao Kawilorot and other known opponents of the missionaries.¹⁰⁰

In retrospect, the Laos Mission seemed to be guilty of either theological willfulness or political naiveté or both, but neither is actually the case. From their own perspective, McGilvary and Wilson understood the significance of corvée quite clearly and knew there was a risk in insisting upon Sabbath observance, but they were willing to take the risk because of the importance of the Sabbath to their evangelical faith. Leading American Presbyterian thinkers argued that God instilled in human nature a need for the Sabbath as a day of worship and rest. It was nothing less than a matter of common sense to the American missionaries that the northern Thai people needed to begin to observe the Sabbath, and they rejoiced in Nan Inta's apparently successful "stand" for that doctrine.

⁹⁸ Brailey, "Siamese Forward Movement," 158-159.

⁹⁹ McGilvary, "Our First Convert," *NCP* New Series 2, 85 (18 August 1869): 4.

¹⁰⁰ McGilvary, undated letter in *FM* 28, 4 (September 1869): 80-84; and McGilvary, undated letter, *FM* 28, 9 (February 1870): 212-17.

McGilvary exclaimed, "It was a spectacle over which angels must have stooped with interest to see the first stand that had ever been taken by a native Laos in favor of God and the Sabbath." Wilson wrote of Chao Tepawong's patient response to Nan Inta, "And here again the hand of the Lord was visible in causing the Sabbath question to pass its first test under such favorable circumstances."¹⁰¹ As they understood it, in sum, McGilvary and Wilson's insistence that the Christian converts keep the Sabbath was neither willful nor naïve. It was a matter of faith and one's eternal salvation, which transcended all other concerns.

That being said, it is not likely that Chao Tepawong actually accepted the restrictions the missionaries placed on his right to Nan Inta's labor on Sundays as readily as Wilson and McGilvary thought he did. Events, at any rate, proved that Chao Kawilorot certainly was not happy about the situation he saw evolving. Only after September 1869 did the missionaries realize how dangerous the situation actually was and how angry and surprised Chao Kawilorot was that, as McGilvary put it, "the old order seemed actually passing away under his very eyes; that his will was no longer supreme in men's minds, nor always consulted in their actions."¹⁰²

*Martyrdom.*¹⁰³ In the months prior to that September 1869, Chao Kawilorot and the other authorities in Chiang Mai behaved in a friendly manner that lulled the missionaries into thinking that, perhaps, Chao Kawilorot would tolerate a large Christian presence in his realm.¹⁰⁴ They did not put much credence in rumors that were floating about in the early days of September that the *chao luang* was about to move against the Christians. Indeed, just days before the actual event Nan Chai applied to Chao Ubonwanna, Chao Kawilorot's younger daughter, to become her client. On conversion he had had to give up his preferred position as caretaker of a temple, and as his village headman seemed disposed to persecute him he felt the need for the protection of a powerful patron, such as Chao Ubonwanna. On different occasions both Chao Ubonwanna and her elder sister, Chao Thepkraisorn, had assured the missionaries nothing would happen to the Christians. Wilson wrote, "With such an assurance from the highest princesses of the land we flattered ourselves that the king would tolerate Christianity."¹⁰⁵ The other Christians seemed as confident as the missionaries, but Nan Chai had been despondent for some months and had gone so far as to ask the missionaries to appeal to the Siamese King for a guarantee of religious toleration for Christians in the North.

¹⁰¹McGilvary "For the Little Folks," dated 12 July 1869, *NCP* New Series 3, 106 (12 January 1870): 4; and, Wilson to Irving, 27 January 1869, v. 3, BFM.

¹⁰²McGilvary, *Half Century*, 102.

¹⁰³The following is based upon McGilvary, *Half Century*, 104-117; Wilson, letter dated 3 January 1870, *FM* 28, 12 (May 1870): 281-84; Wilson to Irving, 3 January 1870, v. 3, BFM; ; Sessional Records, 16-21; McGilvary, "For the Little Folks," dated 1 November 1869, *NCP* New Series 3, 120 (20 April 1870): 4; and "Latest News From Chieng-Mai," McGilvary letter, 31 October 1869, *FM* 28, 10 (March 1870): 227-29. See also Prasit Pongudom. "A Historical Turning Point: The Execution of Christians in Chiang Mai in 1869," *CMU Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 3, 3 (June 2009): 5-21.

¹⁰⁴McGilvary, undated letter, *FM* 28, 9 (February 1870): 216-17.

¹⁰⁵Wilson, letter dated 3 January 1870, *FM* 28, 12 (May 1870): 281.

In fact, Chao Kawilorot chose September as his time to act against the missionaries and their converts. We have already outlined the underlying factors that led him to move against the Laos Mission and its converts. Proximate causes are more difficult to discern. As we have seen, the mission baptized three more converts in early August, and the longer Kawilorot delayed action the more overt interest there seemed to be in Christianity. Wilson later claimed that two other factors led the *chao luang* to act when he did. First, another of his questionable advisors, this one a "Bengalee Mussulman" who had lived in Burma for several years, told Kawilorot (just before the persecution of the Christians) that if he allowed the missionaries to remain they would soon be levying taxes on all the households of Chiang Mai just as they did in Burma. Secondly, rumor had it that the missionaries had powers of "witchcraft." At sometime about the time of the persecution, so it was said, a spirit dressed in missionary clothing and residing in a tamarind tree just outside the Wilsons' front gate began bothering passers-by.¹⁰⁶ McGilvary later speculated that the interest in Christianity of Nan Ta, who was like an adopted son to Kawilorot, may have also contributed to his decision to act. It alarmed him that someone so close to him could be considering conversion.¹⁰⁷ The missionaries also believed that Kawilorot's younger daughter, Chao Ubonwanna, played an important role in bringing events about although it is never explained why she played that role.¹⁰⁸ Just why Kawilorot chose to act when he did is uncertain. Certainly, he was under increasing pressure to do something.

Things began to unravel on Saturday, 11 September 1869. Nan Chai went into Chiang Mai that morning and received his papers from Chao Ubonwanna, guaranteeing him as her client. Sometime during the day, however, probably toward evening, he received a message from home saying that his headman had called him back. The summons greatly depressed Nan Chai, and early the next morning, Sunday the 12th, he hurried off to his home, Mae Pu Kha, without waiting for worship. He had to travel some nine miles across the flooded plain, often walking in knee-deep water, to reach home. He arrived there sometime around Noon. Later that day, he received a summons from the *nai kwan*, the official in charge of his district, through his own headman to appear at his home. Instead of going directly there, Nan Chai stopped off at Noi Sunya's home to see if he had been called and was going too. Noi Sunya refused to receive any summons as he had not been summoned through his own headman, a different one from Nan Chai's. Noi Sunya's refusal delayed matters a day, and both Christians slept in their own homes that night.

The next morning, Monday, September 13th, an armed band collected both men—Noi Sunya had now received a "proper" summons—and hauled them before the *nai kwan*. That worthy proceeded to examine them. At first he charged that both of them had failed to provide slabs of wood for the fortification of Chiang Mai that had been called for by the Chiang Mai authorities. He quickly turned from that line of attack, however, and began to question them about their new religion. Both admitted being Christians. Someone then kicked Nan Chai in face, and one of his eyes bled and swelled shut.

¹⁰⁶Wilson, letter dated 28 July 1870, *FM* 29, 7 (December 1870): 186.

¹⁰⁷McGilvary, *Half Century*, 228.

¹⁰⁸McDonald to Irving, 2 February 1870, v. 3, BFM.

Wilson went on to relate information later gathered by the missionaries from unspecified sources. He wrote,

The arms of the prisoners were tied behind their backs. Their necks were compressed between two pieces of timber (the death-yoke) tied before and behind so tightly as painfully to impede both respiration and the circulation of the blood. They were thus placed in a sitting posture near a wall, and cords were passed through the holes in their ears and tied to a beam above. In this constrained and painful position—not able to turn their heads or bow them in slumber—they remained from Monday afternoon till Tuesday morning about ten o'clock, when they were led out into the jungle and executed.¹⁰⁹

Upon her husband's seizure, Nan Chai's wife fled to the missionaries to call for their help, but she was intercepted and prevented from going to them with the warning that if she did she would share her husband's fate. She returned to sit with Nan Chai. They dared not even converse, except for a little, because of the watchful intervention of the guards. Eventually she took her leave. The evening of the 13th, the servants of both mission families suddenly left without a word of explanation. All they would say was that if Nan Chai did not turn up in a few days, the missionaries should be concerned.

According to Wilson, on Tuesday morning, September 14th, their captors led Nan Chai and Noi Sunya to a wooded area where they were executed with clubs. Missionary information revealed that Nan Chai died with a single blow to his neck, but Noi Sunya clung stubbornly to life even after repeated blows. He had to be stabbed with a spear. The execution party then hastily buried their bodies in an unmarked grave and departed the scene of execution.

Two other of the Christians, Nan Inta and Saen Ya Wichai, escaped a similar fate only through the intervention of their patrons. Chao Kawilorot had issued an order for Nan Inta's death as well, but either his patron or someone closely related to his patron warned him in advance. He quickly and quietly departed and wandered about the country for some months.¹¹⁰ Chao Kawilorot, meanwhile, had gone to Lamphun where he convinced the *chao luang* there to bring in San Ya Wichai and execute him. The prince of Lamphun did condemn San Ya Wichai to death, and he was saved only because his immediate patron, the *chao luang*'s son, argued that San Ya Wichai was only an ignorant villager who did not know any better. He should be let go, which he was. The missionaries did not learn the details of his near escape from martyrdom until 1872 when McGilvary fortuitously met him. At that time, San Ya Wichai admitted that he had remained silent during his "trial" before the Lamphun *chao luang*, thus leaving the impression he was willing to give up Christianity. The missionaries excused him this stratagem on the grounds that San Ya Wichai had had little instruction in Christianity and had had only limited relations with other Christians.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹Wilson, letter dated 3 January 1870, *FM* 28, 12 (May 1870): 283, quoted in McGilvary, *Half Century*, 114-117.

¹¹⁰Wilson to Irving, 31 August 1872, v. 4, BFM.

¹¹¹Wilson, letter dated 30 April 1872, *FM* 31, 5 (October 1872): 151-53.

The morning of September 14th, when Noi Sunya and Nan Chai died, McGilvary went to see Phraya Thepasing, the executive officer Chao Kawilorot left in charge while the *chao luang* went off on his "fishing trip" to Lamphun. Phraya Thepasing denied any knowledge of why the mission's servants should suddenly disappear or of any move against the Christians. He said, as if in passing, that the matter *might* be related to Nan Chai's failure to bring in the slabs of wood ordered by the government. Phraya Thepasing also charged that Noi Sunya was not taking proper care of the cattle belonging to Chao Kawilorot that were in his charge. This was probably an oblique reference to his taking Sundays off. McGilvary denied that either Christian had failed in their duties. McGilvary and Wilson, perceiving the possible threat hanging over the two converts, then went to see Chao Intanon, Chao Kawilorot's son-in-law, who denied any knowledge of unusual events or orders. Wilson, finally, went to see the two men's wives, but they also denied any knowledge of unusual events.

*Aftermath*¹¹²

It was some months before the two missionary families learned the full details of the events just described. For nearly two weeks after the executions, all they knew for sure was that their own servants had fled and most of the Christians had disappeared. Then, on September 26th, a Shan friend secretly told them that Noi Sunya and Nan Chai had been executed. The very next day, a Monday, McGilvary went to see Phraya Thepasing again and received confirmation of the deaths of the two converts. The two missionary families now entered a time of particular dread. Rumor had it that one of their trusted servants, on his way to Bangkok at the time of the executions, had been intercepted and also murdered. Although the rumor later proved unfounded, it caused the missionaries great anxiety as they thought their lives were also in danger.

On 29 September 1869, McGilvary dispatched a letter to Dr. Bradley, his father-in-law, giving an account of events as known to the two families at that time. This letter was carried to Bangkok by a Burmese merchant trusted by the missionaries. Although prior to this time they had not been too worried about themselves, McGilvary stated frankly that it now seemed that the missionaries might be in grave personal danger. They were hearing many alarming rumors. He wrote, in an almost melodramatic vein, that this letter might be the last their family and friends would ever hear from them. McGilvary later reported, however, that,

In the course of a week, however, we began to learn that some of the worst rumors were unfounded. But we knew that two of our native Christians had been cruelly put to death, and this had occasioned a great excitement and alarm. After a week or two we began to think there was no immediate danger of a rebellion against the Siamese Government,

¹¹²The following discussion is based on McGilvary, *Half Century*, 107ff; McGilvary to Irving, 1 November 1869, v. 3, BFM; McGilvary, "For the Little Folks," dated 1 November 1869, *NCP* New Series 3, 120 (20 April 1870): 4; McGilvary, "For the Little Folks," dated 4 January 1870, *NCP* New Series 3, 121 (27 April 1870): 4; "Sad and Unexpected News from Chieng-Mai," S. R. House letter dated 11 November 1869, *FM* 28, 9 (February 1870): 202-204; and, "Latest News From Chieng-Mai," McGilvary letter, 31 October 1869, *FM* 28, 10 (March 1870): 227-29.

which had occasioned our worst fears; though for a month we suffered great anxiety of mind.¹¹³

We have only this brief allusion to the greater political context and possible implications of the execution of these two Christians. While it is unlikely that Chao Kawilorot planned to rebel against Bangkok, the weeks after the two executions were a period of instability. In a letter dated November 1st, McGilvary reported that Chao Kawilorot had gathered an army of some 10,00-12,00 levies and was about to engage in a war with a neighboring prince. McGilvary felt that there was some danger that Chiang Mai could actually be captured by the enemy, again putting the missionaries in personal danger. Thus, for six weeks or more the missionaries remained in a state of highest anxiety and uncertainty.

McGilvary had no doubt as to the intent of Chao Kawilorot's persecution of the Christians. Chao Kawilorot was trying to scare the missionaries themselves into leaving Chiang Mai. McGilvary charged that the *chao luang* had set spies to watch them and issued orders restricting the peoples' relationship with the missionaries. The two families responded passively. They continued, as best they could, to follow their daily routines while refusing to leave. Their strategy was to wait, to delay, and to rely on possible actions by the American consul in Bangkok and by the Siamese government. The missionaries based this strategy of wait-and-see (or, perhaps, "wait-and-pray" would be more accurate) on religious grounds. McGilvary wrote of the decision to remain,

Yet duty was clear. However dangerous our position, we felt that flight would be more dangerous. Our strength was to sit still. God was with us; His word was precious; His promise sweet. We were in his hand, and it has been our hope that we could hold on till God should bring us deliverance, and thus retain one of the most hopeful missions of the church to day, and one where we believe the gospel is to have one of its greatest triumphs when the obstacles shall be removed.¹¹⁴

By the end of October, the missionaries had fuller information on the fate of the two martyrs, and the whole situation was beginning to quiet down. Among other things, they had good reason to think that the servant they had sent down to Bangkok just before the executions and who had been reported murdered had reached Bangkok safely and without threat. After a sharp drop in the number of visitors, that number began to rise again as the excitement quieted down.

We know less about the whereabouts of the surviving converts. At the end of October 1869, the blind Shan was still with the McGilvarys, but the other three converts in Chiang Mai—Nan Inta, Boon Ma, and Noi Kanta—had all fled or gone into hiding. Orders had been given to arrest at least one of the three who were missing. In early January 1870, Wilson reported that Nan Inta had fled while Boon Ma and Noi Kanta were in hiding with friends. The missionaries had heard that San Ya Wichai had visited Lamphun about

¹¹³McGilvary, "For the Little Folks," dated 4 January 1870, *NCP* New Series 3, 121 (27 April 1870): 4.

¹¹⁴"Latest News From Chieng-Mai," McGilvary letter, 31 October 1869, *FM* 28, 10 (March 1870): 229.

two months previously but did not come to Chiang Mai. Wilson speculated that he had been forbidden from doing so.¹¹⁵

Events in Bangkok played an important part in the eventual outcome of this whole event. McGilvary's letter of September 29th arrived in Bangkok at the end of October and came as a shock to the missionary community there. They had shared in the happy optimism of the Chiang Mai missionaries and had not expected such an abrupt change. The tone of the letter especially alarmed them as it appeared that their colleagues' lives were in immediate danger. As it happened most of the male members of the Siam Mission had just arrived in Bangkok for the annual meeting of the Siam Presbytery. Upon the receipt of the letter, the missionaries contacted Chaophraya Phanuwong Mahakosathibodi, McGilvary's old friend and the former *phra palat* at Phet Buri, who had just become Phraklang in May 1869. In that position, he was responsible for foreign affairs among other duties. Eventually the Regent and brother of Chaophraya Phanuwong, Sri Suriwong, met with a delegation of missionaries headed by Dr. Bradley.¹¹⁶ The Siamese government's position was that it could not directly interfere in the internal affairs of Chiang Mai. The most they could do was to send a representative to guarantee that the Chiang Mai mission families could depart in safety. Bradley, however, insisted that the Siamese government make no mention of the missionaries having to leave. He asked that it, instead, request that Chao Kawilorot would see to their safety in any event. McGilvary would later credit the survival of the Laos Mission at this point to Bradley's timely intervention to leave the missionaries the option to remain in Chiang Mai. The Regent promised that the government would move as quickly as possible to send a representative to Chiang Mai. The Siam Presbytery, in the meantime, appointed the Revs. S. C. George and N. A. McDonald to go on ahead to Chiang Mai as quickly as possible. They left on 5 November 1869.¹¹⁷ The Siamese government did not send simply a messenger. The Regent sent, rather, a *kha luang* (a personal representative with vice-regal powers), who followed the two missionaries and eventually caught up with them so that they arrived in Chiang Mai together.

In the meantime, through the months of November and December 1869, the two missionary families carried on as before. McGilvary even made a point of regularly visiting Chao Kawilorot and other *chao*. He also maintained his relationship with Kawilorot's oldest daughter and her husband. They had no news from Bangkok and could only hope that assistance would come from there. The first news finally came on Sunday, December 26th,¹¹⁸ that a *kha luang* and two foreigners from Bangkok had

¹¹⁵Wilson, letter dated 3 January 1870, *FM* 28, 12 (May 1870): 281-84.

¹¹⁶Bradley and Sri Suriwong had long been close friends and some 30 years previously had studied English under Bradley. They were also allies in the introduction of Western ways into Siam. See Lord, *Mo Bradley*, 80ff.

¹¹⁷McGilvary, *Half Century*, 112; McGilvary "For the Little Folks," dated 4 January 1870, *NCP* New Series 3, 121 (27 April 1870): 4; and McDonald to Irving, 2 February 1870, v. 3, BFM.

¹¹⁸McGilvary's account in *Half Century* incorrectly dates the arrival of the *kha luang*'s party as late November 1869. Primary data, however, shows that the party arrived exactly one month later, that is in late December. McDonald and George both reported that the missionaries and the Siamese *kha luang* left Tak on 14 December 1869 and arrived in

arrived in Lamphun. The party arrived in Chiang Mai, along with a royal letter, the following day at about 5:00 in the afternoon. Although intensely relieved to see the two Bangkok missionaries as well as an official representative of the Regent, the two mission families still did not know the contents of the letter or their own fate, that is whether they could stay or would be forced to leave. When Chao Kawilorot inquired indirectly through a messenger as to why the party had come, he was informed that they had come to escort the McGilvays and Wilsons back to Bangkok. That was, of course, good news to him.¹¹⁹

The *kha luang* and the missionaries had an audience with Chao Kawilorot at 9:00 AM on December 28th. Kawilorot's audience chamber was filled with every Chiang Mai *chao* who could come. The *kha luang* and the missionaries went in a procession to the audience with the royal letter leading the way under a golden umbrella on a gold tray. When Kawilorot arrived at the hall in what missionary accounts agree was a state of suppressed rage, he took up the letter and gave it to his Siamese language secretary to read. The letter simply said that the missionaries could stay or leave Chiang Mai as they chose. After Chao Kawilorot stated that he would not hinder the missionaries if they decided to leave, McGilvary affirmed that since they had the permission of the Siamese government they would rather stay. Kawilorot responded immediately in a manner intended to intimidate those present that he would allow the missionaries to stay only if they would not teach religion. Otherwise he would drive them away. Accounts of this encounter differ, but at some point after the letter was read McDonald made a brief and politic address to the Kawilorot. The meeting then reached the point where Kawilorot prepared to close the audience. He had heard nothing that upset him or challenged his power. McGilvary came forward at that moment, determined to bring Chao Kawilorot to task in the presence of the Regent's personal representative. He spoke up, saying that Kawilorot was responsible for the murder of two Christians. The accusation that they had failed to bring in timber as ordered was fallacious. They had never been given a chance to do so. Months later many others still had not; and, in any event, the correct legal forms had not been followed. Kawilorot had ordered the execution of the two converts only because they were Christians. At first Kawilorot angrily denied that they had been executed on religious grounds, but,

When pressed a little closely on that point, so that he found he could not deny it, he declared before us all, in the most defiant manner, that he had done it and would kill every man that should dare to become a Christian—that he regarded every man who rebelled against his god as a rebel against himself.¹²⁰

Chiang Mai on December 27th. A letter by McGilvary dated 4 January 1870 states that the party arrived on December 27th. See McDonald to Irving, 2 February 1870, v. 3, BFM; George to Irving, 2 May 1870, v. 3, BFM; and, McGilvary, "For the Little Folks," dated 4 January 1870, *NCP* New Series 3, 121 (27 April 1870): 4.

¹¹⁹McDonald to Irving, 2 February 1870, v. 3, BFM.

¹²⁰McGilvary, "For the Little Folks," dated 4 January 1870, *NCP* New Series 3, 121 (27 April 1870): 4.

He also declared that he had ordered the two Christians killed in repayment of McGilvary's having murdered his own young grandson. That event had taken place much earlier when McGilvary had inoculated the boy for small pox. He had come down with minor ailment unrelated to the vaccination. McGilvary, he himself wrote, was not allowed to treat the boy further, and he eventually died from the ministrations of spirit doctors. Although no one blamed McGilvary at the time, the matter had evidently festered in Chao Kawilorot's mind.¹²¹

McGilvary, as he recalled the event in his autobiography, had the sole intention of forcing Chao Kawilorot to admit publicly that he had ordered the execution of Noi Sunya and Nan Chai for religious reasons. That is, the missionaries had cause for seeking help from Bangkok. The Siamese Regent had cause for sending a personal representative. The missionaries had not created an unnecessary fuss. And the *chao luang* himself had acted outside of the law.¹²² Whatever else McGilvary hoped to accomplish by this confrontation, the immediate result was heavy pressure from nearly all quarters for the two mission families to withdraw from Chiang Mai. The *kha luang* felt responsible for their safety and did not want them to remain. Their missionary colleagues from Bangkok were frightened by the whole situation. Friends and neighbors in Chiang Mai urged them to leave. Wilson agreed and strongly urged McGilvary that both families should withdraw as far as Tak and await events there. McGilvary was quite willing for the Wilsons to move to Tak and open a new station there. He even thought it was a good idea and might take some pressure off of the McGilvarys since it was a partial withdrawal. He avowed, however, that his family would remain. Although the missionaries had felt it necessary to assure Kawilorot that they would eventually leave, McGilvary wanted to delay that day as long as possible. He feared that once they left it would be many years before they could return.¹²³

On the 29th, McGilvary went to see Chao Kawilorot privately and found that his whole tone and attitude had changed from the previous day. He received McGilvary graciously and after a pleasant discussion told McGilvary his family would not have to leave until after Kawilorot returned from a trip he was about to make to Bangkok. Even then they could take all the time they needed for a comfortable departure. McGilvary later wrote that he was generally pleased with this outcome as it delayed leaving Chiang Mai by at least another six months or more. Although George and McDonald later reported to the Board that the Laos Mission was officially terminated, McGilvary did not feel that such was the case. As he put it, he did not think God would allow one man to prevent the

¹²¹Based on McGilvary, *Half Century*, 118-126; McGilvary, "For the Little Folks," dated 4 January 1870, *NCP* New Series 3, 121 (27 April 1870): 4; and George to Irving, 2 May 1870, v. 3, BFM.

¹²²McGilvary, *Half Century*, 118-126; McGilvary, "For the Little Folks," dated 4 January 1870, *NCP* New Series 3, 121 (27 April 1870): 4.

¹²³"Shall Chieng-Mai be Give Up?" McGilvary letter [3 January 1870], *FM* 28, 12 (May 1870): 274; and McGilvary, *Half Century*, 126-128.

conversion of a whole nation. As it turned out, of course, McGilvary's tactics of delay worked out, and even the Wilsons did not leave Chiang Mai.¹²⁴

Prior to his departure for Bangkok, Chao Kawilorot pursued a dual policy concerning the missionaries. In his personal relations he acted friendly enough to convince the Wilson family to delay their plans to move to Tak. On the other hand, according to Wilson, he also prohibited his subjects from studying Christianity and ordered the remaining Christians put to death if they visited the missionaries. Officials in Chiang Mai later informed the missionaries again that Kawilorot might be willing to have them remain if they would only engage in medicine and refrain from teaching religion. They rejected this offer out of hand. McGilvary affirmed, "...all the king's money would not have induced us to come here for any other purpose than to teach Christianity – that is now and must always be our principal business here."¹²⁵ When Chao Kawilorot arrived in Bangkok, the missionaries there reported that he received their visits coldly and that any mention of the Christian religion threw him into a rage. He made it clear that on his return he expected the McGilvarys and Wilsons to leave Chiang Mai permanently. All of this caused the American Consul, General Partridge, to protest to the Siamese government that Chao Kawilorot should not be allowed to return to Chiang Mai unless he guaranteed the safety of the two families and granted them permission to continue to work in Chiang Mai. Partridge argued that American treaty rights in Siam required no less. After some hesitation, the Siamese Regent agreed and personally committed the care and protection of "American citizens" in Chiang Mai to Chao Intanon, Kawilorot's son-in-law, who had just been granted the position of "second king" or *maha uparat* of Chiang Mai. By this time, Kawilorot had become seriously ill, and the Regent put Chiang Mai in Chao Intanon's hands until Kawilorot recovered with the understanding that Chao Intanon was now the heir apparent.¹²⁶

Chao Kawilorot, having only partially recovered from his illness, left Bangkok on 22 May 1870 for the North. As he hurried northward, Kawilorot again became more and more ill and finally had to be carried the last few kilometers on a litter. He knew he was dying and sought to reach Chiang Mai before he died. According to the custom of the city, a corpse could not be carried through the city gates and thus all of his funeral rites would have to be conducted outside the walls of the city. By the evening of June 28th, he had reached Chiang Mai territory, but he died at 10:00 the next morning, 29 June 1870, without reaching the city itself. McGilvary felt sure that Chao Kawilorot's timely death was the "interposition of Providence" and that the Laos Misison could not have otherwise survived his return. Within some 24 hours of Chao Kawilorot's death, Chao Intanon assured McGilvary that the missionaries were free to remain, carry out their work without

¹²⁴McGilvary, *Half Century*, 128-129; and McGilvary, "For the Little Folks," dated 4 January 1870, *NCP* New Series 3, 121 (27 April 1870): 4.

¹²⁵McGilvary to Irving, 17 February 1870, v. 3, BFM.

¹²⁶Wilson, letter dated 28 July 1870, *FM* 29, 7 (December 1870): 183-184; and "Light from Chiengmai," *FM* 29, 4 (Sept 1870): 89-90.

hinderance, and build their homes. If April 1867 marked the birth of the Laos Mission, then certainly June 1870 marked its re-birth.¹²⁷

Conclusion

In subsequent decades, the northern Thai Protestant church has celebrated the events of 1867-1869 and particularly memorialized the martyrdom of Nan Chai and Noi Sunya; and, thus, perpetuated McGilvary's own interpretation of the importance of those years and that martyrdom. From the first and for years afterwards, McGilvary repeatedly invoked the claim of the ancient church father, Tertullian that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." He thus ascribed to their execution the interest in Christianity on the part of one or two individuals after the death of the martyrs.¹²⁸ So, then, there has long been a pious wish among missionaries serving in Thailand and northern Thai Christians themselves to transform the deaths of these two men into the formative moment of the northern Thai church.

Actual events have a way of not working out according to the grand schemes we mortals seek to impose on them, which is certainly true in this case. On the one hand, Chao Kawilorot failed to eradicate the Christian infestation, which had become so intolerable to him. Had he lived, it may well be that he would have prevented the spread of Christianity in his kingdom for some years, perhaps decades. But he died, and the missionaries did not go away. Northern Thai Christianity did not ultimately succumb to his brutal suppression. In fact, during his reign the Laos Mission laid the foundations for its future work in a number of ways. The two mission families established themselves as permanent residents of Chiang Mai. They made many important friendships. They acquired their first piece of property. They introduced Western medicine into the North, and in all of this they initiated the missionary dialogue, as we have called it, with the North.

On the other hand, there is no evidence in the historical record that the deaths of the two martyrs in any way influenced others to become Christians. More to the point, Chao Kawilorot's persecution of the Chiang Mai church had a serious, even fundamental impact on the emerging Christian movement in the North. It effectively forced the church into a new historical situation, one much less conducive to the spread of Christianity in northern Siam. It most immediately and quite brutally disrupted the widespread interest in the new religion by making that interest dangerous rather than intriguing. Less obvious at the time, it seems likely that these events also altered the fundamental relationship between the mission and its converts in at least two ways. First, had there been dozens or even hundreds of converts in the early 1870s McGilvary and Wilson would have been hard pressed to dominate the Christian movement in the way that the Laos Mission's members later did control the life of the churches. This would have esp. been the case if some members of the *chao* class converted and carried their status over into the church. This is a matter of speculation, of course, because there is no

¹²⁷McGilvary, *Half Century*, 133-139; and Wilson, letter dated 28 July 1870, *FM* 29, 7 (December 1870): 182-88.

¹²⁸"Latest News From Chieng-Mai," McGilvary letter, 31 October 1869, *FM* 28, 10 (March 1870): 228. See also "Later from the Laos Mission," quoting from the *Philadelphia Presbyterian*, *NCP* New Series 3, 112 (23 February 1870): 4.

telling what later events might have transpired; but it would have been very possible that the northern Thai churches would have had a much larger voice in and influence over the founding and running of their own churches than they actually later did. Second, by the time the Laos Mission merged with the Siam Mission in 1921, the mission's schools and hospitals—its institutions—had claimed the central place in the work of the mission. They demanded much more of the missionaries' time, treasure, and concern. By and large, the most capable Christian leaders were also pulled into the institutions, leaving the churches largely overshadowed. If Chao Kawilorot had pulled his punches in 1869, it is again an intriguing possibility that the northern Thai churches would have been the engine that drove the Christian movement in the North rather than the medical and educational institutions.¹²⁹

Still, the years 1867-1869 did mark the introduction of Protestant Christianity into the Northern States and the events of these years laid the foundation for the future of the northern Thai church. First, the Laos Mission survived even in the face of intense political pressure and overt persecution; this alone was no mean feat. Second, the mission established itself as one of the "new patrons" that helped transform the North politically, socially, and economically. In the process, it cemented its "alliance" with the Bangkok government so that missionary patronage complemented the growing power of Bangkok in the North. Third, The Laos Mission began to provide the northern Thai people with important social services, notably medical assistance. Eventually, missionary schools and hospitals would become important social institutions in all of the major cities of the North. Fourth, this first era in northern Thai church history provided the church with its two most important leaders in the nineteenth century, Nan Inta and Nan Ta. Thus, the events of these three critical years both encouraged and set limits on the growth of the mission and the church in northern Siam.

¹²⁹ In the years 1904-1912, the Laos Mission left the churches of Phrae largely to their own devices, briefly under the leadership of the Rev. Robert Irwin, the one missionary who had a serious commitment to empowering the churches themselves. In that brief period and among some of the weaker churches under the mission, local leadership made significant advances "on their own." The mission, however, soon terminated this experiment in self-government as a failure, partly because at least some of the Phrae Christians repeatedly and loudly complained about being "left alone". See, Swanson, *Krishcak Muang Nua*, 109-113; and Swanson, "The Poor Lost Sheep at Phrae Revisited," *HeRB* 5 (March 2003), electronic edition at herbswanson.com.

Chapter Three

The Valley of the Shadow, 1870-1875

Introduction

As we saw in the previous chapter, Chao Kawilorot shattered the dreams and hopes of the Presbyterian missionaries in Chiang Mai with one deadly act, the execution of two of their first seven converts. Prasit Pongudom has rightly described that event as a seemingly discrete event, which in fact was a pivotal moment that precipitated significant changes in the history not only of the Christian movement in the Northern States but also in the religious and social history of those states themselves.¹³⁰ In January 1869, the Laos Mission stood on the mountain top, and by mid-September it had plummeted into the valley of the shadow where it would languish for the next six years. That is the story we tell in this chapter.

Starting Over

The Laos Mission was mired in uncertainty as the new decade opened. The persecution of September 1869 had dashed the missionaries' hopes and plans and, as Wilson wrote, transformed their "tears of joy" into sorrow.¹³¹ McGilvary, drawing on biblical images, compared their situation to that of the Exile when the people of Israel experienced crushing defeat at the hands of the Babylonians. He took comfort, however, in the eventual restoration of the biblical exiles and expected that God would likewise restore their situation to its former hopefulness.¹³² The converts did not share that hope. They necessarily kept their distance from the missionaries and one by one dropped out of the church entirely, excepting only Nan Inta. The public's interest in Christianity also dwindled almost to nothing; and although certain Chiang Mai government officials encouraged McGilvary and Wilson to start building permanent homes, the missionaries judged it best to delay. They remained firm in their insistence that if Chao Kawilorot would not allow them to teach Christianity they would leave.¹³³

Matters improved somewhat after Chao Kawilorot left for Bangkok in January 1870, even though the Prince left strict instructions with his government to prevent any resurgence in Christianity. The Wilsons soon had second thoughts about their plans to retreat to Tak. The fearful rumors of retribution against the missionaries after the executions of September 1869 proved unfounded, and Kawilorot did not rise up in rebellion against Bangkok. He even seemed more friendly to the missionaries before he left for Bangkok. Wilson, thus, decided to delay his decision to stay or go until later in the year when the future might be clearer. By mid-February he and McGilvary had devised a strategy in case Kawilorot on his return demanded they leave. The Wilsons would leave immediately for Tak while the McGilvarys would try to delay their departure

¹³⁰ Pongudom, "A Historical Turning Point," 5.

¹³¹ Wilson to Irving, 3 January 1870, v. 3, BFM.

¹³² "Sessional Records," 22-23. The biblical allusion are to Psalm 13:1, Psalm 137:2, and Isaiah 54:8.

¹³³ McGilvary to Irving, 24 March 1870, v. 3, BFM.

as long as possible.¹³⁴ It was a variation on McGilvary's persistent attempts to delay matters until events created new conditions.

Affairs of state continued to dominate the mission's life. McGilvary reported in March 1870 that the Chiang Mai government was calling up troops to deal with a troublesome fellow named Chao Fa Kolan, who he described as "a prince of the Northern Shans who has for three years caused trouble to this country." He told Kolan's story in considerable detail, and it appears from that tale that Kolan played an important, if shadowy role in the history of northern Thai Christianity. According to McGilvary, he had ruled over a city in the Shan States, but when he fell out of favor with the king of Burma he fled into Chiang Mai territory where he became a bandit chief. McGilvary states that the episode in 1866 when King Mongkut called Chao Kawilorot down to Bangkok on charges of treason had its origins in Kolan's flight. The Burmese king sent an embassy and gifts to Chao Kawilorot to persuade him to assist in the capture of Kolan. Kawilorot accepted the gifts, thus causing some around him to doubt his loyalty to Bangkok. It was on that 1866 trip, we will remember, that Kawilorot gave his formal permission for the founding of the Laos Mission. Kawilorot was chasing this same Kolan in April 1867 when the McGilvarys first arrived in Chiang Mai and, thus, was not present to receive them.

Kolan reappeared once more in November 1869, and his threat to Chiang Mai's security led Kawilorot to collect an army of nearly 10,000 men to pursue him yet again. The raising of this army created many rumors concerning Kawilorot's intention to revolt against Bangkok and caused considerable unease for a time among the two mission families during the tense months after the death of Nan Chai and Noi Sunya. In March 1870, the illusive Kolan appeared still one more time throwing Chiang Mai into a panic, especially because Chao Kawilorot had gone to Bangkok. McGilvary wrote, "We were all in a state of anxiety for a week or more." The authorities, however, responded promptly and on 16 March 1870 routed Kolan's army, wounded him, and chased him back across the Salween River. The Chiang Mai authorities had called on the help of troops from Lampang and Lamphun, and it happened that the Lampang contingent encamped near the missionary residences. McGilvary and Wilson took the opportunity to evangelize the Lampang soldiers and felt they encountered some interest.¹³⁵

Between January and June 1870 the missionaries still received many visitors, and McGilvary, as before, did a considerable amount of medical work.¹³⁶ They continued to have almost no contacts with the Christian converts, although they thought all five of the survivors remained faithful to their new religion. The pressure on the converts, however, was intense, and by July Noi Kanta had evidently given up Christianity. Wilson reported that he was an old, ailing man disinclined by that time to discuss religion with the missionaries. Wilson also found that Boonma's patron, a "civil officer" who had a role in the execution of the two martyrs, was putting heavy pressure on Boonma to quit

¹³⁴Wilson to Irving, 24 January 1870 and 14 February 1870, v. 3, BFM.

¹³⁵McGilvary to Irving, 24 March 1870, v. 3, BFM. For further information on Kolan, see Rendard, "Kariang," 152-53.

¹³⁶McGilvary to Irving, 30 May 1870, v. 3, BFM.

Christianity.¹³⁷ That pressure was successful. One of the few high points of this otherwise difficult period was the visit in February 1870 of the Rev. J. N. Cushing and his wife, Baptist missionaries on intineration from Burma. McGilvary and Cushing quickly formed a warm friendship, and both Presbyterian families felt strengthened by the visit of these American missionary colleagues. The Cushing visit compensated, if only a little, for the fact that for some eight months up to July 1870 the two families received no mail or other news from the “outside world.”¹³⁸

As we saw in the last chapter, Chao Kawilorot’s died in June 1870 while returning from his trip to Bangkok; his death created a new situation in the North. The accession of Chao Inthawichaiyanon (or simply “Intanon” to the missionaries) brought to prominence a pro-Bangkok and pro-Westernization party led by Intanon and his wife, Chao Mae Tip Keson. As would be expected of the daughter of Chao Kawilorot, Chao Mae Tip Keson was the stronger personality and true leader of this faction that was friendly to the missionaries. Chao Intanon himself was a politically weak individual who took little interest in governing Chiang Mai. Opposing Intanon and Tip Keson was the *chao ho na* (“Second King,” also termed the *chao uparat*), Chao Bunthawong. He was a strong personality and succeeded in usurping much of Chao Intanon’s authority to the point that little could be done in Chiang Mai without Bunthawong’s permission. He sought to maintain the traditional structures of a semi-independent Chiang Mai, resisted change, and counted himself among the opponents of the Laos Mission. Chao Bunthawong, however, had neither the strength of personality nor the prestige of Chao Kawilorot, and hence he could not deal with the Laos Mission as forcefully and effectively as had the deceased *chao muang*. He applied what pressure he could, but he could not prevent the emergence of a northern Thai church just as he could not, finally, preserve the political integrity of the Chiang Mai state.¹³⁹ McGilvary, by his own account, diligently played upon this situation to maintain the missionaries’ situation. He spent time visiting all of the important political figures, and he worked with particular diligence at developing a close relationship with Chao Intanon and Chao Mae Tip Keson. McGilvary noted that in these first years after Chao Kawilorot’s death Chao Bunthawong did not openly act against the Laos Mission.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷Wilson, “Fourth Annual Report of the Laos Mission,” 18 July 1870, v. 3, BFM; and Wilson, letter dated 28 July 1870, *Foreign Missionary* 29, 7(December 1870): 182-88.. See also McGilvary to Irving, 17 February 1870, 4 March 1870, and 30 May 1870, v. 3, BFM.

¹³⁸McGilvary, *Half Century*, 139; McGilvary to Irving, 4 March 1870, v. 3, BFM; and Wilson, letter dated 28 July 1870, *Foreign Missionary* 29, 7(December 1870): 182-88. The Cushings, McGilvary related in his letter to the Board, had been on a four-month long tour of the Shan States and northern Siam and had come to Chiang Mai from Chiang Rai to the north. He speculated that their tour might be the longest ever taken by missionaries in Burma or Siam to that time. McGilvary welcomed this Baptist interest in the northern Shan, who he took to be closely related to the northern Thai.

¹³⁹Ratanaporn, “Chiang Mai Treaties,” 175-178; and McGilvary, *Half Century*, 141-144.

¹⁴⁰McGilvary, *Half Century*, 144-145. See also McGilvary to Irving, 22 August 1870, v. 3, BFM.

While the Laos Mission, thus, continued to live in ambivalence, Kawilorot's death meant that its situation was considerably improved over what it had been while he still ruled. The threat of extinction no longer hung over it, as its political enemies had lost the power to destroy the mission although they could still make life difficult for it. One consequence of this changed situation was that in July 1870 Nan Inta began to have open contacts with the missionaries. He had returned to Chiang Mai at some point before January 1870 but remained discretely silent until July.¹⁴¹

For most of the next two years a stalemate existed between the mission and its political protagonists. The missionaries carried on with their evangelism, but they kept it low key and personal. They neither expected nor found much public interest in Christianity, and McGilvary assumed that people still feared a repeat of the events of September 1869 if conversions started up again. Chao Intanon's entirely passive attitude did not help matters so far as the mission was concerned, and he seemed not to care at all whether the missionaries stayed or left.¹⁴² It must be remembered, however, that Chao Intanon had to proceed with caution in his relationship with the missionaries because of the opposition of the "old guard" to social and political change. In the months after Kawilorot's death, for example, the Laos Mission attempted to enlarge its compound and secure clear ownership of the property Kawilorot had permitted it to occupy. It wanted, that is, permission to purchase both its original plot and additional land so that all would acknowledge their legal right to the property they occupied. Intanon, at this time, refused to make any changes in the previous policy that forbade the missionaries from legal ownership. He publicly agreed with Chao Bunthawong that the missionaries already had enough property.¹⁴³ Wilson wrote, "They refused to let us pay for the ground & they made it a serious crime for any one to sell [to] us.... The lot was made over to us for our use, but the deed was careful to state that the ground was royal property."¹⁴⁴

Chao Intanon was, however, a better friend of the missionaries than they seemed to have realized. Before the end of 1870, he devised a ploy that avoided political confrontation and still gave the Laos Mission clear possession of its land and enabled it to acquire additional property. Intanon allowed the mission's neighbors to "give" it land adjoining its original plot and allowed the mission to give its neighbors a complementary "gift" to compensate them for their generosity—just so long as no one spoke of buying or selling. This political stratagem made it possible for the mission to also pay for that first piece of land that Chao Kawilorot had given it, which payment resolved the bad feelings between the original owner and the mission. In December 1870, McGilvary wrote, "We have since the accession of the new prince remunerated them for their places so that we have now a place that we can feel is by right as well as in fact our own."¹⁴⁵ The Mission, thus, did have powerful friends in the new administration, but those friends could not yet act forthrightly in their favor.

¹⁴¹Wilson, letter dated 28 July 1870, *Foreign Missionary* 29, 7(December 1870): 182-88.]

¹⁴²McGilvary, "For the Little Folks," *North Carolina Presbyterian* New Series 5, 266(5 February 1873): 4.

¹⁴³McGilvary to Irving, 22 August 1870, v. 3, BFM; and Wilson to Irving, 1 October 1870, v. 3, BFM.

¹⁴⁴Wilson to Irving, 1 October 1870, v. 3, BFM.

¹⁴⁵McGilvary to Irving, 31 December 1870, v. 3, BFM. Emphasis in the original.

In this new environment, the mission found ways to be useful to the government. It worked out, for example, a way to transfer government funds to Bangkok and mission funds to Chiang Mai through the use of drafts. Chiang Mai *chaos* visiting Bangkok, under this arrangement purchased a draft from the Laos Mission on the Siam Mission in Bangkok. Both the mission and the *chaos*, thus, avoided the sometimes dangerous necessity of having to transport specie through lawless country.¹⁴⁶ In spite of such arrangements of convenience and the perceptible drop in animosity towards the mission, McGilvary still felt that the majority of the ruling elite would have preferred that the missionaries leave, and they would do nothing to make the mission's situation any easier.¹⁴⁷

The mission, nonetheless, felt secure enough to undertake for the first time the erection of permanent mission buildings. It had been collecting timber for some time, and in about September 1870, McGilvary began building a temporary house so his family could move over to the mission compound on the river with the Wilsons. He also started a permanent home at the same location for his family.¹⁴⁸ This was an important venture for the mission. McGilvary stated, "I look upon it here however as being a much more important question than if simply our personal comfort depended on it. It really involves in the eyes of the people the temporary or permanent establishment of the mission." He admitted, too, that the missionaries themselves would feel more settled once they had permanent homes to live in.¹⁴⁹ McGilvary throughout the later months of 1870 and into 1871 devoted a significant amount of his time to this task, which involved numerous headaches including problems in acquiring building supplies and in finding skilled, available workers. Erecting a mission house in Chiang Mai in the 1870s required time, patience, and an abundance of technical and administrative skill. The McGilvary family moved into their temporary quarters in the mission compound in mid-October 1870.¹⁵⁰

We have described the first six months of 1870 as being an interim period, a time of waiting. The last six months of the year was marked by attempts to initiate several key activities that would characterize Laos Mission commitments throughout its existence. Building a physical infrastructure for the mission's work was always a key concern. As it opened station after station, added new personnel, and founded new institutions, the mission invariably initiated the opening of a new station by engaging in a building program. It invested large amounts of its time, personnel, and resources in construction just as McGilvary and Wilson were doing in Chiang Mai during these months. A second recurring concern that persisted in missionary thinking was the desire for a printing press. As early as 1864, McGilvary contemplated the possibility of acquiring northern Thai fonts for its work in the North.¹⁵¹ By 1870, the mission was taking steps to transport a press and northern Thai font to Chiang Mai. For a time it had appeared that Wilson would have to return to the United States to secure a font, but by October it seemed to them they could get one in Bangkok. As of December 1870, the mission had acquired a

¹⁴⁶House to Rankin, 10 September 1870, v. 3, BFM.

¹⁴⁷McGilvary to Irving, 7 October 1870, v. 3, BFM.

¹⁴⁸McGilvary to Irving, 7 October 1870, v. 3, BFM.

¹⁴⁹McGilvary to Irving, 31 December 1870, v. 3, BFM.

¹⁵⁰McGilvary to Irving, 31 December 1870, v. 3, BFM.

¹⁵¹McGilvary to Lowrie, 10 May 1864, v. 2, BFM.

lithographic press, but it was in Bangkok, packed in several large, extremely heavy boxes and no one could be found to ship it up river to Chiang Mai.¹⁵² A third concern that arose at this time was that of formal education. McGilvary noted on the last day of 1870 that the mission hoped to open a school within a few weeks or months, observing that it could not build up the church without the aid of schools.¹⁵³

Little has been said thus far about church life at the beginning of this new period in Laos Mission history because there is little to tell. For all practical purposes, Nan Inta was the only active northern Thai Christian, although the enigmatic San Ya Wichai was, as far as the missionaries knew, still “faithful.” In August 1870, McGilvary reported to the Board in New York that two individuals related to the McGilvary household had applied for baptism. Both of those baptisms were postponed, however, and there seems to have been no active church life even with a few interested “inquirers” and Nan Inta present. Noi Kanta and Boonma continued to absent themselves from any relationship with the missionaries.¹⁵⁴ Nan Inta was employed by the mission as a language teacher and a Bible translator. We have only a tantalizing letter from McGilvary to suggest that perhaps there was some quiet interest in Christianity among a few individuals. He reported to the Board that on 7 March 1871 he performed the first Christian wedding ever held in Chiang Mai and explained that the (unnamed) couple had not received baptism, but that “they are not idolaters” and had professed a belief in God.¹⁵⁵

The year 1871 passed in relative quiet and was the least eventful year to date in the short history of the Laos Mission. Relations with the government continued to be a central concern. Wilson reported that Chao Intanon had yet to publicly state a policy concerning conversion and most people assumed that open conversions would lead to renewed persecution. One person interested in Christianity told Wilson that “an open profession of Christianity would cost him his head.” This individual and several others asked to become “secret disciples,” but the missionaries adamantly refused to consider such an option just as they had when Nan Inta first proposed the idea at the time of his conversion in 1868. They at least found comfort that some people were interested in Christianity. Wilson also reported that this same fear of government opposition quickly brought to an end his first attempt at establishing a mission school. The mission had scrounged together a few students under a “Burman” teacher, but by October 1871 Wilson contemplated closing the school for a lack of students.¹⁵⁶ Otherwise things were quiet. McGilvary struggled to get his house built, and Wilson started buying lumber for theirs.

While it was a quiet year, 1871 in its own way may have been as important as the crisis year of 1869 in the sense that 1871 was quiet for the same reason that 1869 was a year of bloodshed and threat. In both years, some prospective converts to the new religion petitioned the missionaries to allow them to convert secretly, and both times Wilson and McGilvary rejected that possibility out of hand. Tactical considerations had little, if anything, to do with their momentous decision to reject what we might call “soft”

¹⁵²McGilvary to Irving, 7 October 1870 and 31 December 1870, v. 3, BFM.

¹⁵³McGilvary to Irving, 31 December 1870, v. 3, BFM.

¹⁵⁴McGilvary to Irving, 22 August 1870, v. 3, BFM.

¹⁵⁵McGilvary to Irving, 11 March 1871, v. 3, BFM.

¹⁵⁶Wilson to Irving, 24 October 1871, v. 3, BFM.

conversions. As Old School, evangelical Presbyterians, they simply could not accept as valid any conversion that was not made publicly and without consideration of the cost to the believer.

Dr. Charles Hodge, a professor at Princeton Theological Seminary and mentor to both McGilvary and Wilson, dealt with the question of "soft" conversions in *The Way of Life*, a popular evangelical treatise that we may presume both of his former students in Chiang Mai were very familiar with. His strictures against secret conversions gives us some insight into why Wilson and McGilvary could not baptize so-called secret believers. Christians, Hodge argues, have public obligations that require an open confession, and he condemns those who try to escape those obligations for their weak faith. He claims that a large portion of converts must face the pain of ridicule and chastisement. Christianity, Hodge states flatly, cannot remain hidden. The Bible, if nothing else, demands public profession. In words that take on a particular force in light of the Laos Mission's context in Chiang Mai, he insists that converts take Christ as their King and profess their allegiance publicly. They take Christ as their father and must give him public honor and obedience. He asks, "But what kind of worshipper is he who is ashamed or afraid to acknowledge his God?" And he goes on to assert that,

All the relations, therefore, in which a Christian stands to Christ, as his king, as the head of the family of God and as the object of divine worship, involve the necessity of confessing him before men; and we practically reject him in all these relations by neglecting or refusing this public profession of him and his religion.

Being a Christian, Hodge argues further, cannot be hidden in any event because Christians have to behave in ways utterly alien to general social conventions. He writes, "This is one of the reasons why the people of God are called saints. They are distinguished, separated from others and consecrated to God. When they cease to be distinguished from those around them, they cease to be saints."¹⁵⁷ Hodge concludes with the unequivocal statement concerning every convert's confession of faith that, "This confession must be made public; it must be made before men; it must be made with the mouth, and not left to be inferred from the conduct."¹⁵⁸

McGilvary and Wilson never explained their refusal to entertain the notion of a "secret" or "soft" conversion, but we may assume that the similarity between Hodge's explanation and the actions of the Laos Mission is far from coincidental. That refusal was for them a matter of biblical principles and what seemed to be good common sense, rooted in an absolute, dualistic distinction between true witness and a false faith. In 1869, as we have already seen, the missionaries' refusal to accept soft conversions forced Chao Kawilorot to use violence to preserve the northern Thai system of patronage against the perceived threat of missionary competition. In 1871, the consequences were not so obvious, but the rejection of secret conversions shut the door on potential converts at a

¹⁵⁷ Charles Hodge, *Way of Life*, ed. Mark Noll (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 180-83. The quotations are from page 183.

¹⁵⁸Hodge, *Way of Life*, 185.

time when it was simply too dangerous for interested individuals to change their religion publicly.

The pace of events picked up in 1872. In January, Dr. Charles Vrooman, a Canadian physician trained at the Medical Department of the University of Michigan, arrived. He was the first person sent by the Board to reinforce the beleaguered Laos Mission, and McGilvary characterized him as a well-read, intelligent young physician.¹⁵⁹ The two mission families were thrilled by his appointment and arrival, and they had great hopes for his work. They saw around them large amounts of physical suffering that they hoped Vrooman could cure. Vrooman, furthermore, could provide the Wilsons and McGilvary themselves, including especially their children, with badly needed medical care. Most of all, the missionaries believed that Western medicine would challenge, as Wilson put it, “the muttering of charms and the incantations of the spirit-doctors’ means of cure.” McGilvary and Wilson believed that Western medical science particularly demonstrated the superiority of things Western including Christianity, thus making it an invaluable evangelistic tool for the conversion of the northern Thai. Western medicine was a tool, a weapon even, that the missionaries used to confound what they took to be northern Thai superstition. Wilson, commenting on his expectations for Vrooman’s work, believed that the doctor’s skill and scientific approach to disease would surely challenge the people’s faith in their superstitions. Wilson believed that Western medicine proved the superiority of Christianity, and he triumphantly expected that Vrooman would open wide the doors of northern Siam to the Christian message through its practice.¹⁶⁰

Things began well for Dr. Vrooman. He was literally called from the mission boat landing on his arrival to treat Nan Inta, who suffered from acute dysentery and appeared close to death. Vrooman’s timely arrival saved his life. After that a few Western-style surgical operations, the first known in Chiang Mai’s history, won the new doctor a wide reputation. The mission also established its first “hospital” for him, a make-shift, temporary affair of bamboo huts built by the families of the patients themselves and located in the McGilvary compound. By April 1872, there were eight such huts.¹⁶¹

Things did not, however, continue to go as well for Vrooman. His work load was heavy, and he felt unable to meet all the demands for his services. He worked day after day, and there was frequently a crowd of people waiting at his door so that by April the pressure and the heat had markedly weakened him. In an attempt to regain his health, he joined McGilvary on the Laos Mission’s first long exploration tour, but his health did not

¹⁵⁹McGilvary, “For the Little Folks,” *North Carolina Presbyterian* New Series 5, 266(5 Feb 1873): 4.

¹⁶⁰Wilson to Irving, 24 October 1871, v. 3, BFM; and Wilson, undated letter, *Foreign Missionary* 31, 10(March 1873): 307. For missionary views on the uses of missionary medicine see McGilvary, “Medical Missions and Missionary Physicians. No. VII,” *North Carolina Presbyterian* New Series 2, 83(4 August 1869): 1; McGilvary, *Half Century*, 147-148; and Wilson, letter dated 7 July 1869, *Foreign Missionary* 28, 10(March 1870): 232-33.

¹⁶¹C. W. Vrooman, letter dated 6 February 1872, *Foreign Missionary* 31, 2(July 1872): 51-52; and McGilvary, letter dated 10 April 1872, *Foreign Missionary* 31, 5(October 1872): 150-51.

improve to any degree. After returning to Chiang Mai briefly, he took another trip, this time down to Bangkok. His health, again, did not improve. By November 1872 discouragement set in. Vrooman felt keenly the lack of a proper hospital, of facilities and equipment for surgery, and his own language limitations. He expressed a desire to be transferred to Japan. By early 1873, he decided to resign, and he left in June of that year soured not only on the prospects for medicine in northern Siam but also on the future of the Laos Mission itself.¹⁶² The disillusionment was mutual. Some years later McGilvary observed that Vrooman failed because he did not base himself thoroughly on the orthodox foundation of Charles Hodge's theology, which McGilvary saw as the only secure foundation for a missionary to stand on.¹⁶³ Vrooman made a bad impression on others including the influential Dr. House in Bangkok, who openly counted him as a personal enemy. House's opposition contributed to Vrooman's leaving Siam.¹⁶⁴

Vrooman's record represented more than just a disappointment to the McGilvarys and Wilsons. It was an embarrassment. McGilvary felt constrained to assure the Board that, in spite of his short stay, Vrooman's work proved the need for a doctor. He claimed, "I regard the success of the experiment as truly wonderful. I still believe that there is no mission connected with the Board where a physician of the right kind can exert so much influence for good as among the Laos." Vrooman himself had simply not been the right kind of missionary doctor.¹⁶⁵ McGilvary deeply believed what he wrote, but what he does not acknowledge is that a doctor who sought to practice professional Western medicine in Chiang Mai in the early 1870s faced immense difficulties. The missionary doctors felt there was more to being a doctor than just dispensing pills, mixing medicines, and lancing boils. In the absence of "modern" medical facilities and technology they were hard pressed to do more than what an adept amateur, such as McGilvary himself, could do. Vrooman was the first, but not the last, missionary doctor to express his frustration over the conditions they confronted in the Northern States.

The Laos Mission experienced other disappointments during 1872. By February, Wilson had closed down his small boys' school. He was no more successful at getting the mission's lithographic press, to work. That press, evidently, reached Chiang Mai with Dr. Vrooman in January 1871, and Wilson undertook the task of assembling it and putting it in working order.¹⁶⁶ Although he devoted considerable time from April through June 1872 on the machine, he could not get it to operate. Nor could he get the ink that came with it dissolved properly. He tried but also failed to mix up his own ink. Wilson

¹⁶²Vrooman to Irving, 6 February 1872 and 7 November 1872, v. 3, BFM; McGilvary to Irving, 4 December 1872 and 28 February 1873, v. 3, BFM; McGilvary, *Half Century*, 150-159; Wilson, undated letter, *Foreign Missionary* 31, 10(March 1873): 307-08; and McGilvary, "For the Little Folks," *North Carolina Presbyterian* New Series 5, 282(28 May 1873): 4.

¹⁶³McGilvary to Lowrie, 8 November 1875, v. 3, BFM.

¹⁶⁴Vrooman to Irving, 7 November 1872, and 15 April 1874, v. 3, BFM ; and House to Irving, 12 August 1873, v. 3, BFM.

¹⁶⁵McGilvary to Irving, 6 January 1873, v. 3, BFM.

¹⁶⁶McGilvary to Irving, 5 February 1872; and Wilson to Irving, 8 February 1872, v. 3, BFM.

admitted to the Board that he lacked both the materials and the expertise required to make the press work.¹⁶⁷

The Laos Mission failed in 1871-1872 to introduce professional medical care, Western education, and printing for a combination of reasons. The mission itself lacked the financial resources and personnel required to persist in some of its modernizing efforts, and it also could not overcome the geographical distances and poor communications of the Northern States in the early 1870s. Getting proper supplies and technical information was a slow, arduous process. A powerful political faction, additionally, opposed the missionaries' efforts to introduce social and religious change; and, with the exception of medicine, there was not a felt need in the North for some of the things the missionaries wanted to accomplish. Wilson, thus, in 1875 observed that Chao Intanon, Chao Bunthawong, and other top political leaders saw no need for education or Western-style schools. He asked rhetorically, "Unable to read themselves why should they wish the common people to know the advantages of a school?"¹⁶⁸ The Laos Mission, furthermore, still lacked its own community base of converts that would provide it with ready-made workers and students. It would take time and repeated efforts to overcome the technical, financial, political, and social barriers to what the missionaries intended to be the Christianization of the North, which in truth was also and even more a program of Westernization.

The mission's efforts to create a viable Christian community met with only a little more success in the early 1870s. The persecution of 1869 brought the Chiang Mai Church to a standstill, and in 1872 only two northern Thai were loosely affiliated with it, Nan Inta and Saen Ya Wichai. Saen Ya Wichai lived to the North, and the missionaries had not seen him since before September 1869. Nan Inta's status was unclear. In a letter written on 24 April 1872, Wilson indicates that Nan Inta was keeping his distance from the missionaries and not participating in mission activities. Wilson wrote, "Whether his heart has become indifferent to the gospel, or whether the fear of his master keeps him away from our worship, we know not. We have long hoped for his return, but disappointment & sorrow are all that his present course brings us."¹⁶⁹ At the beginning of April 1872, then, the mission had no active converts. The situation changed slightly on Sunday, 7 April 1872 when the mission baptized another man named Nan Inta., who was known to the missionaries as Nan Ta to avoid confusion. He was a farmer, an older man with five grown children, who had been living with McGilvary on an occasional basis for a year or more. Although he showed clear signs of interest in Christianity, the missionaries had never pressed him to convert because of the uncertain political situation. Nan Ta decided on his own to become a Christian.¹⁷⁰

April 1872 was a significant month in the history of the Chiang Mai Church and Laos Mission. On the 7th, Nan Ta received baptism. On Sunday, the 21st, McGilvary and Vrooman were on their tour to the North and unexpectedly met San Ya Wichai, who was travelling on the Sabbath. Although the missionaries considered Sunday travel sinful and instructed San Ya Wichai to that affect, they were still glad to see him. He affirmed

¹⁶⁷Wilson to Irving, 28 September 1872, v. 3, BFM.

¹⁶⁸Wilson to Irving, 15 March 1875, v. 3, BFM.

¹⁶⁹Wilson to Irving, 24 April 1872, v. 3, BFM.

¹⁷⁰McGilvary to Irving, 10 April 1872, v. 3, BFM.

that he continued to feel that he was a Christian. After this meeting, San Ya Wichai travelled on to Chiang Mai, arriving Saturday evening, April 27th. He met Wilson, who heard for the first time how the Prince of Lamphun hauled San Ya Wichai before him and nearly had him executed. Sunday morning San Ya Wichai joined in worship and then Sunday evening Wilson held a special worship service. A few of San Ya Wichai's travelling companions attended this service, and so, surprisingly, did Nan Inta. It was a black, stormy evening with only a few persons present. They sat on the floor, and San Ya Wichai avowed his intention to remain a faithful Christian. He prostrated himself on the floor and prayed that God would provide him with food and that the Holy Spirit would touch his friends. He prayed that Jesus would come and set up his throne in the land. Wilson observed that San Ya Wichai prayed simply and in such a child-like manner that, "The Spirit of God *must* have been in that prayer." Nan Inta also prayed a moving prayer, and they closed the prayer meeting with hymns and injunctions to San Ya Wichai. He left the next day.¹⁷¹

From this time on, Nan Inta evidently resumed his place in the life of the church and the Laos Mission. He was again employed as a language teacher and Bible translator. Later in the year McGilvary described Nan Inta as meek, humble, faithful, and a good scholar who was "our brightest trophy of the power of the gospel."¹⁷² The record as we have it never explains why Nan Inta came back to the church, and we can only surmise that he felt that there was no immediate threat to his life and well-being by doing so.

McGilvary and Dr. Vrooman, meanwhile, continued on their extended tour of the North. They left Monday, 15 April 1872, and their ultimate destination was Luang Prabang, which McGilvary termed the "sixth state" of the North. They proposed to survey several key cities to see which ones should one day become new stations. They passed through Chiang Rai, Chiang Saen, and Chiang Khong, and then went down river to Luang Prabang. Both McGilvary and Vrooman were deeply moved by the beauty of the river, the high mountains, and the rushing rapids they experienced. They spent six days in Luang Prabang and then travelled on to Nan, Phrae, and finally back to Chiang Mai. Of all the places they visited, McGilvary lavished the most praise and attention on Nan. He wrote that Nan, "was well governed, though it long continued conservative as regards the adoption of foreign ways and the welcoming of foreign traders." He added, "I fell in love with Nan at first sight, and marked it for a future mission station."¹⁷³

The closing days of 1872 brought a further modest increase in the number of members belonging to the Chiang Mai Church. Three men received baptism on 29 December 1872. They were Lung ("uncle") In, Lung Daeng, and Noi Choi (sometimes spelled "Chai"). Lung In had lived with the McGilvays for about two years, for reasons unknown. Lung Daeng had come to Vrooman's hospital seeking cure for a disease the

¹⁷¹Wilson to Irving, 24 April 1872 [and 30 April 1872], v. 3, BFM. Emphasis in the original. See also Vrooman, undated letter, *Foreign Missionary* 32, 2(July 1873): 53-57.

¹⁷²McGilvary, "For the Little Folks," *North Carolina Presbyterian* New Series 5, 266(5 February 1873): 4; and McGilvary, letter dated 10 April 1872, *Foreign Missionary* 31, 5(October 1872): 150-51.

¹⁷³McGilvary, *Half Century*, 158. For details of the tour see, *Half Century*, 151-58; and Vrooman, undated letter, *Foreign Missionary* 32, 2(July 1873): 53-57.

spirit doctors could not heal. The McGilvarys' son, Evander, also joined the church on this occasion. At this same time the church Session, meaning Wilson and McGilvary, dropped the three "old" members who had long ceased to participate in church life. These additions and subtractions left the northern Thai membership of First Church standing at six, including Nan Inta, San Ya Wichai, and Nan Ta as well as the three baptized in December.¹⁷⁴ McGilvary, however, did not seem particularly enthusiastic about these converts. The last year or two had been discouraging. The missionaries had put a great deal of effort into their work, and they felt that they had little to show in return. McGilvary avowed that only his belief in the biblical promise that Christianity must triumph throughout the world, including in Chiang Mai, sustained him.¹⁷⁵

Things did not improve in the first days of the new year. Sophia McGilvary had long been unwell, and on 3 January 1873 the McGilvarys left for Bangkok. McGilvary himself journeyed with his family for just a few days and then headed overland to Lampang, Phrae, and Nan. As he recounted the matter later, McGilvary was especially concerned with one particular *chao* in Nan, named Chao Chaiasan, a nephew of the Prince of Nan and an important person in his own right. He eventually attained a high administrative office in Nan under the title Chao Borirak. McGilvary first met him in Chiang Mai and then renewed their acquaintance during his 1872 visit to Nan with Vrooman. Chao Chaiasan, much like Nan Inta, had an abiding interest in cosmological issues and appeared quite taken with Christianity. McGilvary hoped to deepen that interest on this trip, and the two of them spent many hours conversing on scientific as well as religious subjects. During his earlier visit to Nan McGilvary had correctly predicted a solar eclipse for June 1872, and he now reported that the event had impressed Chaiasan almost as profoundly as the prediction of the 1868 eclipse had influenced Nan Inta. McGilvary claimed that Chao Chaiasan "...seems to be fully convinced of the truth of our system of geography and astronomy, and has but little doubt as to the truth of Christianity."¹⁷⁶ McGilvary was fully aware that the conversion of Chao Chaiasan would greatly facilitate the founding of a station in Nan. He never did convert, however, and McGilvary later observed, "Our walks by day and our talks by night are never to be forgotten. But the convenient season to make a public profession never came. He lived in hope of seeing a station in Nan, but died not long before the station was established."¹⁷⁷

Leaving Nan, McGilvary hurried southward to meet his family in Bangkok and from there to travel on to the United States. It would be two full years before they returned to Chiang Mai. McGilvary's visit to his home state of North Carolina was a sad one in some ways. The ravages of the American Civil War were still apparent eight years

¹⁷⁴Sessional Records, 1 December and 29 December 1872, pp. 27-29; and McGilvary to Irving, 4 December 1872, v. 3, BFM.

¹⁷⁵McGilvary to Irving, 4 December 1872, v. 3, BFM. The final sentence is an allusion to Isaiah 60:22.

¹⁷⁶McGilvary, "For the Little Folks," *North Carolina Presbyterian* New Series 5, 280(14 May 1873): 4. See also McGilvary, *Half Century*, 161-63; and McGilvary to Irving, 28 February 1873, v. 3, BFM.

¹⁷⁷McGilvary, *Half Century*, 163.

after it ended. But he had a good visit. He addressed numerous audiences concerning the importance of foreign missions, and he found a replacement for Dr. Vrooman.¹⁷⁸

The McGilvarys left three missionaries behind in Chiang Mai, the Wilsons and Dr. Vrooman. By June 1873, as we have seen, Dr. Vrooman left Chiang Mai and the Wilsons were entirely on their own. They felt it was a lonely time with the pressure of all the work on them. Things became particularly difficult in September 1873 when the city experienced a great deal of illness and Wilson had to fill McGilvary's shoes by treating over a thousand patients with quinine. Wilson otherwise had to devote time to overseeing the construction of their new house. He, like McGilvary, experienced various delays and frustrations in the process. There were no new converts during 1873 or 1874, and two of the six active northern Thai members—Nan Ta and Lung Dang—died during Wilson's tenure. Nan Ta's death especially troubled Wilson because during his search for a cure Nan Ta allowed spirit doctors to perform their rites over him, which was tantamount to rejecting Christianity in Wilson's eyes.¹⁷⁹ The other event of note to take place during 1873 was Siam Presbytery's action to take Nan Inta "under care of presbytery" as a candidate for ordination as a minister.¹⁸⁰

The year 1874 belonged entirely to the Wilsons, and by and large it went along much as the previous year had. Wilson described his work as "varied." He had to oversee the work of the mission compound. He visited people in their homes. He provided medicines to the ill. He spent some time most days teaching theology to Nan Inta. In June he wrote, "The people come as of old, and many an hour is given up to receiving their desultory visits."¹⁸¹ After seven years in Chiang Mai, the missionaries continued to have an impact on the daily lives of its residents and visitors. They had become an important alternative for health care, and evidently more and more people were trusting their pills and potions. At that deeper cognitive level, people still had not "absorbed" or had their fill of these exotic Western residents. The Wilsons were carrying on the missionary dialogue with northern Siam, and the public still actively pursued that dialogue several years after it had begun. It would be awhile yet before the people of Chiang Mai could feel nonchalant about the missionaries.

The relationship of Christianity to northern Thai culture remained at the heart of the dialogue. In 1868 Nan Inta and Nan Chai tried to introduce to the missionaries the concept of a non-confrontational "soft" conversion. They wanted to be Christians without publicly declaring their change in religious alliance. McGilvary and Wilson, as we have seen, rejected such a possibility out of hand. They required of the converts a "hard" conversion whatever the cost or danger. In early 1874, Noi Choi, one of those

¹⁷⁸McGilvary, *Half Century*, 166. For McGilvary's trip to North Carolina and its impact, see C., "Visit From a Missionary," *North Carolina Presbyterian* New Series 5, 300(1 Oct 1873): 2; "The Synod of North Carolina," *North Carolina Presbyterian* New Series 5, 320(25 Feb 1873): 2; D.C.R., "Rev. Daniel McGilvary," *North Carolina Presbyterian* New Series 7, 320 (25 Feb 1874): 1; and "A Missionary Visit to Davidson College," *North Carolina Presbyterian* New Series 7, 321(4 Mar 1874): 1.

¹⁷⁹Wilson to Irving, 9 December 1872, 1 September 1873, 30 September 1873, and Wilson, "Annual Report of the North Laos Mission, 30 September 1873, v. 3. BFM.

¹⁸⁰"Sessional Records," 30-34.

¹⁸¹Wilson, letter, 5 June 1874, *Foreign Missionary* 33, 7(December 1874): 214-218.

baptized in December 1872 entered the fray. He was living in the missionary compound in early 1874, and his is a sad story. Several of his children had become debt slaves to a *chao*, a “princess,” to whom he owed debts. The story was complicated by the fact that before his conversion he had been accused of being *phi kha*, that is the cause of spirit possessions. The charge wasn’t proven, but while he was gone on a trip he and several family members were again charged with being *phi ka*, and this time they were found guilty. The family had to sell its possessions for almost nothing and flee northward. On his return, Noi Choi got the *chao uparat* to overturn the judgment and then went North to bring back the rest of his family. Some had died, however, before he could bring them back. Wilson himself felt that the “princess” to whom Noi Choi was in debt had treated him unfairly.

Noi Choi’s already difficult situation was compounded by a falling out of sorts with Wilson. Wilson reported in June 1874 that he had suspended Noi Choi for “complicity in spirit worship.” Noi Choi had allowed a spirit doctor onto the mission compound to care for his sick grandchild who was visiting him, and Wilson caught them making spirit offerings and using holy water. He demanded they leave, and when the spirit doctor began to argue Wilson took the water and threw it out the window. Noi Choi tried to explain that the rite really wasn’t spirit propitiation, but Wilson was not impressed with his reasoning. Wilson felt that Noi Choi had become indifferent to Christianity and suspected that he had converted only to get the missionaries to pay off his debts.¹⁸²

Underlying the personal drama of this confrontation lay central questions concerning the nature of religious and socio-cultural boundaries. From the beginning and especially in the months before the persecution of September 1869, McGilvary and Wilson consistently affirmed the necessity of clear boundaries between Christianity and Northern States’ society. In 1872 Noi Choi and Wilson entered into a “discussion” as to where to draw those boundaries. Wilson’s own words portray Noi Choi as a victim of harsh circumstances and patent injustices, but Wilson’s actions and attitudes seemed only to have added to Noi Choi’s burdens. From Wilson’s perspective, Noi Choi had turned against God and the Truth by allowing a demon-worshipping spirit doctor into the mission compound. He had profaned the mission itself. However much he might sympathize with Noi Choi, Wilson couldn’t allow him to get away with such actions—presumably for Noi Choi’s own sake as much as anything else. Wilson, in this instance once again drew hard, clear boundaries between Christianity and culture for reasons that he perceived to be of dire necessity. He did not intentionally treat Noi Choi harshly. Noi Choi, on the other hand, tried to draw the boundaries between Christianity and northern Thai culture more loosely in a way that echoed Nan Inta’s previous attempts at making a “soft” conversion to Christianity. He evidently did not see the ceremonies conducted on behalf of his grandson as “animistic” or as “spirit propitiation.” Those are Western religious categories that he would have found confusing and not have been aware of in any event. He was simply seeking to deal with his grandson’s illness with the cultural and medical resources at hand. Noi Choi certainly was not renouncing his Christian faith, and after his suspension he applied for readmission a total of three times. He was finally

¹⁸²Wilson to Irving, 5 June 1874, v. 3, BFM. Printed in Wilson, letter, 5 June 1874, *Foreign Missionary* 33, 7(December 1874): 214-218.

readmitted to the church in 1876.¹⁸³ Noi Choi's suspension in May 1874 was another important moment in the history of the northern Thai church. His case was one of the first of its kind, and the manner in which Wilson handled it helped to define the relationship of the northern Thai church to its larger culture.

It serves well to look upon the issue of boundaries between Christianity and northern Thai society and culture as a process of negotiation between three parties. The obvious parties were the Laos Mission and the northern Thai people. The less immediately obvious party to these negotiations were the converts to Christianity. The mission and most of those northern Thais who thought about such things both agreed that there should be clear boundaries although they drew those boundaries at different points. Each wanted to protect itself from the other. Wilson, thus, refused to allow any participation in northern Thai ceremonies and disallowed the use of indigenous folkways and folk medical practices. He held out for a new set of beliefs, values, and consequent behaviors that emphasized the gulf between the converts and their former religion. The case of a widow who lived in a nearby village who did not convert indicates where most of the citizens of Chiang Mai drew those same boundaries. She had become interested in Christianity and decided to convert. Her relatives, however, threatened her with the dangerous consequences of abandoning spirit propitiation, and she quickly gave up her intention and returned to temple worship. The woman told Wilson that she still paid homage to Jesus every day. She, that is, opted for the soft conversion originally advocated by Nan Inta and Nan Chai in 1868. Wilson, of course, could not accept the validity of her decision.¹⁸⁴ Her family, on the other hand, evidently did not care where she gave her personal religious loyalty. They insisted only that she continue to join in communal religious life because of the inherent danger to the woman, the family, and their community of acting otherwise.

Both Wilson and the widow's family drew the boundary line between Christianity and northern Thai culture at the same point, that is participation in communal religious ritual. Wilson and all of his future colleagues in the Laos Mission refused to permit any participation in Buddhist or animistic ritual while the northern Thai sense of communal unity demanded it. Those rites and practices lay at the very heart of that unity. They tied community members to their ancestors and their past and allowed the community to live in harmony with the spiritual powers that inhabited their world. When disharmony broke out, these rites and practices provided an avenue for reconciliation. They also provided for the well-being of the community and the salvation of individuals through communal merit-making activities. Northern Thai communities, thus, rejected the Laos Mission's intention to create a second, religiously independent social structure in the North. They refused to accept the introduction into their midst of an alternative, exclusive ritual. They could not abide, in short, the thought of two distinct ritual and spiritual traditions in one community.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³“Sessional Records,” 32, 41.

¹⁸⁴Wilson to Executive Committee [annual report], 30 September 1874, v. 3, BFM.

¹⁸⁵See Kumool Chinawong and Herbert R. Swanson, “Religion and the Formation of Community in Northern Thailand: The Case of Christianity in Nan Province” (Paper delivered at the Fifth International Conference on Thai Studies, London, July 1993); and

The future northern Thai Christian community, the third partner in the dialogue over boundaries, had to live in the “space” between these two sharply drawn lines. The missionary line excluded participation in any form of indigenous religious practices. Northern Thai society’s line was the hard and fast expectation that the members of a given community would necessarily participate in its ritual and spiritual practices whatever their personal feelings or inclinations. The cases of Noi Choi and the widow demonstrate that there was more than one solution to the problem of how to accept the new religion and yet live with indigenous practices. Noi Choi, finally, put himself fully in the Christian camp when his attempted compromise failed. The widow remained on the other side of that line while retaining, so Wilson stated, a personal allegiance to the person of Jesus. This drama of choice, was repeated time and again throughout the history of the Laos Mission and the northern Thai church.

Meanwhile, off stage in Bangkok, what we have described here as a three-way dialogue between the missionaries, their converts, and the people of the North more generally was about to have a fourth partner added to the mix—Bangkok. We will remember that King Chulalongkorn ascended to the throne while still young and suffered through a long period of regency, which ended in 1873. The following year, Siam and the British government in India concluded a treaty, the Chiang Mai Treaty of 1874, which aimed at resolving problems between the British and the ruling class of the Northern States. One of the provisions of the treaty had considerable impact on the future course of the Christian movement in the North: by that provision, the Siamese government would appoint a “commissioner” (*kha luang*) whose task it was to see that the treaty was actually carried out in the North. The man King Chulalongkorn chose for the position of commissioner was Phra Narin (Phum Srichaiyan), a civil servant who spoke English well, had traveled to Europe on a diplomatic mission, and had experience in governmental finances. He was evidently a skilled diplomat, and his assignment as Chiang Mai’s first resident Siamese commissioner required him to use those skills to the fullest. Phra Narin was later rewarded with the new name and title of Phraya Thep Prachun for his work in the North. Historians argue that the treaty itself and the appointment of a Siamese government representative to reside in Chiang Mai marked an important step forward in the eventual full incorporation of the Northern States into the Siamese state. It was also, as we will see in Chapter Four, an important development in the story of northern Thai Christianity. Phraya Thep Prachun was a friend and even ally of the Laos Mission during a crucial time in its history.¹⁸⁶

While the Wilsons patiently struggled to maintain the work of the Laos Mission, meanwhile, the McGilvays arrived back in Bangkok in October 1874. The New Year, however, still found them in Bangkok. During his stay, McGilvary worked with the U.S. Consul, General Partridge, to try to solve one of the Laos Mission’s most perplexing problems—regular mail service. The Siamese government had previously refused to take responsibility for mail service to Chiang Mai, but now the situation had changed.

Stanley J. Tambiah, *Buddhism and the Spirit Cults in North-east Thailand* (Cambridge University Press, 1970), 54-57.

¹⁸⁶See Herb Swanson, “The Political & Diplomatic Setting of Northern Thai Church & Missionary History in the ‘Era of Resistance,’ 1867-1882.” *HeRB: Herb’s Research Journal* 9 (March 2004). At herbswanson.com.

McGilvary reported in December 1874 that the government would be soon sending Phraya Thep Prachun to Chiang Mai, and McGilvary's old friend the *phra klang*, or Foreign Minister, agreed to include missionary mail in the monthly government dispatches that were to be sent between Chiang Mai and Bangkok.¹⁸⁷

The McGilvarys finally left for Chiang Mai in December 1874. Accompanying them was Dr. Marion Cheek, a native North Carolinian and the replacement for Dr. Vrooman. The party had a largely uneventful trip upriver except for a brief encounter in Tak with four Baptist missionaries from Nova Scotia. They were on an exploratory trip to ascertain the feasibility of establishing a Baptist mission in the North aimed particularly at working with the Karen. Although McGilvary doubted the practicability of such an undertaking, he welcomed the possibility of a Baptist mission station in Tak where it could facilitate Presbyterian communications between Chiang Mai and Bangkok. Before they parted ways the two missionary parties shared a final evening prayer service on a sandbar on the Ping River.¹⁸⁸ Nothing ever came of the putative Baptist mission in Tak, and meanwhile the McGilvarys and Cheek finally reached Chiang Mai in February 1875.

If McGilvary hoped for an immediate expansion of medical work he was sorely disappointed. Cheek's first year, 1875, was a repeat of Vrooman's experience in 1872-1873. He did perform some impressive operations and, in McGilvary's own words, "He has had a few very successful patients in the King's palace which will greatly aid his practice."¹⁸⁹ Otherwise, however, he did little medical work, one reason being, apparently, a lack of medicines to dispense.¹⁹⁰ Cheek was not a Vrooman, however, and in spite of the problems he faced in starting up missionary medical work, he avowed in September 1875 that he expected to enjoy his work as a doctor in Chiang Mai. He had, by that time, also begun to articulate a vision for that work. In August he had written to New York that,

...I have done no work. I have been studying the language a part of the time; but I have not had an opportunity of doing any medical work since I came here. And, indeed the prospect in the future, I must say, is not cheering. Unless I have a hospital here, my medical work will be a failure. I may give out medicine to any who come for it and visit as many

¹⁸⁷McGilvary to Irving, 17 December 1874, v. 3, BFM; and McGilvary, "For the Family," dated 4 Jan 1875, *North Carolina Presbyterian* New Series 7, 381(30 April 1875): 4. This option did not prove viable in the long run. In the early 1880s McGilvary was again seeking a solution to the mails problem. See McGilvary, "Letter from Siam," dated 23 June 1880, *North Carolina Presbyterian* New Series 13, 664(29 September 1880): 1.

¹⁸⁸McGilvary to Irving, 21 October 1874, v. 3, BFM.; *Half Century*, 167; and McGilvary, "For the Family," dated 15 Jan 1875, *North Carolina Presbyterian* New Series 8, 350(4 June 1875): 4. Also See, Anders P. Hovemyr. *In Search of the Karen King: A Study in Karen Identity with Special Reference to 19th Century Karen Evangelism in Northern Thailand* (Uppsala: Studia Missionalia Upsaliensia, 1989), 119-121.

¹⁸⁹McGilvary, "For the Family," letter dated 1 Oct 1875, *North Carolina Presbyterian* New Series 9, 417(7 January 1876): 4.

¹⁹⁰Cheek to Irving, 3 September 1875, v. 3.

as I can; but this will do little good except to relieve suffering to a slight extent. I would be able to reach only a very few in this way. I could visit only a small number, and my practice would be very unsatisfactory both to the patient and my self. The people are scattered and few in number.

Cheek argued, “A hospital is necessary if a medical man is expected to do enough work to justify keeping him here.”¹⁹¹ This sounded just like Vrooman.

McGilvary seconded Cheek’s desire for a hospital. He observed that when Cheek treated patients in their homes they also made use of animistic cures and, thus, did not give full and complete credit to missionary medicine for their cures. Therefore, it was important for the mission to give them institutional care—for the sake of their souls as well their bodies. McGilvary wrote, “One great object we expect to gain from medical missions among the Laos is to break the superstitious belief in the power of charms and incantations.”¹⁹² It is important to note, however, that McGilvary’s support for a hospital was quite different from Cheek’s vision. Where Cheek viewed the matter primarily as a professional, medical issue, McGilvary saw the need as essentially evangelistic. Cheek wanted to create an institutional environment that would ensure the proper healing of his patients. McGilvary went further. He wanted an environment that would also encourage patients to convert to Christianity.

In mid-March 1875, in the meantime, Wilson wrote a letter to the Board in New York describing the Laos Mission’s situation during the Wilsons’ difficult months alone in Chiang Mai and before the first spurts of conversions that would take place later in the year. It was a discouraging time in spite of the arrival of the McGilvays and Cheek. Wilson described the pervasive influence of animism in northern Thai society and how it insinuated itself into every part of daily life. He also described the numerous hinderances the mission faced. He concluded, however, on a more positive note, praying for a stronger faith and affirming his trust in God. He wrote, “He [God] has good in store for this land. He will gather his chosen ones unto himself. Not one shall be lost.”¹⁹³

While the “in gathering” would take some time yet and church life continued to languish, one important event did take place. The church held its first ever congregational meeting on 10 April 1875 for the purpose of electing Nan Inta as its first northern Thai elder. Presbyterian church government recognized two ordained offices, clergy and elders. Elders were members of the local church’s “session,” the body that governed the church. The session was composed of all the elders in a church plus the minister, if there was one. Prior to this time, the Chiang Mai Church session was made up of only ordained missionary clergy—an unusual and awkward arrangement at best. Nan Inta’s election, thus, regularized and normalized the government of the church so that it had a “proper” session for the first time.¹⁹⁴ There were some other stirrings of life in the church. By October it appeared that Nan Inta’s wife was considering conversion.

¹⁹¹Cheek to Ellinwood, 21 August 1875, v. 3, BFM.

¹⁹²McGilvary, “For the Family,” letter dated 1 Oct 1875, *North Carolina Presbyterian* New Series 9, 417(7 January 1876): 4]

¹⁹³Wilson to Irving, 15 March 1875, v. 3, BFM.

¹⁹⁴Sessional Records, 35-36. See also McGilvary, “For the Family,” letter dated 1 October 1875, *North Carolina Presbyterian* New Series 9, 417(7 January 1876): 4. Note that McGilvary, *Half Century*, 169, incorrectly dates Nan Inta’s ordination as 1876.

Dr. Cheek's language teacher, Nan Chai, also seemed ready to become a Christian. In November 1875, McGilvary speculated that a patient of Dr. Cheek's, Boon Ruen, might also convert.¹⁹⁵

McGilvary was particularly interested in Nan Chai. He was a younger man, and McGilvary felt that his educational background made him well-qualified to become an evangelist and minister. Hardly any issue concerned McGilvary more than the training of northern Thai church leadership. In stating his hopes for Nan Chai, he avowed, "No burden weighs so heavily on my own mind now as the prayer that God will raise up laborers among the Laos themselves. From our distant and isolated position we cannot hope to have a large reinforcement of foreign laborers." He also wrote, "The substantial character of the Laos as a race will I have no doubt enable more to be accomplished thru native assistants than in many other heathen lands."¹⁹⁶ In 1875, however, McGilvary was not yet in a position to act on his concern for developing the abilities of northern Thai Christians to assist in the work of the Laos Mission.

Wilson's earlier assessment of the difficult position of the mission remained entirely correct. Few of its projects came to fruition. Medical work languished. There was nothing to be done in leadership training. The struggle to establish a press, likewise, led nowhere. While on his furlough, McGilvary had asked the American Bible Society for financial assistance in obtaining a northern Thai font. Although the A. B. S. granted him the funds, he was not able to make use of them because he had made no progress towards getting that type font made.¹⁹⁷ In May 1875, after his return to Chiang Mai, McGilvary alerted the Board of Foreign Missions that he still wanted to obtain a font of type if possible. He suggested that his brother-in-law, Cornelius Bradley, might be willing to help have it made. Bradley knew central Thai well and had a scholarly bent of mind. He also had been trained by his father, Dr. Bradley, as a printer. McGilvary sent along with the letter samples taken from well-known northern Thai scribes, including Chao Tamalangka, reputed to be the best scribe in the North.¹⁹⁸

The mission wanted a press so it could create a northern Thai Christian literature and especially so it could publish a northern Thai Bible. Translation work, however, was not progressing very rapidly either. McGilvary reported in May that he had not been able to revise his preliminary translation of the Gospel of Matthew because of the press of other work. Thus, he could not send it to be printed as soon as a font was available.¹⁹⁹ Nine months later McGilvary was still struggling to finish the revision of Matthew. At

¹⁹⁵McGilvary, "For the Family," letter dated 1 October 1875, *North Carolina Presbyterian* New Series 9, 417(7 January 1876): 4; and, McGilvary to Irving, 1 November 1875, v. 3, BFM.

¹⁹⁶McGilvary to Irving, 1 November 1875, v. 3, BFM.

¹⁹⁷The ABS, in turn, contacted the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society of the Presbyterian Church USA for these funds. The WFMS was very willing and collected more than the \$1,500 requested. The WFMS stated, "We count this among the highest honors which God has ever put upon us as a Society, and we wonder why He chose us for such privilege." Annual Report of the WFMS, 1875, 10-11 in *Woman's Work for Woman*, after issue number 12, 1875.

¹⁹⁸McGilvary to Irving, 2 May 1875, v. 3, BFM.

¹⁹⁹McGilvary to Irving, 2 May 1875, v. 3, BFM.

that time he acknowledged that even his revision was of limited quality because he lacked the critical and linguistic tools needed, such as a Greek text of the New Testament and access to the latest in textual criticism.²⁰⁰ Wilson, in spite of his failure to make the mission's lithographic press work, shared McGilvary's hope of establishing a press in Chiang Mai. Dr. Cheek was less sanguine. He observed that setting up a press in Chiang Mai would be an expensive venture. He doubted that the benefits would justify that expense. Cheek advised the Board that it would be better to use the Siam Mission's press for printing northern Thai materials and invest the money saved in other more worthwhile ventures. Cheek also correctly predicted that it would take a long time to translate the Bible.²⁰¹

Conclusion

McGilvary, however, was ever the dreamer and the schemer. In November 1875, he alerted the Board to yet another scheme of his. It seems he had a nephew, presumably in North Carolina, who was interested in becoming a missionary. McGilvary wrote to him to suggest that he should find another ordained clergy with the same interest and the two of them come out to Chiang Mai. They could either join the so-called "Northern Presbyterian Church" Board, the one McGilvary worked under. Or, they might come out under the Southern Presbyterian Church's Board. He allowed, "I don't think it would be material. Coming under the Southern Board would probably secure a greater interest for the present among his own friends in the South."²⁰² McGilvary probably had several ends in mind. Certainly, he wanted to strengthen mission work in Chiang Mai. At the same time, he likely wanted to promote greater cooperation between the Northern and Southern Presbyterian churches, which had split at the time of the Civil War with the new Southern denomination taking the name of the Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS). He long hoped, as a Southerner working under the Northern Board, for their reunion and might have seen his proposal as a modest way to promote cooperation.²⁰³ During his recent furlough he had seen and helped spark mission interest in his native North Carolina, and he undoubtedly wished to provide an outlet for that interest. Nothing came of his proposal, but it certainly was indicative of his creative ability to see possibilities, and the vast challenges he faced in the Northern States clearly left him undaunted.

²⁰⁰McGilvary to Irving, 22 February 1876, v. 3, BFM.

²⁰¹Cheek to Ellinwood, 21 August 1875, v. 3, BFM.

²⁰²McGilvary to Irving, 1 November 1875, v. 3, BFM. Emphasis in the original.

²⁰³See Cornelia Kneedler Hudson, "Daniel McGilvary in Siam: Foreign Missions, the Civil War, and Presbyterian Unity." *American Presbyterian* 69, 4 (Winter 1991): 283-293.

Chapter Four

Unfurling the Banner, 1876-1878

Introduction

For many years the Laos Mission's "mission year" went from September to September, and as we have described it in Chapter Three, the mission year 1875-1876 thus far has sounded about as futile for the Laos Mission as any year since 1869. By January 1876, however, it was apparent that something was happening, and in hindsight it is clear that the mission, in fact, almost imperceptibly reached and passed a turning point that very month, and things were looking up. Renewal was in the air.

Renewal

The improvement in the mission's situation may have been modest, but it was not imperceptible. On 2 January 1876, the first Sunday of the new year, Chiang Mai Church celebrated the sacrament of holy communion, which celebration embodied and symbolized the changes that were taking place. As was normally the case in Presbyterian churches, new members were received at worship services when communion was held; and during this particular service the small congregation received two new members. They were Pa (Aunt) Kamun and Mae (Mother) Noo. Pa Kamun was the widow of Noi Sunya, the martyr. Mae Noo was the wife of Lung (Uncle) In, a Christian convert. These two women were the first northern Thai women to convert to Christianity, and Mae Noo and Lung In became the first northern Thai Christian couple.²⁰⁴ From this point on conversions began to accelerate. In September 1876 the mission baptized three more women including Yai (Grandmother) Peng, the wife of Nan Inta and two daughters of Noi Sunya. The church's session felt especially pleased because the two girls had learned to read and displayed a satisfactory knowledge of the Gospel of John.²⁰⁵ As of September 1876, then, the church numbered nine northern Thai members, including five women and four men, which made it larger than it had been before the persecution seven years earlier.

Kate Wilson, recuperating in the United States, hailed the conversion of the five women as being good news indeed. She wrote of the Laos Mission, "The missionaries seem to be very much encouraged, and I think have great occasion to be, as the people seem anxious to hear the gospel." She went on to observe, however, that it cost northern Thai women a great deal to convert.²⁰⁶ She may have had Yai Peng in mind. According to McGilvary, Yai Peng suffered for her interest in Christianity even before she was baptized. In July 1876 her brother, the family patriarch, called on her to assist in certain

²⁰⁴McGilvary, *Half Century*, 170; "Sessional Records," 38-40; McGilvary to Irving, 22 February 1876, v. 3, BFM.; and, McGilvary, "For the Family," letter dated 1 October 1875, *North Carolina Presbyterian* New Series 9, 417(7 Jan 1876): 4.

²⁰⁵"Sessional Records," 42-44.

²⁰⁶Kate Wilson, "Laos," *Woman's Work for Woman* 7, 7(September 1877): 243.

family animistic activities, and she refused. He then summoned both Yai Peng and her husband, Nan Inta, to a family conference at which he became abusive and threatening. McGilvary recounts,

[Yai Peng] told him that as to that he might do as he pleased but that she was never going to worship the spirits. She was willing to redeem herself for life by paying to the family a small sum, but that she could not again join the family directly or indirectly in their worship. The brother somewhat calmed down and said he would consider that proposition, though insisting still that his sister should be an alien to the family.²⁰⁷

Those words, “an alien to the family,” could well serve as the title of a social history of early northern Thai Christianity. Yai Peng and most other converts, men as well as women, had to step beyond the normal boundaries of their society and culture in order to become Christians. The point is worth making again that the relatives of converts felt that the converts in their family were acting in ways that would bring the anger of the spirits down on them and the family. Families thus felt threatened by the conversion of their relatives, and they took steps to deal with that threat.

Conversions, however, continued to take place. In November, one of Nan Inta’s daughters, Kam Tip, was baptized into the church, and on the first Sunday of December 1876 the church received another four men into its membership. Among them were Noi Wong, Nan Inta’s son-in-law, and Noi Aliya, the first convert from the city of Chiang Mai itself. Both of these men were learning to read Siamese and had received treatment from Dr. Cheek at his makeshift hospital. The other two, Nan Panya and Lung Tooi, had also received medical treatment from Dr. Cheek.²⁰⁸ McGilvary’s account of Nan Panya’s conversion is especially helpful because it reflects both Nan Panya’s feelings about his conversion and his neighbors’ reactions to that conversion. Nan Panya had been a devout individual prior to his coming under Cheek’s care, but during his month in Cheek’s rudimentary hospital he lost interest in his former religion. He stated, according to McGilvary, that his heart was no longer in the temple. McGilvary also recorded his neighbors’ reactions,

The villagers wondered what spell had come over him to keep him from the temple and his idols. There was a general mourning over his defection. That he should give up all his store of merit, the accumulation of a devotee of three score years and ten and become crazy over the notion of the foreign teachers was surely a sad comment on human fallibility from their stand point. He was the one man of the village of whom all of this would not have been expected.”²⁰⁹

However we view the matter, a gap had opened up between Nan Panya and his neighbors. For Nan Panya, his former beliefs and religious activities had lost meaning because he had discovered a new set of religious truths, making conversion to

²⁰⁷McGilvary to Irving, 12 August 1876, v. 3, BFM. Emphasis in original.

²⁰⁸“Sessional Records,” 45-49; and McGilvary, “The Laos Mission,” letter dated 5 December 1876, *North Carolina Presbyterian* New Series 10, 485(25 April 1877): 1.

²⁰⁹McGilvary to Irving, 4 December 1876, v. 3, BFM. Emphasis in the original.

Christianity a positive, meaningful act. His neighbors, however, viewed his conversion as the act of some one who had lost his senses. Nan Panya and his friends and relatives, thus, suddenly inhabited two different spiritual and cognitive worlds.

The key factor in the conversion of Nan Panya and the other three men who were baptized in December 1876 was that they had all been patients in Cheek's hospital. We will remember that just a few years previously McGilvary had supported Cheek's proposal for a hospital because he believed that it would be a good place for evangelizing both patients and their families. In these four cases and in several others in this period, he was correct. His strategy calls to mind Gerald Grob's study of nineteenth-century American mental hospitals. According to Grob, many Protestants in the years before 1860 considered mental illness a moral problem caused by failing to live up to the norms and values of rural, evangelical Protestant American culture. They saw the mental hospital as the perfect tool for retraining social deviants in a controlled environment in which those in charge could carry out a scheme of "moral therapy" to cure the mentally ill. This moral therapy often included occupational therapy, religious exercises, games and amusements, and an emphasis on a safe, humane environment.²¹⁰ It is helpful to see all of the institutions created by the Laos Mission as places of moral therapy and religious retraining aimed at the religious conversion and sociocultural transformation of their "inmates". Those institutions consciously intended to create an environment conducive to the conversion of non-Christians, and they also sought to inculcate a new set of values and attitudes in Christians, particularly Christian children. The Laos Mission intended, then, to use its hospitals and schools to create a counter-culture as the seedbed for a fully Christianized northern Siam.

The road to that grand final goal, however, was not easy. The vast majority of northern Thai who came into contact with the missionaries rejected the idea of conversion, and even those who did convert did not always stay converted. The mission, for example, experienced a reverse with Mae Noo, one of the first two women converts. In early December 1876, the church's session suspended her from communion on charges of "complicity in spirit worship" and failure to exhibit "consistent Christian conduct."²¹¹ McGilvary blamed a foolish, worthless son for getting her into trouble. He was her only child, and Mae Noo loved him as only a mother can. She could refuse him almost nothing he wanted. McGilvary felt some remorse at having to suspend Mae Noo, and he wrote, "We were compelled to do so for the purity and discipline of the church, though we feel that great charity is due to her."²¹²

Even as the Christian community began to grow again, McGilvary continued to press for the geographical as well as the numerical expansion of the Christian

²¹⁰Gerald N. Grob, "Mental Illness, Indigency, and Welfare: the Mental Hospital in Nineteenth-Century America," in *Anonymous Americans: Explorations in Nineteenth-Century Social History*, ed. Tamara K. Hareven (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971), 250-79. See also Walter I. Trattner, *From Poor Law to Welfare State: A History of Social Welfare in America*, 3rd ed. (New York: Free Press, 1984), 56-61.

²¹¹"Sessional Records," 46-47.

²¹²McGilvary, "The Laos Mission," letter dated 5 December 1876, *North Carolina Presbyterian* New Series 10, 485(25 April 1877): 1. See also McGilvary to Irving, 4 December 1876, v. 3, BFM.

community. At the end of February 1876, he and Nan Inta left on a month-long tour northward. They visited Muang Kaan, Chiang Dao, Muang Ngai, and Muang Phrao, and McGilvary reported that they found generally attentive audiences and that their preaching made a deep impression on particular individuals.²¹³

Slowly, then, the mission's overall situation improved. Dr. Cheek contributed to that improvement when he brought back his new wife, Sarah Bradley Cheek, the daughter of the famous Dr. Bradley and step-sister of Sophia McGilvary, to Chiang Mai. They he arrived in early April 1876. The McGilvarys were clearly pleased with this wedding, not the least because it provided them with another worker, one who was born in Siam, spoke central Thai fluently, and was likely to remain on the field. McGilvary also hoped that married life would encourage Cheek to settle down finally to work. Such seemed to be the case, for by August McGilvary noted that Cheek's work was growing in spite of the fact that he refused to treat those who would not stay in his make-shift hospital. It was true that the number of patients declined somewhat, but McGilvary felt that the care given made a greater impact.²¹⁴ Another benefit derived from the hospital, in McGilvary's estimation, was that he could teach Siamese literacy to patients interested in Christianity. He had two purposes in teaching patients to read Siamese. First, they could read the Bible, which was translated in central Thai by this time. Second, McGilvary felt that the mission had more influence over those who were literate. About half of the small Christian group could read central Thai, and McGilvary believed that central Thai would become the "Christian dialect" of the North.²¹⁵

It cannot be said, however, that the mission's way forward was not without its setback. Kate Wilson's health, like her husband's, was seldom good while she lived in Chiang Mai, and early in 1876, she suffered from fevers and assorted other ailments. By April it was clear that she dared not stay on the field any longer, and the Wilsons left that month.²¹⁶ Or, again, McGilvary continued to work, for example, on his revisions of the translation of Matthew, but at some point either in 1875 or 1876, he seems to have turned over the actual translation of the Gospel to his wife, Sophia. A final product, even so, was still far from ready.²¹⁷ Or, again, McGilvary continued his cosmological dialogue with northern Siam's educated elite, but with only mixed results. He, for example, engaged Chao Rat Lamkan, a prince whom he styled as the most intelligent man in the North, in a discussion of the sphericity of the world and the Copernican world view. McGilvary provided him with a small "sea glass" to study the moon and stars and believed that he had convince the *chao* that the world is indeed round.²¹⁸ There was no indication, however, that he also believed in the doctrines of the Christian faith.

²¹³McGilvary to Irving, 29 March 1876, v. 3, BFM.

²¹⁴McGilvary to Rankin, 12 August 1876, v. 3, BFM; and Sessional Records, 40.

²¹⁵McGilvary, Laos Mission Annual Report, 1 October 1875 to 1 October 1876, v. 3, BFM.

²¹⁶McGilvary to Irving, 15 April 1876, v. 3, BFM.

²¹⁷McGilvary, Laos Mission Annual Report, 1 October 1875 to 1 October 1876, v. 3, BFM.

²¹⁸McGilvary, "For the Family," letter dated 21 Feb 1875, *North Carolina Presbyterian New Series* 9, 440(14 June 1876): 4; and McGilvary to Irving, 4 December 1876, v. 3, BFM.

By-and-large, however, 1876 was a good year. The mission achieved another modest success in June or thereabouts when McGilvary supervised the erection its first chapel. It was a small affair, made of bamboo, and McGilvary had it built mostly as an experiment, which he claimed in a letter to the Board was a successful one in that the chapel had been filled to overflowing several times.²¹⁹ The mission took another important step forward in November 1876 when it founded a Sunday school, its first regular program for Christian education. Prior to that time McGilvary had been teaching various converts and a few others how to read Siamese as time allowed. He found individual tutoring burdensome and organized the Sunday school, which met after worship on Sundays, as a way to teach Siamese literacy more efficiently. He called upon several members of the church who could read and write to teach others who could not. They used a Siamese translation of the Westminster “Shorter Catechism,” one of the classic statements of Presbyterian beliefs, as their text.²²⁰

Even in the always troublesome arena of politics, things seemed to have improved. Chao Intanon was friendly though really little interested in Christianity. Chao Mae Tip Keson, his wife and the dominant partner in the family, had evidently entered into her own personal dialogue with the small missionary community, and McGilvary claimed that she privately admitted the truth of Christianity. Cheek had treated her, and this, McGilvary further stated, put her under some obligation to the Laos Mission. More than this, however, he believed that in the last year or more the mission had made large inroads into the thinking of the northern Thai upper class. He asserted, “Others of the princes freely confess that Christianity is true and that Buddhism cannot last long.”²²¹ The presence of the Siamese “Judge” (*kha luang*) gave the missionaries further confidence that they and their converts need not fear political repression anymore. McGilvary acknowledge, however, that the so-called Second King, Chao Bunthawong, remained a worrisome concern. He compared Bunthawong to Intanon, stating that, “Physically and mentally he is a stronger man, and has a more *decided hostility* to anything foreign, and *Christianity* is evidently no exception.”²²²

There is no way of knowing with any certainty whether McGilvary was correct in his evaluation of Chao Mae Tip Keson’s actual views on the Christian religion and those of others in the ruling class, which he thought were disposed to admit to the truth of the Christian religion. On the one hand, he was there, and if anyone should know it was McGilvary. On the other hand simple northern Thai politeness on their side and his own need to maintain as good a press as possible on the other must leave us with some doubt as well. What does seem evident is that an important number of upper class *chao* were increasingly well-disposed towards the missionaries, whatever their personal religious views. It also seems clear that their dialogue with the West, which began in 1867 when the McGilvays arrived in Chiang Mai was continuing apace. The historian longs to go back to those years and to be the proverbial fly on the wall listening to discussions between East and West over the very nature of reality. We can’t, of course, but what we

²¹⁹McGilvary to Irving, 12 August 1876, v. 3, BFM.

²²⁰McGilvary to Irving, 4 December 1876, v. 3, BFM.

²²¹McGilvary to Irving, 4 December 1876, v. 3, BFM.

²²²McGilvary, “The Laos Mission,” letter dated 5 December 1876, *North Carolina Presbyterian* New Series 10, 485(25 April 1877): 1. Emphasis in the original.

can observe again is that the West, embodied in the Laos Mission, had arrived religiously, culturally, socially, and politically. The times were indeed changing.

The Laos Mission, in any event, could look back on 1876 with some satisfaction. The rate of conversions, always the mission's first concern, had picked up. Its political relationships had stabilized in a positive way. McGilvary wrote, "The whole year has probably been one of greater labor and greater success than any one year of my mission life."²²³

The year 1876 passed quietly into 1877, the new year being remarkable primarily for the fact that Christian *families* began to take shape for the first time. Several future leaders of the northern Thai church, furthermore, were numbered among the converts "won" during this year. The congregational records for the Chiang Mai Church show that on Sunday, 7 January 1877, McGilvary baptized three of Nan Inta's grandchildren. They were the very first northern Thai children to receive baptism. The following month, on 4 February 1877, he baptized Noi Intachak and Nai Pook. He noted approvingly that both of these young men gave a clear, biblically correct, and intelligent statement of their religious experience.²²⁴ McGilvary was an American evangelical and religious experience was important to him. He was, however, also a conservative, Old School Calvinist for whom the reasonable, intellectual exposition of that experience verified its correctness. Experience without elucidation was, at the very best, highly suspect. Noi Intachak particularly exemplified McGilvary's bias for the intellect by eventually becoming his personal student and one of the brightest prospects for church leadership until his untimely death in 1884. In his autobiography, McGilvary called Noi Intachak, "one of the finest young men I have ever known in that country."²²⁵

The following May Nan Suwan, from the village of Mae Dok Daeng near Doi Saket, received baptism. He was the son of Nan Panya, the elderly convert described above who had been baptized in December 1876 and died shortly thereafter. His father's conversion stirred an interest in Christianity in Nan Suwan, who was reported to have attended worship services at Chiang Mai Church regularly for some six months before his baptism at the age of 45.²²⁶ Nan Suwan demonstrated qualities of leadership, and he would soon develop into one of the Laos Mission's most capable local church leaders. He was also a man of some courage who willingly eschewed the idea of a hidden or silent conversion put forward at various times, as we have seen, by Nan Inta, Nan Chai, and others. He owed his patronage to either Chao Intanon or Chao Mae Tip Keson, and he was also the son-in-law of a village headman. For both these reasons, he felt obligated to ask permission publicly from his patron to convert. McGilvary later admitted that even he felt this might not be wise because it would force the *chao muang* and his wife to take a stand on conversion to Christianity. He feared that, while they had tolerated conversions unofficially, they might refuse official permission to the detriment of the mission. McGilvary, finally, decided that he would broach the subject with the royal

²²³McGilvary, "The Laos Mission," letter dated 5 December 1876, *North Carolina Presbyterian* New Series 10, 485(25 Apr 1877): 1.

²²⁴Sessional Records, 51-55.

²²⁵McGilvary, *Half Century*, 258.

²²⁶Sessional Records, 59-61; and McGilvary, letter dated 10 Aug 1877, *NCP* New Series 10, 521(2 Jan 1878): 4.

couple himself although he took Nan Suwan along when he did so. To his surprise, evidently, both them readily acceded to Nan Suwan's conversion. McGilvary was particularly struck by Chao Intanon's statement. McGilvary reported, "He joined in by sanctioning the same, stating that this was simply a question of duty for each one, involving no governmental questions at all, and went on to state the Bible doctrine as if it were nothing new and he was simply explaining what had ever been the law and custom of the land."²²⁷

We noted in Chapter One that state-sponsored Buddhism and animism were pillars on which the political power of Chiang Mai's rulers rested. The introduction of Christianity threatened that power sufficiently to cause Chao Kawilorot to take radical action against the incipient convert community. The American doctrine of the separation of church and state made no sense to him in his own situation. Here, however, less than a decade later his successor, if McGilvary was correct, virtually affirmed the principle that religion was a matter of personal conscience. He even acted as if this was the long-held northern Thai view of the matter. It is difficult to evaluate the significance of Intanon's statement. If he said what McGilvary claimed (and believed) he said, he was making a major concession to the "new religion" as well as stating a governing principle quite at odds with previous Northern States' political practice. Northern Thai society generally, as we have already seen, was not indifferent to conversions to Christianity; and northern Thai families, religious functionaries, and political leaders frequently actively opposed those conversions. We should also note that McGilvary, above, did not attribute this statement of principle to the more politically astute Chao Mae Tip Keson. She simply said that Nan Suwan could do as he chose. In the face of all of this, it would be notable if the *chao muang* of Chiang Mai affirmed the doctrine of the separation of church and state as McGilvary claimed. It is possible that he did. It is, perhaps, more likely that McGilvary heard in his words more of a statement of principle than Chao Intanon would have agreed to if pressed on the matter. Then, too, the *chao muang* was not much of a politician and may simply have gone too far in being agreeable. Without pressing the matter of whether or not Chao Intanon had affirmed an American-like principle of religious pluralism, this is a political and religious moment worth noting. Nan Suwan's initiative opened the doors of that religious pluralism just a notch wider. The relationship of state to religion in Chiang Mai was beginning to shift.

It was not all sweetness and light in Chiang Mai, however. In approving the baptism of Nan Suwan, Chao Intanon and Chao Mae Tip Keson were drawing the line against Chao Bunthawong who was himself doing what he could to frustrate the expansion of Christianity. The case of Lung (Uncle) Tooi illustrates the matter. Lung Tooi, we will remember, became a Christian in December 1876. On 2 April 1877, just weeks before McGilvary and Nan Suwan had their interview with the royal couple, he was brought before the session of the Chiang Mai Church on charges of Sabbath-breaking and condoning spirit worship in his home. Lung Tooi was anxious to clear himself of these charges, and in his own defense, according to the Sessional Records of the church, he stated that, "...he had received a positive order on Sab. morning from the Chau Haw Na [Chao Bunthawong] that he must go that day to assist in building a toop or

²²⁷McGilvary, letter dated 10 August 1877, *NCPNew Series* 10, 521(2 January 1878): 4; and "Sessional Records," 61-64.

be imprisoned. He went in the P.M. just in time to save himself from the penalty.”²²⁸ It was pointed out to Lung Tooi that the violation of the Sabbath was more dreadful than any human punishment, and he seemed to take the matter to heart. Regarding the charge of spirit worship, Lung Tooi avowed that he had risked expulsion from the family by teaching against animistic practices. In this particular case, he left his home when the family carried out their rites. The session found his arguments compelling, his attitude exemplary, and he was dismissed without punishment.

Lung Tooi stands as a powerful symbol of the “between-ness” of the northern Thai convert community throughout the period under study here. On one side stood the singly most powerful political figure in Chiang Mai and his faction, doing what they could to preserve their authority to order Lung Tooi to work when they saw fit, Christian Sabbath or not. On the other side was the Laos Mission and its injunctions to keep the new religion and its set of religious rules whatever the consequences. Lung Tooi did his best to steer a middle course and seems to have done so fairly well for all of that, but it wasn’t easy. Religious pluralism, a fine sounding Western academic conception put him very much between a rock and a hard place, made particularly stressful because his adherence to the strictures of his new religion threatened to exile him from his family as well bring down the power of the state on his head.

On occasion Christian between-ness and apartness was stamped on the very name of the converts. Kam Ai, aged 42, received baptism on 5 August 1877. He was the stepson of Noi Sunya, one of the two victim’s of Chao Kawilorot’s persecution of 1868. His mother, Yai Kammoon, we will remember was one of the first two women to convert to Christianity. Kam Ai soon became a prominent member of the small Christian community, and in later years he was widely know as Ai Kula because he had joined the religion of the white people, the *kula khao* as they were widely called in those days. McGilvary reported that Kam Ai had actually been a “believer” for some time before his baptism but the opposition of his relatives delayed that event for several months.²²⁹

If the converts were becoming a community-in-exile within northern Thai society, they had a response of their own, one that McGilvary and some later commentators have seen as being uniquely northern Thai. In order to limit their social isolation and ostracization, it became common practice for new Christians to convert and receive baptism as families, a practice McGilvary later termed “household baptism.”²³⁰ This process of family conversion became clearly apparent at Chiang Mai Church’s monthly communion of 7 October 1877. Among the four adults and two infants baptized that day were the mother-in-law and two infant daughters of converts. Another’s wife would also be baptized in less than a year. It is notable, furthermore, that three of these six new Christians were from Nan Suwan’s village of Mae Dok Daeng, one of them being his infant daughter.²³¹ By October 1877, thus, the converts were beginning to create a

²²⁸“Sessional Records,” 57.

²²⁹“Sessional Records,” 66-67; McGilvary to Irving, 10 August 1877, v. 4, BFM; and Suda Niwornrokaphat, “prawat phonoisuriya lae phonanchai” [“History of Father Noi Suriya and Father Nan Chai,”] in *Memorial Volume Commemorating the Two Martyrs*, 13-15.

²³⁰McGilvary to Mitchel, 3 July 1885, v. 5, BFM.

²³¹“Sessional Records,” 69-71, 81.

distinct, viable community of their own. They were no longer just a scattering of isolated individuals, aliens even in their own families. They were forming Christian families, still scattered and isolated, but no longer just individuals. At the same time, Christians were showing the first signs of clustering together in larger groups, and it was at Mae Dok Daeng that the emergence of a Christian community was rather quickly beginning to take place.

This October batch of converts also brought to the Laos Mission its first contact with leprosy. McGilvary wrote, “One of them belongs to a family in which there is leprosy and there is some fear that he may ultimately become a victim. He has been under a course of treatment and it is to be hoped that the symptoms may be at least mitigated.”²³² In the early days of the Laos Mission, it drew its less-fortunate converts from those accused of causing demon possession, that is of being *phi ka*. In later years, lepers would replace this class as the leading class of social marginals that provided converts for Christianity.

The Mae Dok Daeng connection was strengthened by the interest in Christianity of one its leading citizens and a lower-level government official, Saen Kam. He was an elderly man who was brought to McGilvary close to death with malarial fever. His whole family, it turned out, was ill, and through the use of quinine and other medicines McGilvary was able to cure all of them. Saen Kam himself stayed with the McGilvarys for a month or so and in that time learned to read central Thai and became a convert in all but name. His son was the head monk at the Mae Dok Daeng temple, but after this experience he immediately left the monkhood. The family practiced Christian worship in their home, read the Bible together, and kept the Christian Sabbath as a day of rest. They did not, however, convert. Although a man of status and business acumen, Saen Kam’s family was a slave family, descendants of immigrants who had fled to the North and were later tricked into slavery. He feared that his family’s status made them particularly vulnerable to retribution if they tried to convert, and his mere interest in Christianity did provoke a negative reaction among his neighbors. Saen Kam, rather, chose to practice what we earlier termed “soft” conversion and in the process became a warm, close personal friend of McGilvary, and he actively supported the Christian community that was emerging in his village. He put his eldest daughter in the mission girls’ school that was started in 1879, and eight years after his first introduction to Christianity and at the age of 75, in 1885, he and his family finally converted. At that time he deposited sufficient funds with the Laos Mission to redeem his family, amounting to sixteen individuals, from slavery and asked the mission to become their guardians if he died.²³³ He literally transferred his allegiance, that is, from his northern Thai patrons to the Laos Mission. Political changes that we will chart here made that transfer more tenable in the mid-1880s than it was in the still uncertain political climate of 1877 when Chao Bunthawong and a strong anti-foreigner party still held considerable sway.

We have wrestled throughout the story of the founding of northern Thai Christianity with the ideas of hard and soft conversions. As we’ve seen, the missionary insistence on full, public professions of faith at conversion had fatal consequences in

²³²McGilvary to Irving, 22 October 1877, v. 4, BFM.

²³³McGilvary, *Half Century*, 195; McGilvary to Irving, 1 October 1877, v. 4, BFM; and McGilvary to Mitchel, 3 July 1885, v. 5, BFM.

1869. Two converts died, and the incipient Christian movement itself all but died. In the short term, the demand for hard conversions had hard consequences. We will never know what the long-term impact might have been had McGilvary and Wilson accepted Nan Inta's advice that he not tempt the power of Chao Kawilorot. Perhaps a larger, more indigenous northern Thai Christian movement might have emerged, one that did not provoke the authorities into opposition. It would have been, of course, a movement that kept the Sabbath within the confines of the demands of the *corvée* labor system. Or, again, the convenience of making soft conversions might well have cheapened the whole idea of becoming a Christian to the point that the movement lost substance. We will never know. The one thing that continues to impress this author is that soft conversion represented the indigenous wisdom of individuals who proved themselves to be committed Christians, individuals such as Saen Kam who actually patiently started out as a "soft" Christian and eventually in good time took the final plunge.

By the middle months of 1877, meanwhile, the mission had to contend with another serious problem, one that had been brewing for some time and had to do with Dr. Cheek. In an April 21st letter to the Board that betrayed irritation and disappointment, McGilvary informed it that Cheek, not long returned from Bangkok, had just left again for yet another trip down river. He pleaded a hernia that needed quick and proper medical attention, but McGilvary point blank accused him of running off to Bangkok every time some little ailment appeared. He threatened Cheek with the Board's displeasure at his frequent health trips, and he forced Cheek to pay his own expenses other than for travel down and back. McGilvary's disappointment was doubly keen because he saw that Cheek had a promising medical practice that could be the means for converting many to Christianity. Cheek, for his part, began to consider the possibility of finding missionary work some place else in Siam besides Chiang Mai, which he considered an extremely unhealthy place to live. As it turned out, Cheek felt compelled to take a health vacation all the way to Hong Kong, and as of August 1877 he still had not returned to Chiang Mai.²³⁴

McGilvary, meanwhile, had to take over the medical work—and this at a time when the mission's supply of quinine was low and the number of fever cases very high. When word got out that the quinine was nearly gone, there was a rush of patients so large that McGilvary couldn't handle them all. There were a few deaths, but McGilvary proved himself once again a capable lay physician. First, he noted that many of the ill he treated were suffering mostly from scurvy imposed on them by animistic medical procedures. He started feeding them fish and rice. He also whipped up from the mission's stock of drugs his own experimental substitute for quinine and found that it worked quite well in many cases. Nan Inta and Nan Suwan helped him with this work and took the opportunity to discuss Christianity with many of the patients McGilvary treated.²³⁵ On the whole, however, McGilvary would have much preferred that Cheek be present and carrying out this work. The Laos Mission's medical program was still not stable or secure.

²³⁴McGilvary to Irving, 21 April 1877, v. 4; Cheek to Irving, 20 June 1877, v. 4; and Cheek to Irving, 20 June 1877, v. 4, BFM.

²³⁵McGilvary to Irving, 10 August 1877, v. 4, BFM; and McGilvary to Irving, 6 December 1877, v. 4, BFM.

The year 1877, finally, was another one of those when the Laos Mission turned its attention to Karen missionary work. During the year Nan Inta was delegated to visit a Karen village, and he received such a positive reception that he made a second trip. It looked for a brief time as though the mission might be able to found a Karen congregation under Nan Inta's leadership. The session of Chiang Mai Church even discussed the possibility of having Nan Inta ordained to that end.²³⁶ Nothing came of this brief contact with the Karen, however, and it would be left to the Baptists to initiate Karen work in the North just a few years later.

The slow, steady accretion of new members that began in January 1876 continued in 1878, and eventually, the church would baptize a total of ten adults and five children during the year.²³⁷ Among these, as before, were several more wives and children of Christians. The emergence of a viable Christian community continued at a modest but real rate.

Most notable among the new Christians who received baptism in 1878 was one of the highest ranking converts in the history of the northern Thai church, a *chao phya* from Lampang named Chao Phya Sihanot, who was baptized on 5 May 1878. Over a period of some twenty years, according to McGilvary, Chao Phya Sihanot had headed the Lampang *sanam* (court). In that capacity he travelled with the Lampang *chao muang* on his official trips to Bangkok, where Chao Phya Sihanot became acquainted with Dr. Bradley and took literature from him. He taught himself to read these central Thai materials and came to believe that what they taught was true.

Chao Phya Sihanot eventually became involved in various political rivalries and thereafter fell out of favor with the *chao muang* of Lampang. In May 1877, he went to Chiang Mai to get help from its authorities, evidently Chao Bunthawong, in reversing a legal decision against him in Lampang, and soon after his arrival he sought out the missionaries. On first meeting McGilvary, the two men engaged in what McGilvary later called a long, happy talk during which the tall, elderly Chao Phya sought clarification on many points of Christianity, which he still did not understand. McGilvary was deeply impressed with this new "inquirer," not only because of his social standing but also because McGilvary believed him to be a man of integrity and learning. He had a deep religious interest that had led him to become a careful student of Buddhism and then Christianity. He had studied parts of the Bible on his own and showed some understanding of it even before he received missionary instruction.²³⁸

It was only natural under the circumstances that Chao Phya Sihanot became a Christian in spite of the consequences that quickly followed. Chao Bunthawong, when he heard the news that Chao Phya Sihanot was interested in Christianity, withdrew his promise of legal aid. Not long thereafter the authorities in Lampang, also hearing of his connection with the new religion, called him back to Lampang. He went back reluctantly, fearing the punishment that most probably awaited him, and the missionaries lost contact with him for nearly a year until he reappeared in Chiang Mai in April 1879. During that year he had been stripped of his wealth and his social and political position,

²³⁶McGilvary, "For the Family," letter dated 10 Aug 1877, *NCP New Series* 10, 521(2 Jan 1878): 4; and "Sessional Records," 65.

²³⁷"Sessional Records," 72-76; and McGilvary, "for the Little Folks," *NCP New Series* 12, 579(12 Feb 1879): 1.

²³⁸"Sessional Records," 78-80; and *Half Century*, 199-201.

and his former colleagues and friends shunned him entirely.²³⁹ Chao Phya Sihanot persevered in the face of all of this, and within a few years he would be the central figure in the founding of a small church in Lampang.

The Edict of Religious Toleration

In previous years, the conversion of a *chao phya* would have dominated our discussion of the year's events, but not in 1878. This was the year of the "Edict of Toleration," one of the most memorable events in the early history of the Laos Mission and its convert community. Its story began in May 1878, just at the same time that Chao Phya Sihanot was baptized. Noi Intachak, McGilvary's apt theological student, and Kam Tip, the daughter of Nan Inta who was studying with Sophia McGilvary, agreed to be married early in the month, and the mission planned a big affair as this would be the first marriage between two baptized northern Thai Christians. Things came right down to the morning of the wedding when the family patriarch of Nan Inta's extended family objected to the wedding. He demanded that the proper "spirit fee," as McGilvary called it, be paid for showing regard to the spirits and legalizing the marriage according to northern Thai custom and law. Rejecting the very idea of paying such a fee, McGilvary wrote, "In fact, the payment may be regarded as a distinctively religious act, since it recognizes the spirits as the guardians and protectors of the family. When one becomes a Christian, that allegiance is cast off."²⁴⁰ After hastily consulting with Nan Inta's patron, the missionaries called a halt to the wedding. They refused to have anything to do with what appeared to them to be animistic practices, but at the same time they wanted the marriage to be fully legal.

The missionaries then decided to go to Phraya Thep Prachun, the Siamese *kha luang* or "Commissioner," as they called him in English. This worthy, we will remember, had been appointed Bangkok's permanent representative in the North as a result of the Chiang Mai Treaty of 1874, concluded between Siam and Britain. He was sympathetic to the couple's plight, but he had no power to act in this case. The missionaries next went to Chao Intanon and Chao Mae Kip Keson, but they felt they dared not take an open stand because they were already under criticism for being too pro-missionary. In desperation, Cheek and McGilvary went to see Chao Bunthawong and also the Chao Rachabut, another key figure in the Chiang Mai government. These two worthies were both actually delighted with the situation and naturally refused to help. If Christians couldn't marry, then that was obviously the end of the Christian threat in the North.²⁴¹

Ratanaporn points out that once again the issue at stake was that of the place and authority of Chiang Mai's ruling powers over against the social and political status of the missionaries themselves. By forbidding their converts from participation in religious ceremonies and rites, the missionaries were directly attacking the power and authority of the ruling elite. She writes, in her analysis of this event, that, "In many ways, the *chao's* superiority over the *phrai* [common people] was justified by their performance of spirit propitiation rituals. The ability to perform such rituals was also a means for social

²³⁹Edna Cole, undated letter, *WWW* 9, 12(December 1879): 425-27; and Mary Campbell, letter dated 19 April 1879, in Peabody, *Mary Margareta Campbell*, 27-28.

²⁴⁰*Half Century*, 208.

²⁴¹*Half Century*, 207-209; and "Sessional Records," 82.

control and helped designate who would be at the top of the social hierarchy.” She goes on to state,

“The *chao ho na* [Chao Bunthawong] realized that this intervention by missionaries into the traditional system posed yet another threat to the *chao*. He was concerned that the converts would seek shelter under the missionaries from corvee requirements. Besides their actions exacerbating the problems of labor scarcity prevailing in the Northern States since the time of Kawila, the missionaries came to take the role of patrons which formerly had been the exclusive preserve of the *chao* and other local elites. The widespread propagation of Christianity and its potential adoption by many in the population, threatened the traditional social order of the Northern States.”²⁴²

The stakes were high. The political-social hierarchy, on the one side, felt that the Laos Mission was attacking the religious and ceremonial pillars of its authority. The Laos Mission, for its part, desired nothing less than the right of Christians to conduct their own rituals unmolested by the authorities.

Having tried to deal with the question of Christian marriage in every way it could locally, the Laos Mission, finally, was left with what it felt was no choice. On further consultation with Phraya Thep Prachun, the Siamese Commissioner, McGilvary and Cheek decided to petition King Chulalongkorn in Bangkok. The Commissioner actually urged them to do so as he was having his own problems with the Chao Muang of Lampang, who had treated him in what he considered an insulting way. Phraya Thep Prachun promised that he would write the King a letter supporting the mission’s petition. The mission sent a petition, specifying its problem, to the American Consul in Bangkok for him, in turn, to present it to the King. In their petition, they appealed for general religious tolerance rather than simply the right of Christians to marry. The mission’s petition reminded the King that it had received official permission to establish itself both from the King and from Chao Kawilorot. It specified Chao Bunthawong as the culprit in this case. It requested that northern Thai Christians receive the same civil and religious rights given to other Siamese citizens. McGilvary knew this petition was a risk, and Cheek signed the letter to the King only reluctantly because he feared it might do more harm than good. McGilvary, as well, was unsure what the petition’s reception in Bangkok might be, but he put no little reliance on the influence of Chaophraya Phanuwong Mahakosathibodi, the Phraklang and his old friend from Phet Buri.²⁴³

This was not the first time the Siamese government had to consider the issue of religious tolerance. As early as 1850, a British diplomatic mission led by Sir James Brooke requested that the Thai government include a guarantee of religious tolerance in a treaty with Britain. Siam rejected that request as unnecessary because Christians were already freely practicing their religion.²⁴⁴ In 1868 the government intervened in a dispute between the Roman Catholics and Baptists in which the Baptists alleged that a French Catholic priest seized and held in chains one of their Chinese converts. According to the Baptists, this incident led to the issuance of a proclamation by the Phraklang (“Foreign

²⁴²Ratanaphorn, “Chiang Mai Treaties,” 209, 210.

²⁴³*Half Century*, 210-12.

²⁴⁴Vella, *Siam Under Rama III*, 137.

Minister”), who at that time was Kroma Kun Warasak, forbidding such actions in the future. Although the proclamation dealt specifically with a conflict between the Baptists and the Catholics, the Baptists’ translation of that proclamation had it stating that, “Should anyone desire to embrace any Religion whatever, the Siamese Government does not forbid, nor hinder them.”²⁴⁵ Lord makes the point that by the early 1870s the Siamese government followed a policy of complete religious toleration.²⁴⁶

Meanwhile, tensions mounted in Chiang Mai where a policy of government tolerance of Christians was still controversial. Chao Bunthawong ordered that Nan Inta, father of the intended bride, be detained and threatened his entire family with slavery if they did not renounce Christianity. He threatened Nan Inta personally with banishment to Chiang Saen in the far north, then being resettled. The governmental faction opposed to the Laos Mission evidently began making plans to attack openly the mission, and a contest for the physical person of Nan Inta ensued. After a confinement lasting some three months, Nan Inta’s health had deteriorated seriously, and McGilvary felt constrained to protest to the Siamese Commissioner that Nan Inta needed medical attention from Cheek. The Commissioner advised McGilvary to speak directly to Chao Bunthawong, who reluctantly released Nan Inta from confinement but ordered him to stay away from the missionaries. McGilvary immediately protested to Bunthawong that his action violated American treaty rights because Nan Inta was a mission employee. Chao Bunatong then backed down, and Nan Inta began to recover his health under Dr. Cheek’s care.²⁴⁷ It is significant that Chao Bunthawong, who had never acted against the mission so openly, lost this contest for Nan Inta’s person even though Nan Inta’s own immediate patron sided with the Chao. In local terms, McGilvary and Bunthawong engaged in something of a patronage contest, which McGilvary eventually won, in part by siding with and relying upon the power of the Siamese government. Chao Bunthawong also faced the problem that he could have pressed this matter only at the peril of Nan Inta’s life.

The King’s reply to the Laos Mission’s petition and Phraya Thep Prachun’s letter reached the Siamese Commissioner in late September 1878 and gave him authority to proceed in the matter of the mission’s complaint in any way he saw fit including the issuing of an edict guaranteeing toleration of the Christian religion. The Commissioner met with McGilvary to discuss how to proceed, and Chao Bunthawong evidently also called on him to argue against anything as drastic as a proclamation.²⁴⁸ Bunthawong lost again. In a letter intended for publication in his native North Carolina, McGilvary exalted that the King’s response couldn’t have come into better hands than those of the Commissioner. He counted Phraya Thep Prachun a “true friend” of the mission and even hinted that the Commissioner was a secret Christian or, at least, what one might call a

²⁴⁵William Dean to Warren, 27 November 1868, File 109-3, Records of the American Baptist Foreign Missionary Society.

²⁴⁶Lord, *Mo Bradley*, 82.

²⁴⁷Sophia McGilvary, undated letter, *Woman’s Work for Woman* 8, 11(November 1878): 309-310; McGilvary, “for the Little Folks,” *North Carolina Presbyterian* New Series 12, 579(12 Feb 1879): 1; and McGilvary, *Half Century*, 210, 211.

²⁴⁸McGilvary, *Half Century*, 213; and McGilvary, “for the Little Folks,” *North Carolina Presbyterian* New Series 12, 579(12 Feb 1879): 1.

“fellow traveler” of Christianity. The Commissioner, in any event, issued an “Edict of Religious Toleration” that went beyond even what the missionaries had asked for.²⁴⁹

Phraya Thep Prachun opened the edict with a statement of his intent to issue a proclamation to the princes and people of Chiang Mai, Lamphun, and Lampang states. He mentioned briefly the origins of the edict and made it clear that he acted on the full authority of the King of Siam. He then gave a general statement of the concept of religious toleration that affirmed the right of individuals to worship as they chose without governmental interference. The edict affirmed the right of citizens to become Christians and ordered the princes, relatives, and friends of converts to throw up no obstacles to conversion or the practice of the Christian religion. It freed Christians from participation in animistic rituals and also specifically affirmed the right of Christians to observe their Sabbath unmolested excepting only in times of war or genuinely pressing need. The edict also confirmed that “American citizens” had the right given to them by international treaties to employ anyone they chose without infringement on that right.²⁵⁰

Although McGilvary realized from the beginning that the anti-missionary faction among the ruling elite was bound to resist the implementation of the “Edict of Religious Toleration,” he was elated. It had the immediate affect of lessening the pressure on the convert community, particularly Nan Inta. It seems that Chao Bunthawong backed off and displayed a less threatening, more gracious public attitude towards the missionaries because of the edict.²⁵¹ Nan Inta was also overjoyed. He wrote to the McGilvarys’ daughter Emilie in the United States, “...[God] inclined the heart of the great King of Siam to send a royal decree forbidding the princes and masters in Chiengmai to oppose those who wish to become believers and forbidding any oppression of those who have or will become such in the future.”²⁵²

The “Edict of Toleration,” in retrospect, was an important event in the permanent establishment of northern Thai Christianity *and* in the full incorporation of the Northern States into the Siamese state. Yet, its significance should not be overstated as it reflected changes that were already happening concerning the place Christianity would have in northern Siam. The proclamation of the edict, in particular, showed that the anti-missionary faction of the Chiang Mai government was already losing ground and that the power of the mission's Bangkok patrons was on the rise. As we have already seen, furthermore, the northern Thai church had already begun to grow again well before the

²⁴⁹McGilvary, “for the Little Folks,” *North Carolina Presbyterian* New Series 12, 579(12 Feb 1879): 1.

²⁵⁰See the two translations of the Edict. made by McGilvary in *Half Century*, pages???, and “Proclamation of Religoius Tolerance for the Laos,” *North Carolina Presbyterian* New Series 12, 579(12 Feb 1879): 1.

²⁵¹McGilvary, “for the Little Folks,” *North Carolina Presbyterian* New Series 12, 579(12 Feb 1879): 1.

²⁵²Loong Nan Inta to Emelie McGilvary, in McGilvary, “Letter from Siam,” dated 22 July 1879, *North Carolina Presbyterian* New Series 12. 617(5 Nov 1879): 1. Although it is clear from contemporary sources that the King did not directly issue the Edict of Toleration, it has long been held by the Christian community in the North that he did. That understanding apparently began almost immediately as reflected in Nan Inta’s letter to Emilie McGilvary.

Commissioner issued the Edict. McGilvary himself noted there were conversions even during the time when Chao Bunthawong held Nan Inta incognito—a period when the mission’s eventual victory over him was not at all certain.²⁵³ The most important immediate result of the edict, perhaps, was its impact on the Christian community. All of that small band joined Nan Inta in rejoicing. The rate of conversion, though still modest almost in the extreme in comparison to the population, did increase.²⁵⁴ Early in 1879, furthermore, McGilvary protected a family accused of causing demon possession (of being *phi ka*) from further persecution by citing the edict.²⁵⁵

McGilvary understood that the edict itself and the events surrounding it was a political event, and he also understood that it had two central implications. The first had to do with the political situation and legal status of the Laos Mission and its converts. The second involved the relationship of the Bangkok government to the Northern States. Politically, the Edict of Religious Toleration represented to McGilvary a second significant victory over the enemies of Christ and innovation. He compared Chao Bunthawong to Chao Kawilorot with a certain disdain for the Uparat, whom he judged as lacking the power, the dignity, and the personality of Kawilorot. McGilvary evidently felt that this second victory came more easily than did the one over the powerful old *chao muang*. In terms of Siamese policy, McGilvary argued that the outcome of the edict hastened the process of centralization. It enhanced the power of the *kha luang*, the Siamese Commissioner and, consequently, reduced the power of the local ruling elite, the *chao*.²⁵⁶ McGilvary wrote many years later that, “The Lao country has ceased to be either a feudal dependency or a separate ‘buffer-state.’ Silently—almost imperceptibly—it has become an integral portion of the consolidated Kingdom of Siam. Autocratic rule has everywhere ceased. And all these changes are directly in line with the civilization of the age.”²⁵⁷

On this second point, regarding centralization, Ratanaphorn’s analysis of the event agrees to a degree with McGilvary’s. She notes that while the Christian converts remained the clients of northern Thai patrons in the traditional manner, the edict restrained the power of those patrons over Christians. It did so, furthermore, in a key way: as we have noted earlier, traditional northern Thai religion was an important source of legitimization of the power of the northern Thai political system. The edict undercut the role of religion, which now became more of a matter of personal choice rather than a tool for state control. Ratanaphorn summarizes, “With the opposition of the missionaries to this traditional system, the existing social system was seriously threatened particularly because McGilvary and the others were able to provide political protection.”²⁵⁸

This process did not magically, suddenly happen over night. It had actually begun some years before. The Chiang Mai Treaty of 1874, between Siam and Britain, set the stage for the events surrounding the Edict of Religious Toleration and made those

²⁵³“Sessional Records,” 81-82.

²⁵⁴McGilvary, “for the Little Folks,” *North Carolina Presbyterian* New Series 12, 579(12 Feb 1879): 1.

²⁵⁵McGilvary, “Letter from Siam,” letter dated 22 July 1879, *North Carolina Presbyterian* New Series 12. 617(5 Nov 1879): 1

²⁵⁶McGilvary, *Half Century*, 217-220.

²⁵⁷McGilvary, *Half Century*, 220.

²⁵⁸Ratanaphorn, “Chiang Mai Treaties,” 209.

events possible. That treaty reflected Britain's and British India's desire for a stable, controlled northern Siam that would allow British investment in and exploitation of the region to proceed smoothly. The treaty granted Bangkok judicial oversight of foreigners living in the North and otherwise served to confirm the Siamese government's right to intervene more openly in the affairs of its northern dependencies. For the time being King Chulalongkorn carefully limited that intervention, but his power in the North was real as the edict itself demonstrates.²⁵⁹ Well before the events of 1878, the Siamese Commissioner had made his presence felt as a political force that quietly but persistently worked to limit the power of the northern elites. He, in the process, became a friend and even ally of sorts of the Laos Mission. As early as December 1876, McGilvary noted that the Commissioner's presence had been beneficial to the mission and provided a guarantee against persecution. In August of that same year, McGilvary further stated that the missionaries were thus preaching with more freedom and the people listening more attentively than had been the case previously.²⁶⁰

It may well be that the edict's impact, as far as the Laos Mission and the convert community were concerned, was most important in the short term. Its long term impact was more limited. In a letter written just after the edict was published McGilvary himself wrote,

Our work is, of course, more hopeful though we of course do not anticipate a rush into the church as the princes and people seemed to fear to take off all restraint till the proclamation comes from the Laos princes themselves. The one from the king secures exemption from punishment, but all the moral influence is still on the side of Satan as far as the princes can make it so. But still the people are less fearful to talk than they were. Even the priests and princes themselves talk more freely than before. And there is, no doubt, a spirit of inquiry among the people such as has probably never been before.²⁶¹

The central problem concerning the edict, as McGilvary noted, was that it came from Bangkok; and even then, we might add, not directly from King Chulalongkorn but through his agent. Those powers arrayed against the Laos Mission remained in opposition. McGilvary returned to this thought in 1881 when he noted that it would have been a distinct advantage to gain the same sanction from the northern Thai rulers as the mission had gained from Bangkok.²⁶²

In a long letter to the Board written in July 1880, Wilson cited three cases of evident persecution in which the edict proved to be of no value. In one instance, in May 1880, the Chao Muang of Lamphun ordered three Christian men to perform corvée labor on a Sunday with veiled threats of criminal prosecution if they did not. The missionaries did not intervene directly and left it to the converts to work out a solution for themselves.

²⁵⁹Ratanaphorn, "Chiang Mai Treaties," 171ff.

²⁶⁰McGilvary to Irving, 4 December 1876, and McGilvary to Irving, 12 August 1876, v. 3, BFM.

²⁶¹McGilvary to Mother [Sarah Bradley], 28 October 1876, McGilvary Papers. Emphasis in the original.

²⁶²McGilvary to Irving, 11 February 1881, v. 4, BFM.

Wilson later stated that while they could have taken the edict and read it to the *chao muang*, such a tactic would only have made matters worse. The *chao muang* of Lamphun already feared the loss of the converts' allegiance and labor and citing the edict would make it appear that the missionaries were contesting his rights of patronage. They did not intend to do so, and this minor persecution ended once the *chao muang* realized he had nothing to fear. Wilson described a second case, which took place at some point in late 1879, in which a quick-tempered "princess" whipped a slave, the daughter of a Christian, seemingly for attending Christian religious services. It appeared that she was going to forbid both mother and daughter from further attendance, and the mission was prepared to bring the edict into play if she did. She did not, however, and Wilson noted that the edict was not relevant in this case because it could not protect Christians from *veiled* attacks. Finally, according to Wilson, a newly baptized Christian was the victim of an unjust debt claim, which Chao Bunthawong judged against him. All that could be done was to let the convert, Nan Ta, settle the matter as best he could. Wilson summarized these cases by stating, "The proclamation for Christian toleration was a great thing. It stands as a significant precedent in favor of the native Christian & his cause. But it will not meet every difficulty. It should not be expected to do so."²⁶³

The authorities in Lampang in 1881 took action against Chao Phaya Sihanot in a way similar to that used by Chao Bunthawong against Nan Ta. Huge debt claims were made against him, claims Chao Phaya Sihanot refused to acknowledge. He was imprisoned. He believed that the Laos Mission had the right to demand his release on the strength of the edict, but Wilson realized that there was no clear connection between his imprisonment and his religion. It was assumed by many in Lampang that religion was an important issue, and the two Christians in the city who were not members of Chao Phaya Sihanot's immediate household quickly renounced their new religion.²⁶⁴ Finally, we will see that Chao Bunthawong took aggressive steps against the mission in October and November 1882, steps that amounted to a virtual repeal the Edict of Toleration. It was only his death late that same year that ended what had promised to be a major attack on mission and church.²⁶⁵ One of the most important negative consequences of the edict, in fact, was that McGilvary's handling of it embarrassed Chao Bunthawong and strengthened his opposition to the missionaries. It was only a matter of time until he would strike back.²⁶⁶

This is not to say that the Edict of Religious Toleration had no long-term impact whatsoever. Missionaries later cited instances in 1885 and in 1886 when displaying copies of the edict brought to an end the persecution of an elderly Christian woman in one case and overt resistance to the founding of a Christian group in the other.²⁶⁷ It is important to note, however, that these were local instances in rural communities not involving the political power of the northern Thai elite. As we have seen, the Bangkok government had by this time apparently evolved a policy of toleration of Christianity,

²⁶³Wilson to Lowrie, 23 July 1880, v. 4, BFM.

²⁶⁴Wilson to Irving, 30 December 1881, v. 4, BFM.

²⁶⁵Wilson to Irving, 27 November 1882, and Wilson to Irving, 2 January 1883, v. 4, BFM.

²⁶⁶See McGilvary, *Half Century*, 214-215.

²⁶⁷Martin to Irving, 9 June 1885, and McGilvary to Mitchell, 22 July 1886, v. 5, BFM.

which no longer posed a political or even a religious threat to Siam while missionary methods and technologies aided its modernization. The Northern States would soon enough come to accept this same attitude, and we have already seen how readily Chao Intanon and Chao Mae Tip Keson acquiesced to the conversion of Nan Suwan well before the events of the edict.

We may conclude, then, that the longer-term impact of the edict was limited by the fact that the rulers of Chiang Mai, Lamphun, and Lampang either ignored or rejected it. They opposed it and acted in ways diametrically opposed to its intent and spirit. The edict did not halt political opposition to the Laos Mission and may even have incited the northern Thai authorities to greater and more open opposition, at least in some cases. At the same time, it appears from later examples of the use of the edict that it was not widely known in rural areas. Local authorities accepted or opposed the presence of Christians in their communities according to their own feelings on the matter or local public opinion—not in accord with the Edict of Religious Toleration. Christian “freedom” in the North was not achieved by a single document, however noteworthy. It came about, rather, through a longer process of political change. One key element in that change was that, except only in the matter of keeping the Sabbath, the Laos Mission refrained as best it could from contesting the patronage rights of the northern Thai elite. Another key element was the gradual assumption of power by the Bangkok government that rendered northern Thai opposition to Christianity increasingly impotent. The greatest challenge to northern Thai political autonomy did not come from a mere handful of missionaries and Christian converts but, rather, from Bangkok’s growing ability to enforce its will in the North.

The year 1878, otherwise, seems to have been a quiet year that was dominated by the events of the Edict of Toleration. The records of the Laos Mission, in any event, are largely silent concerning other events during the year. It was almost as if everyone connected with the mission held their collective breaths, awaiting the outcome of the political contest of wills that pitted the missionaries against Chiang Mai’s most powerful political faction. By any measure, the mission emerged from the year strengthened both by its victory over Bunthawong and by the addition of Chao Phya Sihanot to its rolls.

Conclusion

As seen above, the years 1876 through 1878 marked an important period of transition for the Laos Mission. By 1877, it had survived sustained political pressure for a decade, and in 1878 its unofficial alliance with the Siamese government provided it with its own political clout. We will see, and soon, that Chao Bunthawong was not yet done with the mission and that there was still more high political drama to come before the Laos Mission finally established its presence permanently and beyond all challenge. Yet, by December 1878, the mission had proven its ability to do combat on the political front, and in retrospect it seems clear that the Christian religion had come to northern Siam to stay. Families were beginning to convert, and a Christian community was beginning to take shape out at Mae Dok Daeng. The “hard years” had come to an end.

“PROCLAMATION OF RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE FOR THE LAOS

“I, Phyo Tape Phrai Chune, the royal representative of His Majesty, the supreme King of Siam, at Chiengmai, and also for the Laos States and cities of Lakawn and Lampang, do hereby make a proclamation to the princes and rulers and officers of various grades, and the common people, in the States and cities named, that His Majesty, the King of Siam was graciously pleased to send a royal letter, with the royal seal, to the effect that D. E. Sickles, Esq., the United States Consul, has communicated to His Excellence, the Foreign Minister of Siam, a complaint signed by Rev. D. McGilvary and Dr. M. A. Cheek, against certain parties for molesting the Christians and compelling them to observe their old religious customs. The Foreign Minister has laid the subject before His Majesty, who had most graciously listened to the said complaint, and had given the following royal command in reference to the same:

“That as religious and civil duties do not conflict, any religion that is seen to be true may be embraced by any person without constraint; that the responsibility of a correct or a wrong decision rests with the individuals making it; that there is nothing in the foreign treaty, nor in the laws and customs of Siam to throw any restriction on the religious worship of any. To be more specific; if any person or persons wish to embrace the *Christian* religion they are freely allowed to follow their own choice, and this proclamation is designed from this time forth to remove any fear that may have existed to the contrary. It is, moreover, strictly enjoined on the princes and rulers, and the relatives and friends of those who may wish to embrace the Christian religion, that they throw no obstacles in the way, and that no creed be enforced on the Christians, nor work demanded of them which their religion forbids them to hold or to do, such as the worship and feasting of demons or departed spirits, and working on the Sabbath day. Except in cases of war and other unavoidable or necessary work, and not *feigned* as such, they are to have the free observance of the Sabbath. No obstacle is to be thrown in the way of American citizens employing any persons needed for their service. The treaty in this respect must be observed. Whenever this *proclamation* is known by the princes and rulers, and officers and people, they are to beware that they violate no precept contained therein.

“Proclamation made on the 11th of the 12th waxing moon, year of the tiger, and 11th year of His Majesty's reign.”²⁶⁸

²⁶⁸ “Proclamation of Religious Tolerance for the Laos,” *North Carolina Presbyterian* New Series 12, 579(12 Feb 1879): 1.

Chapter Five

Into the Future, 1879

Introduction

In these early years of the Laos Mission and the slowly emerging Christian community in the North, three moments set the course for all that was to come later. The first was when McGilvary and Wilson refused to allow Nan Inta to have a “soft,” secret conversion and insisted that he openly, publicly keep the Sabbath. From that point on, the mission and its converts were bound to come into conflict with the ruling powers in Chiang Mai. The missionaries seemed to be setting themselves up as alternative patrons who, among other things, challenged the right of the ruling class to call their people to work whenever it suited them. The second key moment was when Chao Kawilorot martyred Nan Chai and Noi Sunya, an event that followed from the first as naturally as water flows down hill. The third important moment in the history of the mission and its converts was the issuance of the Edict of Religious Toleration, which to a degree cemented the alliance of convenience between the mission and the Siamse government as each sought to establish themselves increasingly firmly in the North. Christianity thus gained a legitimacy that it had not had previously, which made conversion less of a risk even as it made it less likely that the mission’s still powerful opponents would be able to force it to leave.

By 1879, there was a sense of gathering positive momentum for the Laos Mission and the convert community. The future was beginning to take shape. By the end of the year, that shape would be still clearer, the small church less small, and the mission grown almost exponentially. It was increasingly clear that Christianity had in fact come to the North to stay.

The New Generation Arrives

With the exception of the New England Congregationalists, no American evangelical denomination could rival the Presbyterians in their commitment to education. We have already seen that six of the first seven missionaries to serve under the Laos Mission were among the most well-educated Americans of their time, the women as well as the men. In 1871, as we have also noted, Wilson attempted to start a small boy's school, but the time was not right and his effort soon failed. Some months after that failure, the mission received a letter from the Board proposing that it send single women missionaries to Chiang Mai specifically to engage in educational work, a proposal that would take the mission’s commitment to education to a new level.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁹Before 1860, American Protestant mission boards sent out only a handful of single women to their mission fields; women who wanted to be missionaries generally had to marry one. After the American Civil War (1861-1865), however, they began to send out large numbers of younger, single women primarily as teachers for girls’ schools. Among the reasons for this development, one that resonated with the situation of the Laos Mission was that boarding schools were needed to train Christian girls in a Christian environment as a part of the drive to build up convert churches and Christian families. See Dana L. Robert, *American Women in Mission: A Social History of Their Thought and Practice* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1996), 81-82, 88-89.

McGilvary greeted this idea with a mixture of enthusiasm and caution. On the one hand, he felt that single women missionaries, as "enlightened women," could exercise a real influence over northern Thai women, especially given the fact that according to "the customs of society" northern Thai women were nearly equal to their husbands. He cited the political influence women had, emphasizing particularly the power of Chao Mae Kip Keson. On the other hand, McGilvary worried that Chiang Mai might be too isolated for most young women. They would have to be content with their work and a very limited social life.²⁷⁰

Many years later in his autobiography, McGilvary elaborated on his argument that the matrifocal structure of northern Thai society afforded a particularly significant opportunity for women's missions. He reminded his readers of the northern Thai custom whereby newly married husbands moved into the home of their wife, became subordinate members of her family, and were thus somewhat distanced from their own family; and he then argued that this system put great pressure on young Christian men if their wives are not Christians. It forced them to live and raise their children in a non-Christian environment. Developing strong Christian family life in northern Siam, thus, depended on training Christian girls who, when married, would establish homes with a Christian environment. He argued that trained Christian wives had a positive religious and moral impact on their husbands and that a Christian woman's children were generally raised as Christians even if the husband was a Buddhist.²⁷¹ In any event, the Board, as it happened, did not act on its proposal to send young, single missionary women to Chiang Mai, and that is where the matter rested for some years.

Some three years later, in 1875, the two step sisters, Sophia McGilvary and Sarah Cheek, took educational matters into their own hands. Sophia, at some point that year, began an informal "school" with four or five girls. Two of them were the daughters of Noi Sunya, the martyr, and his wife Yai Kammoon, and they seem to have been the nucleus of the school. Sophia's basic purpose was to teach the girls to read, almost certainly Siamese. This small core of pupils grew to six and then to as many as ten by 1878.²⁷² The goal of the expanded school was, partly, to begin to lay the groundwork for an educated Christian constituency of women and by extension men. The goal of the school was also to prepare assistants for the single women missionaries who "have been promised" to expand the school.²⁷³ The Board and the mission were clearly again considering sending single women to Chiang Mai, and the mission was laying foundations for their future work.

Sarah Cheek, meanwhile, began teaching an adult class on Sunday afternoons that same year, 1875. The mission's annual report for 1875-1876 not only made reference to her class but also reported that the mission would soon be able to request two women missionary teachers for a girls' school. The report mentioned that Chao Intanon and Chao Mae Tip Kesonn also approved of the idea.²⁷⁴

²⁷⁰McGilvary to Irving, 4 December 1872, #200, v. 3, BFM.

²⁷¹McGilvary, *Half Century*, 178.

²⁷²Half C, 177; D.McG., "For the Family," letter dated 1 Oct 1875, NCP New Series 9, 417(7 Jan 1876): 4; McG., "for the Little Folks," NCP New Series 12, 579(12 Feb 1879): 1.

²⁷³McG., "For the Little Folks," NCP New Series 12, 579(12 Feb 1879): 1.

²⁷⁴McGilvary, Laos Mission Annual Report, 1 October 1875 to 1 October 1876, v. 3, BFM.

In 1878, six years after it first broached the subject, the Board of Foreign Missions did finally appoint two young women to the work of establishing a permanent girls' school in Chiang Mai; and on 26 November 1878, Wilson returned from his furlough of over two years bringing with him Mary Campbell and Edna Cole, newly minted and very young Presbyterian missionaries. Cole and Campbell were recent graduates of Western Female Seminary, Oxford, Ohio, itself a product of a religiously-based New England movement in women's education that went back to the 1820s. That movement sought to promote Christian home life through the training of girls in a Christian environment. The seminary emphasized domestic training, academic study, and Christian piety; and it prided itself on the fact that between 1853 and 1880 forty-one of its graduates became missionaries. During the winter months of 1878, the school experienced a period of intense revival, which motivated both Cole and Campbell to separately decide to become foreign missionaries.²⁷⁵

Wilson, Campbell, and Cole left Bangkok headed for Chiang Mai on 6 February 1879, and arrived on April 8th. The young women later reported that the trip up river was both beautiful and exciting, an almost romantic interlude that was a real adventure for them. What made everything doubly exciting, however, was that it was a pious, spiritual adventure that allowed plenty of time for prayer and hymn singing. Campbell brought a guitar with her, which they must have put to good use. The trip was also a time for language study and beginning the process of learning to know northern Thai culture, and Nan Inta had gone to Bangkok both on a vacation to regain his health and to meet them in order to be their language teacher on the way back to Chiang Mai.²⁷⁶

In a letter later published in the U.S., Campbell wrote that one of the first things she and Cole did after their arrival was to visit Chao Intanon and Chao Mae Tip Keson, who she reported were glad they had come to Chiang Mai and invited them to visit often. Campbell went on to say that she and Cole also visited "most of the princesses, and many have returned the call." She then noted that every evening she and Cole took some of their students out for walks aimed at "gaining the confidence and love of the people," using the students as interpreters. She felt that they were well-received in the homes they visited, and they were always invited to return.²⁷⁷ In a letter of her own, Cole added that she and Campbell had also paid their respects to Phraya Thep Prachun, the Siamese Commissioner, of whom she wrote, "Mr. McG. thinks the judge very near the kingdom, and in many ways he is a changed man."²⁷⁸

²⁷⁵ See "Annual Report of the Principal of the Western Female Seminary, 1871" (Oxford, Ohio: W.A. Powell, 1871); Olive Flower, *The History of Oxford College for Women 1830-1928* (Oxford, Ohio: Miami University Alumni Association, 1949), 51; *Memorial: Twenty-fifth Anniversary of the Western Female Seminary* (Indianapolis: Carlon & Hollenbeck, 1881), 3-11, 222-23; and Helen Peabody, *Mary Margaretta Campbell: A Brief Record of a Youthful Life* (Cincinnati: Silvius and Smith, 1881), 9-10. See also Leonard I. Sweet, "The Female Seminary Movement and Woman's Mission in Antebellum America," CH 54 (March 1985): 41-55.

²⁷⁶ Peabody, 17-23; Edna Cole, letter dated 25 January 1872, *Woman's Work for Woman* 9, 6 (June 1879): 205-206.

²⁷⁷ Mary M. Campbell, letter dated 19 April 1879, *Woman's Work for Woman* 9, 11 (November 1879): 389-91, republished in Peabody, 25-27.

²⁷⁸ Edna Cole, undated letter, *Woman's Work for Woman* 9, 12 (December 1879): 425-27.

We should not think for a moment that all of this visiting on the part of the two young ladies was merely a matter of social niceties and gracious politeness. It was as much about politics as anything else. Cole and Campbell provided the mission with another way in which to gain public trust and cement important political relationships—that is, to increase the political capital it required to achieve its ultimate goals of a growing church and a “Christianized” (read Westernized) society and culture. All of this visitation, furthermore, served to show the mission’s converts as well as their neighbors exactly what young Christian women should be like. Cole and Campbell were educated, articulate, self-confident women with the training necessary to be professional teachers who could manage an educational institution on their own. They became models for Christian girls and examples for northern Thai women more generally, and the mission wanted them to be as visible and accessible as possible.

The arrival of these two young, single, and obviously competent young American women, furthermore, marked an important change in Chiang Mai society. We have already noted, above, that northern Thai society in some ways allowed women a good deal of social, cultural, and even economic independence in what anthropologist style a “matrifocal” society.²⁷⁹ At the same time, however, northern Thai Buddhism severely restricted the role of women in religion and, by extension, education since all formal education took place in the temples. The mixture of domestic and economic empowerment and religious disestablishment, interestingly enough, was a mirror image of American gender roles. Northern Thai women had some degree of social power but no leadership role in the temple and consequently no formal education. American women were socially and politically second-class citizens but played a role in both religion and education. Where northern Thai women were prominent, American women were subordinate, and vice versa.

Cole and Campbell’s arrival also marked a significant change for the mission itself. Up to this point only Sophia McGilvary had played a role comparable to the highly visible one Cole and Campbell would now play both in the mission and in local society. The other two women besides Sophia McGilvary who served in the mission, Kate Wilson, and Sarah Cheek, had been less visible—Wilson because of frequent illness plus her duties as a mother and Cheek because of her much more recent arrival. The arrival of Cole and Campbell was thus no small thing. They were the first women the Board appointed to the Laos Mission irrespective of their marital status. They were the first women to write official reports and send correspondence on their own to the Board, that is, they were the first women missionaries with an independent voice of their own. Now, to be clear, the leadership of the mission remained firmly in the hands of, first, Daniel McGilvary, and, second, Jonathan Wilson; that did not change. Nonetheless, women now took a much more obvious and a fuller place in the work of the mission than they ever had before. This meant that “women’s work” took on a much greater significance than previously, which in turn meant that as of April 1879 the convert women and girls also assumed a still larger place in the concerns of the mission.

In terms of Chiang Mai, their obvious differences as women made them something of social revolutionaries, or at the very least women who were profoundly and intriguingly different from the “typical” northern Thai woman. They were educated

²⁷⁹See Richard Davis, “Muang Matrifocality.” *Journal of the Siam Society* 61, 2 (1973): 53-62.

women who played prominent religious roles: they prayed in public, taught the Bible, and led religious exercises. But most importantly, like Sophia McGilvary, they modelled for northern Thai women a new, radically different relationship to religion. They offered women a religious choice, one they never had before, and for women who decided to convert they offered access to education and forms of influence only very rarely enjoyed by northern Thai women previously.²⁸⁰

All of this meant that the missionary women were strikingly different from Chiang Mai women in general, which distinction was doubly true for Campbell and Cole as young, single women, whose youthful educational status and work in the school gave them a status virtually unique in northern Thai society.²⁸¹

The people of Chiang Mai did indeed notice that Cole and Campbell did not fit into the usual social conventions. They were women who acted like men—in some ways. But they were still women who acted just like one would expect a woman to act—in other ways. The usual social categories, that is, did not fit these two women; and what happened was that the local people reconfigured categories they already had to fit these new circumstances. In an 1882 letter to the Board, Wilson in passing mentioned that Campbell was locally known as “*nai Cam*,” a very northern Thai take on her name.²⁸² “Cam” is, of course, an shortening of her last name—“Cambell” being hard to pronounce in northern Thai. We can assume that Edna Cole was known as “*nai Cō*,” Cole also being a difficult word to pronounce. She was latter known as “*mem Cō*” in Bangkok, “*mem*” being a Siamese-language honorific reserved for Western women on the order of the French meaning of, “Madame” or “Mademoiselle.”

What is striking is the use of the honorific, “*nai*,” with a young woman. Normally, *nai* is a title of respect for a person of higher social status, most usually men. Older women might be known as *mae nai* (“Mother *nai*”), if they had sufficient status, but not a young woman. It became clear to the people of Chiang Mai, however, that the usual categories applicable to young, single women did not fit young, single *missionary* women. They deserved more respect than that, respect being a matter of importance in a hierarchical society. In truth, this process of reframing honorifics to fit missionary women was not limited to women like Cole and Campbell. Although we do not know the timeframe, we do know that older, married missionary women came to be known as *mae kru*, “mother teacher,” or, in the case of women married to doctors, *mae liang*, “mother benefactor.” Sophia McGilvary eventually was known as *mae kru luang*, “most highly respected mother teacher” just as her husband, Daniel, was known as *pho kru luang*.

In all of this, we have just one more example of the ways in which the missionary *presence* in Chiang Mai was in and of itself a modernizing presence. The ways they spoke, behaved, and related to the general society introduced change. The way they built things and organized things offered alternatives to business as usual in the North. Their ideas about God, salvation, freedom, and justice slowly seeped into the consciousness of their neighbors and their neighbors’ neighbors.

²⁸⁰See, Swanson, “A New Generation: Missionary Education and Changes in Women’s Roles in Traditional Northern Thai Society.” *Sojourn* 3, 2 (August 1988): 187-206.

²⁸¹Older, married My personal favorite for the way in which northern Thai people indigenized missionary names is *pho liang* Pee-per, for Dr. Samuel Peoples, who last served in Nan.

²⁸²Wilson to Irving, 31 August 1882, v. 4, BFM.

Within days of their arrival, Cole and Campbell took over the little, informal school begun by Sophia McGilvary, and under their full-time management it began to grow virtually immediately. In just a little over a week, the school doubled in size from six to twelve students. They began with a modest, limited curriculum that included arithmetic, geography, and music; and they found that their little band of scholars were easy to teach and eager to learn. Cole and Campbell themselves were clearly excited to be in Chiang Mai and were very taken with what Campbell described as the quiet, affectionate, sociable, yet energetic and reliable nature of the northern Thai people.

By September 1879, the girls' school had eighteen students and could have had more than that if the mission had had the room and the finances to enroll them. Cole and Campbell were distressed that they had to turn down quite a number of boys who also wanted to study with them, but they had their hands full with just the girls. In addition to the eighteen boarding students, they also had two girls who lived at home but studied at the school and an additional four girls and seven boys who studied on their own at home with some tutoring from Cole and Campbell. In all, then, they were teaching some 31 students, twenty of whom were full-time regular students. So successful had their school become that Wilson turned his home over to the school and moved into a bamboo house.²⁸³ By October, the mission was laying plans to build a school on property adjacent to its compounds on the river, property purchased by it for the school.²⁸⁴

The significance of this moment in time can hardly be overstated, whether it be in its importance to the history of the Laos Mission, the growing convert community, or the larger story of the modernization of the Northern States including the introduction of Western education into the region. Vachara Sindhuprama, in his ground breaking dissertation on the development of modern education in northern Thailand, states that in Siam generally, "Christian missionaries played an important role in this development as the forerunners of the spread of modern education in the country." He goes on to state that the Presbyterian role in the North was even more important and also notes that the Laos Mission remained the sole provider of Western-style education for women until about 1907 when the Siamese government founded a girls' school in Chiang Mai—almost thirty years after Cole and Campbell started their work.²⁸⁵

The year 1879, thus, marks the headwaters of the mission school system, which eventually would expand into every one of the five Northern States and become a dominant, highly valued part of the mission's work. This year also stands at the headwaters of the introduction of Western-style, secular education more generally in the future northern Thailand. It stands at the headwaters, as well, of the women's education movement, which would eventually make education just as available to women as it long had been to men.

All of this was not simply a matter of significant social changes spanning decades. In the year of our Lord eighteen hundred and seventy-nine, those changes had an immediate impact on the lives of northern Thai women. This was particularly true for

²⁸³Mary Campbell, undated letter, *Woman's Work for Woman* 9, 12(December 1879): 424-25; Edna Cole, undated letter, *Woman's Work for Woman* 9, 12(December 1879): 425-27; Campbell letter, 19 April 1879, in Peabody, *Mary Margaretta Campbell*, 28-29; and Campbell to Douglas, 29 September 1879, in Peabody, *Mary Margaretta Campbell*, 29.

²⁸⁴Cheek to [the Board], October 1879, v. 4, BFM.

²⁸⁵Vachara, "Modern Education," 5, 64.

Chantah, a young woman who had studied with Sophia McGilvary and eventually became a nanny and household servant in the McGilvary home. When Cole and Campbell took over Sophia's little class, they hired Chantah as their "assistant teacher," making her the first northern Thai woman to be employed as a salaried professional in a "modern" institution or organization.²⁸⁶

The school also intensified the dialogue that we have seen taking place between the missionaries and the people of Chiang Mai. In a letter she wrote in September 1879, Campbell noted that the school usually had visitors who often came when they started in the morning and stayed until noon. They observed everything that was going on in the house as well as in the school, and they listened attentively to the students as they received their lessons, which Campbell took to be their way of discovering the potential of their own people. She wrote that these visitors were especially taken with the students' singing, which was becoming quite good.²⁸⁷ New words. New ideas. New music. New ways of behaving and dressing. Strange accents. If the West, in a sense, arrived in April 1867 with the McGilvarys, that arrival was intensified, magnified in April 1879 with Campbell and Cole.

In a limited sense, then, the arrival of the Laos Mission's first two single women missionaries in 1879 recalled the arrival of the McGilvary family in Chiang Mai in 1867, just twelve eventual years previously. They, like the McGilvarys, represented something new and exotic. They represented a distant world where people behaved (and believed) strangely. We do well to remind ourselves yet again that Westernization was not just about economic or technological change. It was that dialogue we have alluded to previously between two very different peoples, and the young ladies from America gave that dialogical encounter a refreshing jolt and carried it forward still further.

The influence of the school was also felt in the Chiang Mai Church. For one thing, as Campbell noted in the letter cited above, the students were contributing to a marked improvement in congregational singing. Apparently, the missionaries had pretty much been the only ones who sang during worship previously, but now the girls from the school joined in with them. One might dare say that congregational singing and the impact of Western hymnology on the northern Thai church began in important degree with the new school. For another thing, the church also began to baptize girls' school students preparatory to receiving them as full members beginning with three students who received the sacrament in July. By year's end, one of the girls was admitted into full membership of the congregation with two more scheduled to join in January 1880.²⁸⁸

Writing to Campbells' parents in June 1881, McGilvary summed up the initial success of the new girls' school by stating that, Campbell and Cole's "...success for so short a time has been astonishing. Many of their pupils are already recorded on the church's roll, and give evidence of a new heart by a new life."²⁸⁹ The "new generation" of missionaries and of northern Thai women had indeed arrived in Chiang Mai. We should note, finally, that it would be almost another decade before the mission opened its

²⁸⁶Swanson, "A New Generation," 195.

²⁸⁷Campbell to Douglas, 29 September 1879, in Peabody, 29.

²⁸⁸Campbell to Irving, 20 October 1879, v. 4, BFM; and Campbell letter, 1879, in Peabody, 31.

²⁸⁹McGilvary to Campbells, 8 June 1881, Mediterranean Sea, in Peabody, 49.

second school, a boys's school, and it would not be until the 1890s that the mission began to spread its educational system in other mission centers.

Growth of the Church

As important as the founding of the girls' school was, the growth of the church, which began to accelerate at a somewhat faster pace in 1879, meant still more to the members of the Laos Mission. This was especially true that year because the congregation was becoming more and more of a church of families rather than individuals, and the converts were beginning to build their own society and with it their own religious culture. The numbers were still very small, less than fifty individuals in total belonged to the church at the end of the year; but the Christian constituency, if we can call it that, was definitely growing and taking shape.

Nan Inta, writing in July 1879 to the McGilvary's daughter, Emelie, who was in the United States, described the situation of his own family. He, of course, was the first baptized Christian, and by this time his wife, Pa Peng, was also baptized as was his second daughter, Kam Tip. He told Emelie that all of his other six children also considered themselves to be Christians, making them the first fully Christian family in the North. In fact, Nan Inta's oldest daughter, Kaoma Ruen, her infant son, and Nan Inta's youngest son, Oon Ruen, had just been baptized on July 6th, the first Sunday of that same month.²⁹⁰

Although Nan Inta's family was the most pronounced example, it was not the only one that was coalescing around the new faith. The pages of the Chiang Mai Church session's official minutes for 1879 are filled with notes explaining the relationship of newly baptized members to those who were previously baptized: Kaowanna was Saeng Boon's niece; Pa Ta was from Pa Kammooon's family and the mother of Noi Intachak; Boon Yueng was the sister of Pook and the daughter of Loong In; and so forth.²⁹¹ Although the statistics given for the year vary somewhat, by mid-year the baptized constituency of the church including baptized children and infants was just under or at 60 individuals.²⁹²

As the church in Chiang Mai grew, however, it began to experience the growing pains that would mark the northern Thai church for the rest of the century and into the next one. One of those growing pains had to do with the difficult question of church discipline. Since ancient times, church leaders, especially in times and places where the church was entering new territory, have had to strike some balance between the doctrinal and moral purity of the churches and the need to be realistic about the human frailties of their members. How much perfection, that is, should be expected of imperfect mortals when they become followers of Christ?

In April 1879, the session of the Chiang Mai Church tried the case of Boon Huang, a recent convert, who was charged with complicity in spirit worship because he

²⁹⁰Loong Nan Inta to Emelie McGilvary, in McGilvary., "Letter from Siam," letter dated 22 July 1879, NCP New Series 12. 617 (5 November 1879): 1.

²⁹¹Minutes of the Chiang Mai Church, 6 July 1879, 94-96.

²⁹²Unlike several other evangelical denominations in the U.S., the Presbyterians baptized infants and children, which very much worked to their advantage in the Northern States because it allowed families to begin the process of folding family members, including even the youngest, into the Christian faith.

allowed strings to be attached to his wrists during an illness.²⁹³ He had also not been very regular in attending worship. After due deliberation, the session (composed of McGilvary, Wilson, and Nan Inta) found Boon Huang guilty and deserving of some punishment, which they limited to a public admonishment before the whole congregation.²⁹⁴ In these early years of the church, Boon Huang's case was unusual and his punishment markedly restrained, but in years to come the question of church discipline would only grow.

Establishing standards for church discipline was not the only issue that the session had to deal with. It had to also consider the criteria for church membership, a concern that was related to maintaining the doctrinal and moral integrity of the congregation. Two cases, in particular, stood out during 1879. There was first the question of Noi Tip. In July, the session finally permitted him to be baptized and admitted to the membership of the church after having postponed his admission by a full year because he could not read and also needed further instruction in the faith. The following September, however, the session voted to accept two older women, Pa Pin Pa and Pa Chonpaang, in spite of the fact that "their knowledge is not very accurate nor their views of course systematized" because "they seem to be actuated by a sincere desire to be the servants & children of God and as such are welcome to the communion of the church." From the church's founding in 1868, standards for membership had usually included the ability to read Siamese and to articulate basic Christian doctrines. Noi Tip failed these standards. But, then, so did the two women, which showed that there were other criteria for membership that were still more important, especially in the Case of Pa Chonpaang whose husband had already been baptized and whose five children were baptized with her. In addition, she had long been known by the missionaries and evidently worked in the McGilvary household.²⁹⁵

It is important here to take note of the degree of flexibility exercised by McGilvary and Wilson as demonstrated in these cases. In the case of Noi Tip, they (along with Nan Inta) reaffirmed their commitment to maintaining a trained, knowledgeable, and literate church membership. In the case of Pan Pin Pa and Pa Choonpaang, however, they showed a willingness to be flexible in enforcing their standards for church membership, especially in Pa Choonpaang's case. While she was not very knowledgeable in her faith and almost certainly couldn't read Siamese, there were mitigating factors; and the session admitted her to membership.

That is to say, the Laos Mission a decade into its life had already developed something of a balanced approach to its standards for church membership. Its missionaries could be flexible when they perceived qualities in given converts that made

²⁹³In the various cultures of the Thai peoples, including the northern Thai, string tying ceremonies have long been an important way to preserve the integrity and wholeness of an individual's *kwahan*, a term variously rendered into English as a person's life force, essence, or soul. It was especially important in times of personal transition or crisis. While some Western missionaries in Thailand today argue that string tying ceremonies are essentially cultural rather than religious, that was not the view taken by the members of the Laos Mission. See Paul DeNeui, "String-Tying Ritual as Christian Communication in Northeast Thailand." Ph.D. dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 2005.

²⁹⁴Minutes of the Session of the Chiang Mai Church, 13 April 1879, 91.

²⁹⁵Minutes of the Session, Chiang Mai Church, 7 September 1879, 102-103.

them acceptable church members even if they didn't measure up to the expectations of literacy and a certain degree of theological understanding. By way of comparison, the Siam Mission, the Laos Mission's sister Presbyterian mission centered on Bangkok, in the 1880s and 1890s suffered through a long, acrimonious debate over church membership standards that resulted in a much more judgmental, rigid application of the criteria for membership. That rigidity had the consequence of limiting the growth of the Siam Mission churches that negatively impacted church life for decades to come.²⁹⁶ Such was not the case in the Northern States, for the most part.

If the criteria for church membership and discipline were key issues importantly addressed by the mission in 1879, leadership in the convert community was equally a matter for concern. Since the Chiang Mai Church's foundation in 1868, Nan Inta had stood out as its single most important northern Thai leader, unchallenged in that position by any of the later converts. In early 1879, however, that situation changed with the return to Chiang Mai of Nan Ta, a man who was on the verge of conversion in September 1869 until he was warned of Chao Kawilorot's impending persecution of the Christian converts and fled for his life. According to McGilvary, Nan Ta had been a monk in a monastery sponsored by Chao Kawilorot and *chao muang's* "protégé" or *luk keo* ("jewel son"), which meant that he was in effect Chao Kawilorot's adopted son. It was during this time that he first encountered the McGilvarys and became interested in Christianity, and he continued to visit McGilvary from time to time to learn more about the new faith. He was particularly struck by the contrasts between it and Buddhism. Nan Ta thereafter left the monastery, married, and he continued to visit McGilvary and Wilson to discuss religion. He also studied Siamese with them. All of this was known to Chao Kawilorot, and when the persecutions were about to take place, Nan Ta was warned to flee, which he did going first to Chiang Rai and eventually as far as Maulmein. He told McGilvary that he had tried to get news of what had happened in Chiang Mai but for the next ten years had no idea what had happened until he finally heard about the Edict of Toleration and returned home. There he found that his wife had not remarried and that the missionaries were still in Chiang Mai.²⁹⁷

Years later Nan Ta wrote a letter addressed to, "The Ministers & Members of the Church in America" in which he described his experience. He wrote that he had come to believe in "the religion of the divine Jesus" while still a Buddhist monk. He, in fact, had come to a point in his religious studies when his teachers had little left to teach him; and it was just at that point that he heard about the McGilvarys and based on their instruction he felt that he "...knew that I had now found the true God." As related above, he fled at the time of Chao Kawilorot's persecution of the Christians, and it was only when he finally learned ten years later the Kawilorot had died that, "I returned home and sought the teacher and learned from him until I was ready to receive baptism, and indeed to this time."²⁹⁸

Nan Ta had been a man of some consequence in Chiang Mai in 1869 before he fled, and his prominence plus his own innate leadership skills gave the emerging

²⁹⁶Herbert R. Swanson, *Towards a Clean Church: A Case Study in Nineteenth-Century Thai Church History* (Chiang Mai: Office of History, Church of Christ in Thailand, 1991), 45-48.

²⁹⁷McGilvary, *Half-Century*, 225-228.

²⁹⁸Nan Ta to The Ministers & Members of the Church in America, n.d. [10 February 1892], copy, trans D. G. Collins, v. 9, BFM.

Christian community a second leader of some caliber. Nan Ta was baptized in January 1880 and admitted to church membership at that time—nearly a year after he returned. Writing in February of that same year, Wilson reported that, “Nan Ta is now living on the Mission Compound & bids fair to be a valuable assistant in our work.”²⁹⁹ As we will see in later chapters, such proved to be the case.

At this early stage in the congregation’s life, one thing that is clear from the historical record is that it was still not “convenient” to be a Christian in Chiang Mai. There was still a very powerful political faction opposed to the new religion, and the mission could not yet provide converts with the plethora of mission jobs that there would be in later years. Just as the first seven converts back in 1869 had converted out of an apparently genuine interest in Christianity, so the small band of sixty or so affiliated with the church in 1879 were mostly sincerely taken with their new religious faith. Mary Campbell provided a glimpse of their commitment when she wrote of one Sunday service late in the year when ten converts joined the church that, “Some of those who sat together at the Lord’s table walked ten or twelve miles to do so, crossing creeks they were obliged to swim, and wading through mud and water, in many places reaching to their waists and above. I suppose this looks almost impossible to you, as it did to me, nevertheless it is true.”³⁰⁰

They were, after all, only a small number of people. There was no great people’s movement such as McGilvary and Wilson looked for in the glory months before September 1869. Some converted after receiving medical care. Some converted after entering the girls’s school. Some converted after family members had previously entered the new religion. Some, such as Nan Inta and Nan Ta, were just plain taken with Christianity in contrast to their previous adherence to a mixture of Buddhism and spirit propitiation. And in all of this the northern Thai church was not born on one particular day or even in one given year; it gradually began to emerge, to be born in the last half of the decade of the 1870s and would continue to be born into the new decade to follow.

By the end of 1879, then, Chiang Mai Church was finally beginning to take shape as a northern Thai church increasingly made up of families and composed of individuals committed to their new faith. In December, the congregation held its first election of new elders, which was surely the first Western-style democratic election ever held in the Northern States.³⁰¹ This meant that the church was now taking increased responsibility for its own life, although the missionaries continued to play a very large role as well. The girls’s school meanwhile was providing more Christian education for the converts, especially its girls and young women. Even congregational singing was improving. In these twelve months, in sum, the mission and the church crossed a threshold that bode well for the future.

Phi Ka

Yet another significant development in the history of the mission and the church deserves particular attention here. In a letter dated 22 July 1879, McGilvary called attention to the story of one of the converts, who was baptized on the first Sunday of July, and her family. Her name was Saeng Boon. She originally came from a “good family,”

²⁹⁹Wilson to Irving, 14 January 1880, v. 4, BFM; Wilson to Irving, 12 February 1880, v. 4, BFM.

³⁰⁰Campbell letter, 1879, in Peabody, 31.

³⁰¹Sessional Records, 103-104.

and her first husband was Chao Mae Tip Keson's uncle; we will remember that she was the wife of the *chao muang*, Chao Intanon, which meant that Saeng Boon's first husband had been an important figure. But he died, and Saeng Boon married a widower; and here is really where her story begins roughly a year earlier, in mid-1878.

Saeng Boon's second husband's deceased first wife had been suspected of harboring within herself a "witch-spirit," called *phi ka*; and her neighbors came to believe that Saeng Boon and her two young son's had been infected with the same witch-spirit because they lived in the house and on the land where the spirit resided. These neighbors planned to drive the whole family away. Saeng Boon divorced her second husband in hopes that she and her sons would be freed of any suspicion, but the neighbors were having none of that; and all of them were to be forced off their property.

McGilvary writes, "At the request of a prince, a son of [Saeng Boon's] first husband by a different wife, I took the family on our place, promising to risk the spirit of the dead, and do all I could to protect her against her living enemies." Not long after Saeng Boon's family took refuge with the missionaries, the Siamese commissioner issued the Edict of Religious Toleration, which among other things gave the Laos Mission legal standing in its defense of Saeng Boon's family. Their house and all of the trees on the family's property, meanwhile, were burned to the ground by their neighbors to make sure that the witch-spirit could not continue to occupy the property. Nearly a year after all of these events, the session of the Chiang Mai Church voted to baptize Saeng Boon and receive her into the church. For all of that time, apparently, she and her children plus a niece had resided in the mission compound, and the two boys and the niece had all been given instruction by the missionaries.³⁰²

Recalling this event decades later, McGilvary observed that the case of Saeng Boon and her family was a pivotal moment both in the history of the northern Thai Christian movement and in Northern States politics. He wrote that from the first days of the Laos Mission he had been amazed by the large numbers of people driven from their homes by accusations of *phi ka*, what is usually called "witchcraft" in English although it is actually a form of demon possession. He stated that,

Accusation of witchcraft had become one of the most dreaded means of oppression and persecution. It was a favourite way of getting rid of an envied rival or of a disagreeable neighbour. No family and no rank were safe from such attack. Princes, even, had fallen under its ban. When once the suspicion of witchcraft was well started, the individual or the family was doomed.

He also remembered that the hue and cry against Saeng Boon's family did not end when they took up residence in the mission compound. Their former neighbors contended that her boys continued to visit their neighborhood causing people to fall ill every time they did so. Things got so bad, in fact, that the *chao* who had asked McGilvary to intercede and who had assumed the legal authority for him to do so, asked that he give up the family and allow them to be sent into exile. Significantly, McGilvary agreed but only on the condition that the family's case first be taken to the Siamese Commissioner for adjudication. If the Commissioner found them guilty of witchcraft, they would be exiled;

³⁰²McGilvary, "Letter from Siam," letter dated 22 July 1879, *NCP New Series* 12. 617(5 Nov 1879): 1; see also, Sessional Records, 6 July 1879, 94-96.

but if he found them innocent, their accusers would be punished. As McGilvary guessed, this “offer” brought an end to the case. He summed up the whole matter by writing that, “It was a great victory in the demon controversy; and, later, as we shall see, it proved a great boon to scores of helpless victims. Before the arrival of the Commissioner such an outcome would have been impossible. No Lao court would have refused to expel persons so accused.”³⁰³

Some four years after Saeng Boon joined the Chiang Mai Church, Holt Hallett, a British explorer surveying possible railway routes through the Shan States of Burma and the Northern States, visited Chiang Mai in 1884 and made particular note of the consequences of the Laos Mission’s handling of the problem of *phi ka*. Relying on information from the Presbyterian missionaries, notably Wilson, Hallett described the accusations of witchcraft as often a result of greed, envy, or a desire for revenge against a given person and family. It was used as a way to steal property or get back at someone, which was widely used against all levels of society from highest to lowest. He praised the Presbyterians for trying to conquer the belief in witchcraft and reported that men of the highest ranks and other “intelligent people” had begun to turn to the mission for medical assistance rather than rely on spirit mediums and ceremonies in cases of *phi ka*. Again, relying on his missionary sources, he claimed that, “Another blow has been given to superstition by the missionaries sheltering those who lie under the accusation of witchcraft.” He also noted that, “At the time of my visit sixteen accused families were residing in the Mission grounds, some of whom had been converted to Christianity; and most of the children were attending the schools.”³⁰⁴

In subsequent years, those accused of witchcraft became an important source of converts; and because the accusations of witchcraft were lodged against individuals from every level and sector of society, converts who otherwise would not have been considered social marginals found their way into the churches of the Laos Mission. For the missionaries themselves in the 1870s and 1880s, it is clear that their concern in all of this was not just to gain converts. They pitied those who were accused of witchcraft because they suffered under a severe form of social and economic persecution that was thoroughly unjust. The missionaries cared about their faith and about the church, but they also cared about social justice; and we see here once again that their concerns had social and political consequences. They began the process of reconfiguring the uses of power in Northern States’ society so that one person could not longer “get at” a neighbor by feigning illness and stirring up a community against that neighbor with accusations that neighbor was possessed.

Put another way, the Laos Mission in its frontal assault on the evil spirits of *phi ka* began to create a new kind of space in the Northern States, one where these particular spirits no longer resided. As Tanabe has observed, such spirits were linked to particular places and considered to be “real ‘beings’” that could affect the very relationship between a person’s body and soul. He states that, “Spirits are power, or more precisely a flow or flux of power.”³⁰⁵ In light of the nature of these malevolent spirits, it is significant that

³⁰³McGilvary, *Half-Century*, 204-206.

³⁰⁴Hallett, *Thousand Miles*, 106-111.

³⁰⁵Shigeharu Tanabe, “Becoming Spirit: Spirit Cults in Northern Thailand.” In *Mobility and Heritage in Northern Thailand and Laos: Past and Present*, edited by Olivier Évrard, Dominique Guillaud, and Chayan Vaddhanaphuti, (Chiang Mai: Institut de Recherche pour le Développement, 2013), 75-76.

Hallett reported that they were believed to be afraid of Europeans and would not enter the Laos Mission compound. Instead, when a “witch” went into the compound their *phi ka* supposedly left them and roosted in a tamarind tree near the mission gate; the spirit would reinhabit them only when they left the compound. Hallett reported that local people were afraid of the tree, claiming that at night they could hear the cries of the spirits waiting there and that sometimes the spirits confronted people when they walked by.³⁰⁶

Mission space was a new kind of space. From a northern Thai perspective we might call it a “secular” space, one free of both Buddhism and the worship of spirits. For Christian converts, of course, the mission compound was the center of their new religious faith and not secular at all; but for the vast majority of the people of Chiang Mai, it was truly secular, modernized territory—a harbinger of things to come as the Northern States slipped more and more into the Siamese nation state and the so-called modern world.

In assessing the missionary role in the modernization in the Northern States/northern Siam, Dr. Ratanaporn Sethakul makes two observations pertinent to the case of Saeng Boon and withcraft. First, she notes that the Laos Mission and the Siamese government worked in a loosely held alliance, each supporting the other in introducing secularizing and modernizing changes in the North. That was certainly the case here as McGilvary himself said: without the Edict of Toleration and the Siamese Commissioner, there was no way the mission could have successfully protected Saeng Boon and her family. Second, Dr. Ratanaporn argues that the missionary role in northern Thai social changes was to introduce, promote, and accelerate changes. They not only introduced modern institutions, such as schools and hospitals, but they also had an impact on the northern Thai world view; and again we see precisely that kind of change taking place in the early 1880s as people begin to turn to Western medicine rather than spirit doctors and rites for healing.

Dr. Ratanaporn insists that these changes were not limited to those who converted to Christianity or otherwise came into direct contact with missionary influence. She, in fact, proposes something of a wave theory to explain the modernizing impact of the Laos Mission. The changes it introduced spread into northern Thai society indirectly as they influenced individuals who then carried the seed of that influence to others. She also observes, as we have noted previously, that one of the contradictions of missionary work in the North was that they helped to introduce and spread materialistic values that actually frustrated them in trying to attain their religious goals. They were part of larger social and economic forces that accentuated the introduction of more materialistic values.³⁰⁷

The story of Saeng Boon and her family, thus, is not only the story of one convert and one convert family. Embedded within their story is the experience of succeeding generations of Christian converts, notably lepers as well as supposed “witches,” who had been cast out to the margins of their society and decided to join the Christian alternative society created by the Laos Mission. Embedded within their story is also the experience of an entire society and culture as it was pushed, prodded, cajoled, and encouraged to enter the so-called modern world.

³⁰⁶Hallett, *Thousand Miles*, 111.

³⁰⁷Dr. Ratanaporn Sethakul, interview with the author, 26 May 1995.

Conclusion

Writing in his autobiography some thirty years later, McGilvary felt that the year 1879 marked a turning point after twelve years of struggle. While the more permanent establishment of the girls' school was the singlemost important development in the year, he also observed that the mission's medical work had become better established and its evangelistic work strengthened. For all of these reasons, he enthused that now the mission "could write in large letters on our altar, 'Jehovah-Nissi'—Jehovah our banner."³⁰⁸ He was entirely correct in his assessment, but this does not mean that the hard times and the struggle had magically come to an end. Placing the Christian religion on a permanent basis in the Northern States was a process that involved struggle as well as achievement, and as the 1880s began, that process would continue.

³⁰⁸McGilvary, *Half-Century*, 225.

Chapter Six

The Years March On, 1880-1883

Introduction

Thus far, the history of the Laos Mission and the incipient Christian movement in the Northern States developed in three stages. The first dated from the mission's foundation in April 1867 through August 1869, when it looked as if the mission was on the verge of fostering a religious "people's movement." Chao Kawilorot brought that time of hope to an end in September 1869 by executing two converts and threatening the lives of the rest. From that point on the mission entered its second phase, a time of trial and retrenchment, which over the next five years gradually shifted into the third era in the history of the mission and its converts. Beginning roughly in 1876, both mission and church began to grow, if slowly and fitfully. The mission opened a girls' school, a major accomplishment. The handful of converts began to share their new religion with relatives as well as friends, which meant that they began to form Christian *communities*, also a major achievement. As we saw in the last chapter, the year 1879 was a watershed year. Directions had been established. Trends were emerging.

One of the few clear lessons history teaches us is that nothing is set in stone, and if 1879 marked a turning point in the history of the Laos Mission and the Christian movement in the Northern States, it did so only in hindsight. All that was clear to the missionaries at the dawn of the "new era" in January 1880 was that there was still more to do than they had time to do it in, more of the same challenges and obstacles that they had faced in the previous decade

Growth and Its Limitations

Beginning most clearly in 1879, the handful of converts under the leadership of the missionaries as well as Nan Inta began to transform the Christian movement from a few discrete Christian individuals into Christian families and Christian communities. That process continued for the rest of the history of the Laos Mission and beyond. So it was on the 4th of January 1880, that Chiang Mai Church received into its number, See Mo, the son of Nan Chai and Wan Dee, Kooey Koon, the daughter of Nan Suwan and Huen Kam, and, Booa Kam, the adopted daughter of Pook and Chanta. Nan Ta, whose story we related in Chapter Five and who was to become a key leader in the years ahead, was also baptized and received into the church. Beginning on the 4th, the church observed a week of evening prayer held in various homes, which meetings were then continued as weekly prayer meetings.³⁰⁹ In succeeding months, Nan Inta and other converts led these prayer meetings because a missionary could not always be present. Wilson, who had a touch of the romantic in him, was particularly moved because the prayer meetings reminded him of his own childhood experiences in western Pennsylvania.³¹⁰

From this point on, the Chiang Mai Church regularly received new members at communion services held on the first Sunday of the month. Month by month, then, the

³⁰⁹Sessional Records, 108-109; Wilson to Irving, 14 January 1880, v. 4, BFM.

³¹⁰Wilson to Lowrie, 12 May 1880, v. 4, BFM.

church grew. The numbers were not impressive, just a few individuals each month, but it did continue to grow; and as we have already seen it grew particularly but not entirely among those who were marginalized by the larger society, especially those accused of harboring evil spirits.

The mission and its churches, by the same token, would also continue to struggle over how to deal with individual converts who pledged themselves to their new faith but then did not live up to the standards that the missionaries understood to be integral to the Christian life. Writing of one case, Wilson lamented that a particular member of the Chiang Mai Church engaged in highly immoral conduct (unspecified, which means it was likely sexual misconduct) and that some other members of the church tried to hide his “sin” from the missionaries. These kinds of actions dishonored Christ in Wilson’s view, and he concluded, “How feeble the consciousness of sin which sometimes manifests itself in the lives of some of our Christians!”³¹¹

The girls’ school continued to play an important role in the growth of the Christian community. In October 1880, Cole reported to the Board that the school had been almost too successful, growing faster than Cole and Campbell’s ability to cope with it, especially in terms of their own northern Thai language skills. Even so, Cole was very encouraged with what they had accomplished so far, as evidenced in the changing behaviors of their students, which she felt was the true measure of the growth of their work—not numbers. She believed that their students were becoming firmer, more patient, and less idle and careless in the way they lived. She felt the presence of the Holy Spirit in their midst carrying out the “blessed process” of purifying these young northern Thai girls. She reported that they loved to pray and have their own evening prayer service, which every girl attends; and they would even come together at other times for prayer “as the Spirit inclines them.”³¹²

As we have seen, 1879 marked what we might call the beginning of the “new normal”. The year 1880, by that measure, was the point at which the new normal really began to be normal. The church grew normally. It had a set of regularized, usual activities. The issues it faced were ones it had faced before and would again. The school had its own regular routines. And much of the other work of the missionaries had also become routine. Wilson, for example, spent much of his time with “secular” matters including the administration of the mission and supervising the erection of new buildings. The mission had developed a large organization, which included the necessity of having yearly supplies shipped up the river.³¹³

The missionaries, especially Wilson, invested great amounts of time in overseeing the construction of the mission’s physical plant, and in their correspondence they felt constrained to justify why that was the case. Cole, for example, explained that the missionaries had to superintend all construction work because, “The natives are unable to oversee any kind of work that requires care and exactness, besides they are so slow.”³¹⁴ And it wasn’t just the male missionaries who were required to supervise construction

³¹¹Wilson to Lowrie, 12 May 1880, v. 4, BFM.

³¹²Cole to Irving, 1 October 1880, v. 4, BFM.

³¹³Wilson to Irving, 22 November 1880, v. 4, BFM.

³¹⁴Cole to Mrs. Douglas, 19 March 1881, in Peabody, p. 43.

work because of the inadequacies of northern Thai workers. In a letter to her parents-in-law, Sarah Cheek told them how she enjoyed overseeing the work of getting her newly built house in order and enjoyed the work of supervising construction as well. While they might find it strange for her to be overseeing fifteen to twenty men at work every day, it only made sense to her. All over the world, she wrote, missionary women were taking up duties usually denied them in America because “civilized women” had a higher social standing than “native men.”³¹⁵ We should remember that Sarah Bradley Cheek was born and raised in Bangkok and that her comments here are those of a woman who grew up in in Thai society in which hierarchical thinking was as natural as breathing. As we saw in Chapter Five, northern Thai society had to reconfigure its usual terms of social respect in order to fit young, single missionary woman into its sense of hierarchy and respect. That same process applied to the married women, such as Sarah Cheek, and it had practical, every day consequences.

Sometimes, the routines of administration and building the mission’s infrastructure obscured and took time away from its main purpose: evangelism. McGilvary, however, made time for spreading the Christian message including taking tours of varying lengths into the hinterlands. In February 1881, for example, he took a “short” tour of eight days walking to a few villages that he had never visited before; and he reported that he found a “wonderful interest” in Christianity in those communities. He also noted, however, that the villagers seemed as concerned to learn to read Siamese as they did in his religious message; and he concluded that people’s interest in Siamese literacy served to encourage their willingness to entertain the Christian message.³¹⁶

McGilvary’s comments once again highlight the intimate connection between the work of the Laos Mission and the introduction of social change. They also suggest that when he and the other members of the mission engaged in evangelism on such trips into the countryside they were, in effect, conducting a Western-style public relations campaign, the first of its kind in the Northern States. Later, the mission would establish a printing office, translate the Bible and other materials into northern Thai, and thus further develop a multi-media approach to public relations—all in the name of Christ. In any event, evangelistic tours also became a part of the mission’s routine.

Conflict

The year 1880 may have been the first normally normal year in the history of the still young Laos Mission, but that does not mean that things had suddenly gotten simpler or easier. The mission itself was still a very human institution prone to all of the troubles any institution can find itself facing. In 1880, those problems included a growing conflict between McGilvary on the one hand and Wilson and Dr. Cheek on the other.

As we have seen, McGilvary and Wilson dominated the early history of the Laos Mission, and of the two, McGilvary, was the more important. He, indeed, long remained the leading figure in the mission and his is the one name most closely linked to the whole of its history down to the present. He was a man of vision and courage. The people of

³¹⁵Sarah B. Cheek to Father and Mother, 6 February 1880, [photocopy] McGilvary Family Papers.

³¹⁶McGilvary to Irving, 11 February 1881, v. 4, BFM.

Chiang Mai were enough impressed with his leading role not only in the mission but in the local society that in later years they bestowed in him the honorific of *pho kru luang*, the “Great Father Teacher”. Wilson never quite attained McGilvary’s stature, and while revered in the convert community he never did have the affection or the standing of McGilvary. He was less of a visionary, less of an optimist, and sometimes he could be a bit of a whiner. For McGilvary, the glass was almost always half-full; Wilson tended to see it as being half-empty.

From 1867 up to 1880, there are no hints of friction or disagreements between the two men; this does not necessarily mean there weren’t any problems between them, but the missionary record in general tends to shy away from mentioning interpersonal issues, especially in official correspondence with the Board of Foreign Missions. In 1880, things changed. While there was no face-to-face confrontation because McGilvary was not in Chiang Mai, a serious disagreement over mission strategy erupted between them, one that dominated most of 1880s. And from that point on for years to come, there would be other disagreements and points of friction between these two veterans of the Laos Mission.

The year 1880 opened with the McGilvarys headed down river to Bangkok, Sophia being ill. Dr. Cheek had recommended that her only real hope of recovery was to return to the United States. Having gone as far as Hong Kong, she had improved enough so that McGilvary felt he could return to Chiang Mai while his family continued on to America.³¹⁷ In the meantime, Dr. Cheek himself left for a trip to Bangkok, and Mary Campbell and Edna Cole were absent from Chiang Mai as well. Kate Wilson was already more or less permanently living in the United States. For a time, Wilson was the only missionary left in Chiang Mai, which meant that McGilvary’s absence was sorely felt. Although Cole and Campbell soon returned, the mission staff remained seriously depleted, leaving Wilson to have to focus all of his attention on the mundane matters of carrying on new construction and otherwise just holding the fort.³¹⁸

Then, in April, there came the news that McGilvary has decided not to return to Chiang Mai but, rather, to take up residence in the border town of Tak (in those days known as Rahang, Rahaeng, or Raheng) for seven months. Because it stood on the border region between Siam proper and the Northern States and was an important center of trade, McGilvary felt that it was a place of importance for the spread of Christianity in the North. He decided to remain there partly because it was easier to stay in touch with his family but more because he wanted to discern what for him was God’s will in the matter. Did God, that is, intend for the Laos Mission to open a permanent station in Tak? Wilson’s initial reaction in his correspondence with the Board was mild, but he did note immediately that the mission needed two new male missionaries as soon as possible.³¹⁹

By June, the differences between McGilvary and Wilson concerning Tak were out in the open. Letters had been exchanged between them in which Wilson, along with Dr.

³¹⁷McGilvary to Lowrie, 9 February 1880, v. 4, BFM.

³¹⁸Wilson to Irving, 14 January 1880, v. 4, BFM; Sarah B. Cheek to Father and Mother, 6 February 1880, [photocopy] McGilvary Family Papers; and JW to Irving, 12 February 1880, v. 4, BFM.

³¹⁹McGilvary to Lowrie, 16 April 1880, v. 4, BFM; and Wilson to Lowrie, 12 May 1880, v. 4, BFM.

Cheek, expressed the feeling that the work in Chiang Mai was all but overwhelming and McGilvary must return. There was the added urgency that Chiang Mai was seeing something of a surge in conversions, which added to the need for immediate help.

McGilvary wrote the Board, and presumably Wilson, that while there was a need for him in Chiang Mai there were more compelling reasons for him to stay on in Tak. He had two individuals ready for baptism and had gathered a worshiping group of about twenty individuals who were regular in their attendance. While he celebrated the growth of the church in Chiang Mai, McGilvary felt that in its “revived state” the Chiang Mai Church should begin to reach out to others in need of the Christian faith and the mission should invest its growing strength in expanding its reach into other places.³²⁰ Tak was one such place.

If a letter Cheek wrote to the Board is any indication, the disagreement between McGilvary and his colleagues in Chiang Mai soon turned acrimonious. Cheek accused McGilvary of writing “flattering letters” about the church in Chiang Mai that pasted over the fact that Wilson was not strong, had been left with far more work than he could do, and the church had less missionary oversight than it required. Cheek begged the Board not to forget the Laos Mission in its time of need. Wilson himself wrote that all of this had become a matter of personalities, and he did not want to see the work in Chiang Mai suffer because McGilvary was staying on in Tak. He, too, pled for help, and he wrote he would, “study peace and maintain it as far as duty will allow”³²¹ Still, nothing they could say in Chiang Mai was going to change McGilvary’s mind. He, perhaps stubbornly, continued to insist that Tak offered the Chiang Mai Church an opportunity to learn the meaning of self-sacrificial service and the mission a chance to develop the congregation’s strength.”³²²

The tension between McGilvary on the one hand and Cheek and Wilson on the other was about more than just McGilvary’s failure to return to Chiang Mai as soon as his colleagues thought he should. Wilson wrote to the Board in July 1880 that Cheek was beginning to send orders for goods on behalf of some of the ruling *chao*, including both *chao luang* Intanon and *chao ho na* Buntawong, the so-called first and second kings. By doing so, he got a commission that went into the mission treasury and improved relations especially with Buntawong who had been offended by the Edict of Religious Toleration, which Wilson said singled Buntawong out by name. Wilson blamed McGilvary, calling him unwise and claimed that relations with Buntawong had improved since McGilvary left.³²³

Wilson’s letter is striking. Generally, members of the Laos Mission did not complain about each other to the Board, and as a whole its correspondence provides few insights into how members actually felt about each other. We cannot help but wonder

³²⁰McGilvary to Lowrie, 12 June 1880, v. 4, BFM

³²¹Cheek to Lowrie, 30 June 1880, v. 4, BFM; and Wilson to the Board, undated fragment, 1880, BFM.

³²²McGilvary, “Letter from Siam,” dated 23 June 1880, *North Carolina Presbyterian*. New Series 13, 664 (29 Sept 1880): 1; McGilvary, “Letter from Siam,” dated June 1880, *NCP* New Series 13, 665(6 Oct 1880): 1.

³²³Wilson to Lowrie, 1 July 1880, v. 4, BFM.

how long the personal tension between the men in Chiang Mai had been brewing. What were the sources and causes of this conflict? We also wonder how much that conflict affected other members of the mission, particularly Cole and Campbell. In fact, it seems very possible that one reason McGilvary did not return to Chiang Mai was because it would be uncomfortable for him to be there without his family. Wilson's claim, furthermore, that the Edict of Toleration singled out *chao* Buntawong does not seem to be true. At least, there is no specific mention of him or any other member of the Northern States' ruling elite in the English language translation that has come down to us (see the appendix to Chapter Four). Whether Buntawong was mentioned or not, Wilson clearly blamed McGilvary's aggressive attitudes for the mission's poor relations with him.

Wilson and McGilvary, thus, disagreed over at least two important mission policies, namely how to deal with Chao Buntawong and the other more conservative members of the ruling elite and how to balance the mission's need to evangelize the North over against its need to support and train the converts who had already joined its churches. Wilson, at this time at least, presented himself to the Board as being less confrontational with the princes and more concerned about pastoral care and Christian education. He painted McGilvary as lacking in good judgment when it came to both politics and the life of the church. It is impossible to believe that these feelings suddenly sprung up in the early months of 1880. They had a longer history; we just don't know the entirety of the story.

One ongoing source of the tension between Wilson and McGilvary, however, seems to have concerned Dr. Cheek himself. Writing some years later, McGilvary wrote to the Board of Foreign Missions concerning his vast disappointment in Cheek as a missionary. He was not committed to evangelism and building up a Christian community in the Northern States. He had from the beginning engaged in private business, which only absorbed more and more of his attention as time went on. Cheek did not have the heart or mind of a true missionary in McGilvary's estimation, and McGilvary charged that in all of this "he has appeared to have the support and sanction of Mr. Wilson."³²⁴ Although McGilvary's comment was in passing and not really germane to his complaints about Cheek, it points to a serious underlying tension concerning the very nature of missionary work itself. In the politics of the Laos Mission in its early years, Wilson compromised himself in McGilvary's opinion by siding with Cheek and thereby tacitly condoned behavior detrimental to the work of the mission. This still does not take us to the beginnings of the tension between Wilson and McGilvary, but it does underscore the depth of those feelings on both sides.

McGilvary, in any event, remained in Tak until October 1880, and he did see some growth in interest in Christianity. He was particularly proud of a man by the name of Saen Ootama, who was baptized in July, and there were others who might have also become Christians had the Laos Mission established a permanent presence in Tak. In his final report of the "Rahang Substation," McGilvary continued to insist on the significance of Tak for the Laos Mission, but in the end, things just did not work out there as he had

³²⁴McGilvary to Mitchell, 15 March 1886, v. 5, BFM.

hoped.³²⁵ For some years afterwards, he continued to cling to the dream of a mission station in Tak until it became clear by 1884 that Lampang (known then at “Lakan”) offered a much better opportunity for mission expansion and it seemed clear even to McGilvary that God was leading the Laos Mission Lampang, not Tak.³²⁶

“Cha ow”

The door was shut, then, on Tak. In Chiang Mai, on the other hand, it was increasingly open both for the emerging northern Thai church and for the Laos Mission itself. The increases that began in 1876 and accelerated in 1879 continued into the new decade to such an extent that the 1880s were going to be a time of marked growth.

In May 1880, Wilson, Cole, and three schoolgirls visited a village nine miles south of Chiang Mai at the request of a group of villagers who wanted to become Christians. In all, twelve adults and eight children were baptized, and Wilson celebrated the sacrament of communion with them. He reported himself deeply moved by the experience, especially by the baptism of one elderly convert who had initially rejected Christianity out of hand but who then firmly took hold of his new religious faith. Kate Wilson wrote, “In making a public profession of their faith, the first question asked is ‘Do you take the Lord Jehovah, the holy Trinity, the one & only living and true God, to be your God and Redeemer?’ The dear old man with his face bowed down to the floor answered in a clear firm voice ‘Cha ow’ (literally, “I will take!”).”³²⁷ A month later, the mission established a church in that community and named it, “Bethlehem Church.” As it turned out, Bethlehem Church was the first of three new congregations the Laos Mission established in 1880.

Bethlehem Church. Nan Inta’s home was out in the country in what is today Saraphi District of Chiang Mai Province, and by the early months of 1880 some 17 members of Chiang Mai Church lived nearby. The mission decided that it was time to form a new church there, and in June it elected three elders and a deacon to take charge of the church, which was officially founded on 11 July 1880. Nan Inta, who had belonged to Chiang Mai Church since 1868, became a member of the new church, which was named, “Bethlehem Church,” in honor of Wilson’s home church back in Pennsylvania.

In his detailed account of the founding of Bethlehem Church, Wilson claimed that there had previously seemed to be considerable interest in the new religion in that region, which provoked serious opposition as well. While the community was physically located in Chiang Mai territory, its residents had migrated from Lamphun and still owed their loyalty to its ruler. Village leaders thus threatened to report the names of anyone who became a Christian to the *chao luang* of Lamphun; and Wilson reported that the opposition focused its anger particularly on one young woman who intended to become a Christian. She was threatened that she would be held accountable for any tragedies that

³²⁵ McGilvary to Lowrie, 12 October 1880, v. 4, BFM; and McGilvary, Rahang Substation Report, 1 October 1880, v. 4, BFM

³²⁶ McGilvary, *Half-Century*, 232; McGilvary to Irving, 21 January 1882, v. 4, BFM; and McGilvary to Irving, 4 June 1884, v. 4, BFM.

³²⁷ K. M. Wilson to Irving, 24 August 1880, v. 4, BFM.

might take place in her community because such events would show she had offended the spirits. She remained firm, however, and received baptism in April 1880. In May, Wilson had planned to go out to the area early in the month to conduct baptisms for twelve adults and eight children, but the opposition was so vocal that he delayed his visit until later in the month when he did the baptisms.

Three days later, according to Wilson, the Lamphun *chao luang* sent a letter demanding that three Christian men go into the forest to work for him and then appear before him on the following Sunday. The converts feared for their lives as the *chao luang* was known to have an ugly temper, and they took the letter to the missionaries. Wilson and Cheek saw in it an opportunity to reaffirm the centrality of Sabbath observance for the Christian faith, and they advised the three men to wait until Monday to go to Lamphun and promised to protect them. But the converts involved chose a safer path: two went to work and the third, who was ill, sent a substitute in his place. The missionaries, meanwhile, wrote a letter of protest to the *chao luang* specifically reminding him of the protections the Edict of Religious Toleration afforded his Christian subjects. The *chao luang* responded that nothing would be done to harm Christians, and eventually the whole matter came to a quiet end.

Wilson observed that the issue at stake for the *chao luang* was his authority as a patron who had the right to conscript the labor of his subjects, including these new converts. He was convinced that they only converted to escape their responsibilities to him as their ruler. Wilson further observed that he and Cheek behaved correctly in this matter, which had caused them no little anxiety, by not engaging in a direct confrontation with the *chao luang* and letting matters play out.³²⁸ Wilson was correct that both the converts themselves and the political leaders in the Northern States, local and as well as state, in fact did believe that the missionaries were attempting to establish themselves as alternative patrons.³²⁹

In other words, the three-cornered dialogue between the Laos Mission, the Christian community, and the ruling powers of Siam's northern dependencies continued to revolve around the question of corvée labor. As we saw during the events of September 1869, changing one's religion was as much a political act as it was religious. It was about trust and about power. The converts in this case trusted Wilson and Cheek, but they also understood that it was the *chao luang* who had the literal power of life and death in their cases. Unlike 1869, however, the *chao luang* did not actually exercise that ultimate power and allowed the converts enough latitude so that they could "thread the needle," as it were, between their divided loyalties. Wilson lamented that the converts did not take a clearer stand for the Sabbath, but it can be argued that they did successfully continue the process of making political space for Christianity in the Northern States. Or, in another sense, they played their part in the emergence of a de facto secular society in which religion was a matter of less political consequence.

³²⁸Wilson to Lowrie, 23 July 1880, v. 4, BFM.

³²⁹See Graham S Fordham, "Protestant Christianity and the Transformation of Northern Thai Culture: Ritual Practice, Belief and Kinship" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Adelaide, 1991), 139.

The circumstances surrounding the founding of Bethlehem Church also remind us that there was real risk involved for many of those who decided to change their religious allegiance. They risked the unwanted attention of their rulers. They risked the opposition of their neighbors who feared the potential wrath of the local spirits. While we do not know precisely why the seventeen new members of the Bethlehem Church decided to become Christians, it is important to keep in mind that in their context that decision was not and could not be purely religious. When they became Christians, they declared an allegiance to the Laos Mission as well as to Jesus. They knew it. Their neighbors knew. The ruling class knew it.

Having organized this new congregation, Wilson put Nan Inta in charge of it on an informal basis while he and McGilvary visited the church from time to time to baptize new members and lead the church in the sacrament of communion. In the years following 1880, Bethlehem Church continued to grow and made plans for a building, which came to fruition in March 1883 when the congregation erected the first “chapel” in the Northern States devoted specifically to Sunday morning worship.³³⁰

Lampang Church. Each of the new churches was a test of the Christian movement’s strength. Starting a church is one thing, but keeping it going is quite another. In the cases of the Bethlehem Church and the church that would be established in Mae Dok Daeng at the end of 1880, the congregations survived and grew. In that sense, the movement passed the test. The story in Lampang, however hopefully it started, was a different matter entirely.

The mission had been interested in developing a presence of some form in Lampang since at least 1870, but it did not find an opening until the end of the decade. We will recall from Chapter 4 the story of Chao Phya Sihanot, a retired officer of the court in Lampang, who had received a Siamese Bible from Dr. Dan Beach Bradley while on a visit to Bangkok in the 1850s and from it discovered an interest in the religion of Jesus. It was not until 1877 that he came into contact with the missionaries in Chiang Mai and subsequently was baptized. He had gone to Chiang Mai seeking assistance from the authorities there regarding legal difficulties he was having in Lampang. When he returned to Lampang and the authorities learned that he had become a Christian those difficulties only increased, and the mission was able to maintain only sporadic contact with him—although in mid-1879 he did walk all the way to Chiang Mai to visit the missionaries.³³¹

Then in June 1880 while he was in Tak, McGilvary received a letter from Chao Phya Sihanot proposing to go and visit him with the hope of having his wife baptized. In the letter, he reported that there were three others, including a man who was a government officer, who were waiting in Lampang to be baptized. Chao Phya Sihanot did indeed travel down to Tak, and he and McGilvary spent a good deal of time in serious discussions about the Christian faith. McGilvary was obviously very taken with the old

³³⁰Wilson to Brethren, [Annual Report], 30 September 1880, v. 4, BFM; McGilvary to Irving, 5 January 1881, v. 4, BRM; Wilson to Irving, 1 August 1882, v. 4, BFM; Wilson to Irving, 2 April 1883, v. 4, BFM.

³³¹McGilvary to Irving, 24 March 1870, v. 3, BFM; and Campbell to Irving, 20 October 1879, v. 4, BFM.

Chao Phya, reporting him to be a man of considerable religious insight into both Buddhism and Christianity. He, in fact, had a surprisingly accurate grasp of Christian principles in spite of his having formed, according to McGilvary, a few wrong opinions.

McGilvary also recalled that when they had first met in 1877 Chao Phya Sihanot had thought that he would stay in Chiang Mai rather than return to Lampang. McGilvary persuaded him, however, that it would be better for him to go home. There he could evangelize others and exert a real influence for the Christian religion. By September 1880, McGilvary was planning to leave Tak to return to Chiang Mai and decided to make long stop in Lampang.³³² In October, he thus spent sixteen days in Lampang and organized the Lampang Church with six members; he also ordained Chao Phya Sihanot as elder of the church.

Ominously, however, a seventh individual who had planned to receive baptism at the same time was deterred from doing so by the threats of an “Influential prince” who promised to have the man whipped if he converted. According to McGilvary, he took a copy of the Edict of Religious Toleration and showed it to this prince who admitted that he had been in the wrong but also said he had no choice. This *chao* claimed that if he hadn’t taken a threatening public posture there would have been many more who would have also converted to Christianity.³³³ From that point on, the situation deteriorated rapidly. By mid-October 1881, Chao Phya Sihanot was in irons ostensibly for a debt that he refused to pay; but he himself was convinced that the actual cause of his imprisonment was his conversion to Christianity. He was also threatened with still more punishment if he kept writing letters to the missionaries in Chiang Mai. Wilson felt that the mission could not intervene in this case because the official charge against Chao Phya Sihanot had nothing to do with religious freedom. The Edict of Toleration did not apply. The newly founded Lampang Church, in the meantime, was virtually disbanded while mission efforts to quietly secure Chao Phya Sihanot’s release failed.³³⁴ And there matters rested until late 1883 when McGilvary visited Lampang and finally convinced the authorities to release him.³³⁵

Mae Dok Daeng Church. The last church established in 1880 was a small congregation of 17 members founded on Christmas day in Mae Dok Daeng, a rural community lying about twelve miles north and east of Chiang Mai in the midst of a very rich rice paddy plain. The mission’s connection with this village went back to 1876, as we saw in Chapter 4, when an elderly man from Mae Dok Daeng was baptized. Although he died soon thereafter, his son, Nan Suwan, also became interested in Christianity and was baptized in May 1877. There matters rested for some three years until two other residents in the village were separately accused of witchcraft and went to the missionaries for assistance. In one case, the mission bought the accused’s home and land before they could be destroyed by his neighbors as a way to get rid of the witch

³³²McGilvary to Lowrie, 10 July 1880, v. 4, BFM; McGilvary to Lowrie, 17 September 1880, v. 4, BFM; and McGilvary, *Half-Century*, 232.

³³³McGilvary to Irving, 19 November 1880, v. 4, BFM.

³³⁴Wilson to Irving, 30 December 1881, v. 4, BFM.

³³⁵Wilson to Irving, 24 November 1883, v. 4, BFM; and Wilson to Irving, 1 March 1884, v. 4, BFM.

spirit that supposedly infected his property. That man and his family were baptized in September 1880. Others in the community also declared their intention to join the congregation, which was then duly constituted as the Laos Mission's fourth church.³³⁶

By June 1882, the congregation had 26 adult members and 15 baptized children, making it only slightly smaller than the Bethlehem Church. In an August letter to the Board, Wilson reported that, "Some of the members of the church show a desire to advance in Christian knowledge & practice. And all yield outward obedience to what they know to be Christ's commands. But they need a regular systematic instruction & training so much."³³⁷ A year later, Wilson informed the Board that the Mae Dok Daeng Church was building its own small bamboo church building, and also wrote, "Our work has a cheering prospect which our seeming adversities have not the power to blight. Out of weakness the Lord can make us strong."³³⁸ In sum, this little congregation showed sufficient commitment to its new religion and sufficient strength as a church that Wilson took real comfort in it in spite of the limited Christian knowledge of its members.

Karen Churches: The Baptists Have Arrived

If the Laos Mission's big story of 1880 was the founding of three new churches, the major evangelistic and ecclesiastical story of 1881 was the arrival of Karen Baptist tribal evangelists from Burma and the initiation of Baptist work in Siam's northern dependencies. The Baptists had a small mission in Bangkok, which by the 1880s was on its last leg; but it also had a much larger presence in Burma including a highly successful mission to the Karen tribal people. The Baptists looking both east from Burma and north from Bangkok had long wanted to evangelize the Siam's northern dependencies because they knew that there were Karen people living there.

Thus it was that McGilvary reported that in February 1881 that four Karen preachers sent as official representatives of the Baptist missions in Burma had arrived in Chiang Mai. He felt that they came at an auspicious time because the influence of the Edict of Toleration plus the fact that they carried British passports meant that the Karen evangelists had a political opening that bode well for the success of their work. McGilvary greeted their prospects, however, with mixed feelings. On the one hand, he admitted that his own attempts to evangelize Karen communities near Chiang Mai using northern Thai and Siamese as the medium of his outreach, had failed. The Baptist evangelists could surely do better. To that end, he and Wilson had gotten letters from the Chiang Mai authorities explicitly stating that no officials were to hinder these evangelists or prevent anyone from becoming a Christian. In short, McGilvary avowed that the Laos Mission was ready to support Baptist work with the Karen in every way that it could.

On the other hand, McGilvary worried that the Baptists would not be content to work only among the Karen. He wrote, "Some of our brethren in Burmah have hardly yet been willing to give up their idea of a mission to the Laos." He assumed that success among the Karen would require a permanent Baptist missionary presence probably in Lampang State where there were more Karen than in Chiang Mai; and he noted that the

³³⁶Wilson to Irving, 1 January 1881, v. 4, BFM.

³³⁷Wilson to Irving, 1 August 1882, v.4, BFM.

³³⁸Wilson to Irving, 11 June 1883, v. 4, BFM.

Baptists “...are not the people to sit down and not work among any people among whom they may be.” The Baptists, that is, could become competition, which possibility left McGilvary feeling uneasy. Still, he felt that the Presbyterians could not “be like the dog in the manger and keep [the Baptists] away from doing what the church does not enable us to do.”³³⁹

The veiled threat here is clear enough. McGilvary was warning the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions that if wouldn't provide the Laos Mission with better support, the Baptists just might come in and take the field away from the Presbyterians. It is impossible to know how worried McGilvary actually was about a Baptist “invasion,” but he clearly saw the prospect of Baptist competition offered him leverage with the Board. All of this serves to remind us that it was not only in Chiang Mai that he and his colleagues had to play politics to advance the cause of the Laos Mission. The Board of Foreign Missions was a political arena in its own right, and the mission had to compete with other missions around the world for financial resources and personnel.

McGilvary subsequently took the four evangelists to the Karen villages near Chiang Mai that he had visited several times, but they were not welcomed with open arms. He speculated that Chao Buntawong had likely warned the Karen villagers to pay no attention to Christian advances; and they, therefore, dared not show any interest in the evangelists' message. In Chiang Mai State, at least, it turned out that neither the British passports nor the Edict of Toleration were all that helpful. Two weeks later the four Karen from Burma left for Lampang where they visited three villages (Ban Thet, Ban Nok, and Ban Ka) and met with much greater success. Some 500 people in these three communities indicated their desire to become Christians. One of the evangelists, Muang Htwe, assisted by a member of the Presbyterian Lampang Church, stayed on to instruct them while the other three returned to Burma to report their findings.³⁴⁰

A year later, in January 1882, the Revs. David Webster and Walter Bushnell and a large party that included six Karen preachers arrived in Chiang Mai where they stayed for a week before going on to the three villages evangelized the previous year. They remained in Lampang State for two months and baptized 75 individuals in Ban Nok and Ban Ka. Later in the year, another 29 were also baptized bringing the total number of new Christians to 104. It is worth noting here that in 1882, after fifteen years, the Laos Mission had 83 baptized members in its four churches. According to a report published by C. H. Carpenter, there would have been still more individuals baptized but for threats made by “Shan officers” (that is, northern Thai officials) that so frightened them that they ceased their interest in the new religion. He also reported that while there was sufficient interest among the Karen “to warrant aggressive evangelization” that work did not warrant opening a Baptist mission station in the Northern States at that time.³⁴¹

³³⁹McGilvary to Irving, 11 February 1881, v. 4, BFM.

³⁴⁰Hovemyr, *Karen King*, 132-135; “Siamese Karens.” *The Baptist Missionary Magazine*. 61, 8 (August 1881): 284; and Wilson to Irving, 2 June 1881, v. 4, BFM.

³⁴¹C. H. Carpenter, “Mission to Northern Siam,” *The Baptist Missionary Magazine*. 62, 8 (August 1882): 299-300; “Latest From Northern Siam.” *The Baptist Missionary Magazine*. 62, 9 (September 1882): 342-343; Wilson to Irving, 20 February 1882, v. 4, BFM; and Hovemyr, *Karen King*, 143-144.

While the Baptists had this immediate success in the two Karen communities in Lampang State, the Karen churches languished in something of a back eddy of the larger story of the Christian movement in the North. As it turned out, there was not any spectacular growth among them. They were geographically isolated from the Karen churches in Burma, and they were culturally, denominationally, and to an extent geographically isolated from the northern Thai churches in the lowlands. Although there was some occasional contact between the Presbyterian and the Baptist churches in Lampang, it did not amount to much especially in the 1880s and 1890s.

*A Mysterious Providence*³⁴²

By the end of 1880, much about missionary life in Chiang Mai had become routine and even business-like, as we noted earlier, and among those routines was the shipment of annual supplies upriver from Bangkok, which took place at the beginning of each year. For the 1881 shipment, the missionaries in Chiang Mai decided that it would be a good idea to send a missionary down to Bangkok both to supervise the shipment and to provide one of their number with leave time. Since Mary Campbell had been unwell and was feeling in need of some time away from her duties at the girls' school, she was chosen for the trip downriver to Bangkok; and she left at the end of November 1880 with two of her students in tow.³⁴³

McGilvary observed later that both Campbell and Cole had thrown themselves into their mission duties with the zeal often shown by young missionaries to the detriment of their health. Still, he noted that they had made a significant, highly successful contribution to the Laos Mission. They had been so successful that the mission was planning to start up a boy's school when Campbell returned. He wrote, "A boys' school of fourteen, including the son of the Siamese international judge and three sons of Princes of high rank, was awaiting Miss Campbell's return."³⁴⁴ Understanding that the responsibility of superintending the annual supplies boats was a major task for a young missionary, the mission sent Dr. Cheek down river to give her a hand; he left on 6 January 1881, about five weeks after she had gone. Campbell, meanwhile, enjoyed her month's stay with the missionaries in Bangkok very much, and they didn't want her to leave, but to stay on with the Siam Mission. On January 17th, however, she did leave along with her travelling companions and three boats loaded with supplies.

Cheek's timing was off by only a little; instead of getting to Bangkok before she left, he met her on the river just three days out from Bangkok. He found that the boats had been improperly loaded and would not have been able to get to Chiang Mai, and as

³⁴²This section is based on: Peabody, *MMC*; Wilson to Irving, 22 November 1880, v. 4, BFM; Cheek to Irving, 10 February 1881, v. 4, BFM; McGilvary to Irving, 18 January 1881, v. 4, BFM; McDonald to Irving, 14 February 1881, v. 4, BFM; Hartwell to Irving, 16 February 1881, v. 4, BFM; Mary E. Hartwell, "The Drowning of Miss Mary M. Campbell," *Foreign Missionary* 39, 12 (May 1881): 520-521; Wilson to Irving, 21 March 1881, v. 4, BFM; and McGilvary to Campbells, 8 June 1881, Mediterranean Sea, in Peabody, 49.

³⁴³For a description of missionary river travel at this time, see Mrs. Chalmers Martin, "Boat Travel on the Maa Ping." *The Church at Home and Abroad* 1, 5 (May 1887): 461-463.

³⁴⁴McGilvary to Irving, 18 January 1881, v. 4, BFM; and Wilson to Irving, 22 November 1880, v. 4, BFM.

he had business in Bangkok anyway the whole party returned to Bangkok where they remained for another week. Finally, on 31 January 1881, they started out again.

On February 8th, the Chiang Mai-bound party pulled up on the shore of the Chao Phraya River for the night, and Mary and her two schoolgirls, Kham Tip and Buk, went for a walk and then had their evening meal. They had not had a bath for two days because Dr. Cheek felt it was not safe, but on this evening after scouting out the river carefully he agreed that they could bathe. In simplest terms, Mary Campbell carelessly found herself in deep water. She could not swim. Dr. Cheek and Kham Tip both rushed to her aid, and it was a near thing, but the combination of the two rescuers getting in each other's way plus the panicked struggles of Campbell herself led to their failure. At roughly eight o'clock p.m. on the moonlit banks of the Chao Phraya River she drowned. Cheek's repeated attempts for several hours to resuscitate her failed, and finally the grief-stricken physician had to give up his efforts.

Cheek then placed her body in a temporary grave and hastened downriver to Bangkok, arriving there on February 11th around ten o'clock in the evening. The next day he and the Rev. John Culbertson of the Siam Mission hastened back up the river in a launch to recover the body; they arrived back in Bangkok about midnight on the 13th, and Mary Campbell was buried on 14 February 1881 at a funeral service conducted by the Rev. Dr. S. G. McFarland at 4:30 pm.

From correspondence from the field as well as a commemorative volume published by Campbell's teacher and mentor at Western Female Seminary, Oxford, Ohio,³⁴⁵ it is clear that the impact of Campbell's death was devastating. Cheek was particularly hard hit because he felt responsible for all that happened. He was said to have nearly died himself in the deep water and the currents of the river in his desperate, futile attempts to save her. News of Campbell's death hit Cole and Wilson in Chiang Mai nearly as hard, as it did her family and friends in the United States. The tragedy of her death, in fact, became known in the larger church as well, to the extent that an abridged edition of the memorial volume was printed in Britain.³⁴⁶

The most immediate impact of Campbell's death on the Laos Mission, of course, was grief. It did have other consequences as well; in particular, it left a large hole in the mission, first by removing one member of its staff and second by leaving those remaining with still more work to be done. In 1881, the Laos Mission was already understaffed. The McGilvarys were absent. Wilson's wife, Kate, was no longer on the field. Cheek was often absent. Wilson's health was not good, and both he and Cole had taken serious tumbles from horses, which especially left Wilson laid up for a long period of time. Already understaffed, the loss of Campbell further seriously weakened the mission; among other things, the opening of a boys' school was delayed for nearly a decade.

There was a theological impact as well. The members of the Laos Mission firmly believed that God had called them to the mission field and superintended all of their

³⁴⁵Peabody, *Mary Margaretta Campbell: A Brief Record of a Youthful Life* (Cincinnati: Silvius & Smith, 1881).

³⁴⁶Peabody, *At Rest Among the Laos: Story of the Life of M.M. Campbell*. Edited by Caroline G. Cavendish. London: John F. Shaw, [1882].

efforts. Whatever happened was, for them, ultimately the will of God. That was a doctrine easily affirmed when an adversary of the mission, such as Chao Kawilorot, suddenly died at what seemed to be an auspicious moment. It became harder to hold such a view when a young, dedicated, winsome, and effective member of the mission dies suddenly and out of time.

Dr. Cheek posed the question most poignantly, when he wrote to the Board, “My heart is too broken by grief to tell you of anything more than that she has been taken away by death. She was much beloved by all who knew her, and had given bright promise of a useful life. *Why was she not spared?*”³⁴⁷ There was no easy answer. The Rev. Noah McDonald of the Siam Mission, wrestling with that same question, pronounced Campbell’s death “a mysterious providence,” especially considering the awful impact the news would have on the Presbyterians in Chiang Mai. In a letter to Campbell’s parents, McGilvary wrote, “Rarely has a providence been permitted so mysterious as the one which has cast such a sudden gloom over our mission. Never did one occur so hard to realize as true.”³⁴⁸

At our distance, it is impossible to gauge precisely the full measure of the impact on the Laos Mission of Mary Campbell’s death in February 1881. As we will see shortly, both Cole and Cheek were soon lost to the mission—Cole to the Siam Mission and Cheek to secular business. Did Cheek’s growing disaffection with his missionary calling have anything to do with his feelings of guilt in this case or perhaps being blamed by some for letting Campbell bathe than evening? We do not know. Had Campbell lived, would she and Cole have devoted themselves for a much longer period of time to Chiang Mai? Would they together have realized the success that Edna Cole later experienced in her work in women’s education in Bangkok? We can never know. What we do know and can say is that Mary Campbell’s death was one of the darkest moments in the history of the Laos Mission, perhaps second only to the death of the martyrs fourteen years earlier in 1867.

Persecution

In his autobiography, McGilvary relates that he spent nearly a week in Lampang back in early 1873 with the purpose of visiting the ruling class and discussing privately with them the nature of missionary work and its purposes. He wrote, “It is necessary to give the rulers a clear idea of the non-political nature of our work.”³⁴⁹

On the face of it, McGilvary’s assertion that the Laos Mission’s work was “non-political” seems either naïve or disingenuous especially in light of the mission’s continuing conflicts with the powers that be in Chiang Mai. His point, surely, was that the princes of the Northern States misunderstood the intention of the mission, which was not to establish itself as a political player but, rather, to share its religious message with the people. The missionaries did not seek to coerce conversions and, indeed, mistrusted conversions that seemed to be for personal advantage—political or otherwise.

³⁴⁷Cheek to Irving, 10 February 1881, v. 4, BFM. Italics added.

³⁴⁸McDonald to Irving, 14 February 1881, v. 4, BFM; and McGilvary to Campbells, 8 June 1881, Mediterranean Sea, in Peabody, 48.

³⁴⁹McGilvary, *Half-Century*, 161.

It bears repeating where what have already been seen previously, namely that McGilvary's assertion that the mission was non-political was based on nineteenth-century American attitudes, which accepted the formal separation of religion from the state. While nineteenth-century evangelical Protestants in the United States wanted America to be a "Christian nation," that did not mean that they believed that Protestantism should be the established state religion. Legal political ties to the state, they knew, tended to corrupt religion. These niceties of the American political and religious system were, however, irrelevant to the realities of the Northern states, which were fundamentally premised on the unity of Buddhism and the state. They were also naïve, encouraging the missionaries to take supposedly "non-political" stands on issues, especially maintaining the sanctity of the Sabbath, that only got themselves and their converts into political trouble.

That being said, the Northern princes, particularly those who openly opposed the missionaries, were equally naïve when it came to the missionaries. The Presbyterians actually did not intend to undermine their authority, as hard to believe as that was. They were patriotic Americans who firmly believed that religion, if it was the "right religion," was a strong foundation for national life. They wished the North to have that same firm foundation and did not intentionally threaten the power of the *chao* class. Both the missionaries and the princes had lessons to learn in their evolving relationship with each other. Some on both sides proved themselves more adept than others at learning those lessons.

It is little wonder, at any rate, that a strong faction of the Chiang Mai government, centered on the "Second King," Chao Buntawong, continued in the 1880s to be opposed to the Laos Mission and resisted its attempts to convert people to Christianity. That party's attempts to frustrate the growth of the mission had largely been unsuccessful, although again we have no way of knowing how many individuals might have taken a deeper interest in the new religion if there had not been this powerful opposition. More generally, however, the mission itself had powerful local allies both among the ruling *chao* and in the Siamese commissioner, and the mission had generally been fairly adroit in playing the game of local politics.

In the last half of 1882, however, Buntawong and his party saw what seemed to them to be an unusually good opportunity to deal the mission a hard, perhaps fatal blow. As we have already seen, the mission had been badly understaffed for some time, and its main pillar and best politician, Daniel McGilvary, was in the United States. Then, at some point in the latter months of the year, Wilson made a bold attack on the religious sensibilities of the people, which gave the mission's enemies their chance to move against it openly. What happened was that workmen uncovered a long-buried Buddha image on mission property, which had once been the location of a Buddhist temple. Local residents knew that the buried image was still there, and they often snuck onto the property at night to leave offerings to it. Wilson ordered the image dug up, which drew a large crowd to see the five-foot, headless sacred image. The next day, much to the horror of the people, Wilson took an axe to the image, destroyed it entirely, and spread its rubble

on a compound footpath, a particularly sacrilegious disposal of the venerable image. Cole wrote at the time that his action caused "quite a stir."³⁵⁰

Wilson provoked a reaction. In his position as the "second king" and the most powerful single individual in Chiang Mai State, Chao Buntawong issued a lengthy decree in the name of the "legislative council," which included the leading political and religious figures of the state. It called on all monasteries to enforce a long list of reforms that included forbidding monks from engaging in commercial activities, called on them to follow their codes of behavior more strictly, and in general to be more faithful in their religious practices. The decree also took direct aim at the Laos Mission. As Wilson quoted the document, it stated,

Let the abbots & fraternity of priests forbid the laity from visiting the foreigners under any pretense. If any should go, let them speak neither good nor bad to these foreigners. Let them not pay any regards to what they may say or teach. These foreigners will only darken their minds - deceive them & lead them astray. Priests & people obey these statues. If you go to the foreigners they will not allow you to make merit. And then when you come to die you will fall into hell, all of you."

Wilson also reported that two letters, which were sent out along with the decree, forbade people from selling timber and other building supplies to the missionaries and forbid those accused of witchcraft from seeking shelter with them on pain of death. Wilson obtained a copy of the decree, but he only heard about the other two letters. He reported all of this to the Board in a letter, dated 10 October 1882.³⁵¹

Subsequently, Wilson further reported that two more documents had been distributed to the people. The first, issued by Chao Buntawong, required all Christians to give up their faith and required local government officials to prevent further conversions in their jurisdictions. The second was from the government in Bangkok and virtually repealed the Edict of Religious Toleration. He summarized its contents as saying, "The case of any Laos subject becoming a Christian is left entirely to the consent of the Laos rulers." Wilson himself had seen neither document, but he was sure they existed.³⁵²

And then suddenly the threat of persecution ended before it had even really began. On 15 November 1882, Chao Buntawong died of tuberculosis, or "consumption" as it was then called, which he had been suffering for some time. His death did not mean that the opposition to Christianity suddenly came to a halt, but it had certainly lost its most powerful voice.³⁵³ Writing some months later at the time of Buntawong's funeral, McGilvary stated that he clearly saw the hand of God in his death and recalled that other opponents of the mission had been "removed out of the way." He surely had the events of 1869-1870 in mind. In a moment that was at least ironic, McGilvary took the

³⁵⁰Edna S. Cole, "From Chieng Mai," *Woman's Work for Woman* 12 (November 1882): 367-68. *cf.* Backus, *Siam and Laos*, 452-53. See also Holt S. Hallet, *A Thousand Miles on an Elephant in the Shan States* (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1890), 109.

³⁵¹Wilson to Irving, 10 October 1882, v. 4, BFM.

³⁵²Wilson to Irving, 27 November 1882, v. 4, BFM.

³⁵³Wilson to Irving, 27 November 1882, v. 4, BFM.

opportunity afforded by Buntawong's funeral to evangelize the large crowds that gathered for the ceremonies held at that time.³⁵⁴

Chao Buntawong's death did not signal the end of the persecution of Christians, but it did mean that those who persecuted the new religion no longer had the power to drive it from the field. Most of that persecution would now be by local officials or by neighbors of converts who did not want Christianity to endanger their communities with retaliation from the spirits. It would not be until World War II that the state, this time the Siamese government, would openly persecute Christian communities.

Reinforcements

From its inception, the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions struggled to adequately staff the Laos Mission, a challenge painfully emphasized by the death of Mary Campbell. The Northern States were a long, long way from home, and even between Bangkok and the Northern States themselves travel to and from Chiang Mai consumed great amounts of time and effort. The climate was debilitating, and over the course of its history the mission would time and again see new recruits leave after a brief few years, sometimes even months, because of ill health. Many did not return. The culture in the North was very different, and the missionaries experienced social isolation especially once the mission began to establish smaller stations in places like Lampang and still more distant Phrae, Chiang Rai, and Nan. The Board and the mission always wrestled with these problems, but as we have already seen they were particularly acute in the early 1880s.³⁵⁵

No one was more aware of the desperate need for reinforcements than McGilvary. As we saw previously, in early 1880 he had accompanied Sophia and their children as far as Hong Kong. She was headed for the United States because of poor health, and it had been McGilvary's hope to send the family on without him if she had improved by the time they reached Hong Kong while he would return to Chiang Mai. He was, indeed, able to return, but as we also saw he decided to stay in Tak and did not return to Chiang Mai until later in 1880. Word eventually came that Sophia had not recovered fully and was staying in the U.S. another year, and McGilvary decided to go back as well. His primary concern was for his family, but he also decided to engage in some aggressive recruitment on behalf of the mission.³⁵⁶

McGilvary left in March 1881, and a January 1882 letter to the Board shows that he had indeed been energetically visiting Presbyterian colleges, seminaries, and other institutions seeking recruits. At the time he wrote, he was at Western Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh where he addressed the student body and by his own account generated a good deal of interest in the Laos Mission. His hope was that he would have enough new recruits to open stations in both Lampang and Tak as well as beef up the force in Chiang Mai. He also wanted to staff a theological training school, and he hoped to find a replacement for Mary Campbell as well.³⁵⁷ Wilson, in the meantime, continued

³⁵⁴McGilvary to Cornelia, 24 May 1883, McGilvary Papers.

³⁵⁵See Wilson to Irving, 4 October 1881, v. 4, BFM; and Wilson to Irving, 25 May 1882

³⁵⁶McGilvary, *Half-Century*, 237-238.

³⁵⁷McGilvary to Irving, 21 January 1882, v. 4, BFM.

to impress upon the Board the need for more missionaries, writing at one point that the Laos Mission's work was crippled by its lack of staff.³⁵⁸

McGilvary stayed in touch with both the Board and with Wilson in Chiang Mai throughout the rest of 1882, and although the news was sometimes discouraging as one prospective recruit or another decided not to join the mission the news was generally encouraging. By the end of the year, Wilson was looking forward to the arrival of reinforcements, which he expected by late January 1883.³⁵⁹ By December 8th, 1882, McGilvary and his family were back in Bangkok and they had indeed brought with them a contingent of new missionaries that included Dr. S. C. Peoples, the Rev. J. H. Hearst, as well as Misses Florence Wishard, Sadie C. Wirt, Antoinette Warner, and Isabella A. Griffin. Two more recruits, Lizzie Westervelt and the Rev. Chalmers Martin would follow later.³⁶⁰

While the Laos Mission party was in Bangkok, McGilvary used his influence with the Siamese government to arrange a reception for his colleagues by King Chulalongkorn. In his remarks, the King is reported to have expressed his appreciation for the work of the missionaries, particularly as one report put it, in promoting "the moral and intellectual advancement of the people" of Siam. He stated that he intended to follow the open door policy of his father, King Mongkut, which welcomed representatives of those religions that worked for the advancement of the nation. McGilvary is reported to have then expressed his thanks to the King for the Proclamation of Religious Toleration.³⁶¹

The McGilvarys and their new recruits finally reached Chiang Mai in two stages, the first contingent arriving the second week in February, where they found Jonathan Wilson and Edna Cole holding down the fort as best they could.³⁶² After the initial enthusiasm of their arrival, things almost immediately turned sour. McGilvary later remembered, "We found on our arrival the fever, which is always prevalent in Chiengmai, amounting almost to a plague." The Hearsts, Dr. Peoples, Griffin, Warner, and Wishard all fell ill and all suffered lasting affects. The Hearsts left before the end of 1883 for Japan and Warner left after a three-year struggle with the climate. Wishard also left to marry a missionary in China. McGilvary himself, Sophia, and their son Norwood also were sick. And Cole, who had been ill even before this, finally had to give up and go home. In addition to illness, she had fallen from a horse two years previously and never fully recovered.³⁶³ She would not return to Chiang Mai.

Of all of the missionaries lost to the Laos Mission, the loss of Edna Cole hurt the most. The new missionaries mostly did not have an opportunity to demonstrate their potential value to the mission, but Cole had proven herself to be a capable mission

³⁵⁸Wilson to Irving, 20 February 1882, v. 4, BFM.

³⁵⁹Wilson to Irving, 27 November 1882, v. 4, BFM.

³⁶⁰McGilvary, *Half-Century*, 238-240.

³⁶¹"Siam," *The Gospel in All Lands* 7 (1 March 1883): 105. Cites the *Siam Advertiser*, 2 December 1882, as its source.

³⁶²McGilvary to Irving, 30 January 1883, v. 4, BFM.

³⁶³Wilson to Irving, 2 April 1883, v. 4, BFM; McGilvary., "Letter From Siam," *North Carolina Presbyterian* New Series 19, 942 (27 Jan 1886): 2-3; McGilvary, *Half-Century*, 242-243.

educator and invaluable missionary colleague. She returned to the field in 1885, but took up work in Bangkok where she became the principle of the Bangkok Girls' School, which under her guidance became one of the premier educational institutions in Siam and a key source of women teachers for government schools.

It was not all a bust, however. Dr. Peoples soon married Sadie Wirt, and they together developed into leading members of the mission for years to come. In June 1883, Peoples took over the medical work from Cheek and quickly founded himself all but overwhelmed with his duties—so much so that he did not even have time for language study. By his own count, he was seeing nearly 30 patients a day including 17 new patients each and every day. He divided his time between holding two daily clinics and then visiting other patients. In all, he had 2,330 “consultations” not including those who came to buy quinine and patients who were seen by his assistant, Boon Ma. The mission's medical work, he reported, made a modest profit of 182 Rps. on receipts of 3,866 Rps. By September 1st, he himself came down with a fever, and the Peoples left for Bangkok on 3 November 1883 for rest and recuperation. While there, they met the Rev. Chalmers and Mrs. Lillian Martin, new recruits headed for Chiang Mai. The Peoples and Martins arrived in Chiang Mai the following January.³⁶⁴

Conclusion

The four years, 1880-1883, were eventful ones for the Laos Mission and the emerging northern Thai church. Although there were missteps and failures, notably the founding of the Lampang Church, it was largely a period of growth and advancement. The Christian movement, although still small, was much less fragile than it had been in the 1870s; and it had spread into the hills among the Karen. The girls' school made an important contribution in spite of the death of Mary Campbell, and Dr. Cheek's small hospital offered a vital service to the people of Chiang Mai as well as a point of contact with the Christian religion.

In the midst of all of this, there is still one more event to recall—one that in a sense summed up the whole history of the Laos Mission and its churches to date. On 27 August 1882, Nan Inta died in Chiang Mai; he had come into the city from his new home near Mae Dok Daeng to be close to Dr. Cheek. The years had hung heavy on him, and he had been quite ill and in pain for some time. In May, it was feared that he would die; but he made something of a recovery. In June, Wilson had visited him on his way to lead worship at the Mae Dok Daeng Church, and he felt that Nan Inta might well recover. Instead, he died of bronchitis. His funeral was the next day.

Wilson praised him for his courage, moral worth, and calm faith. In all, Nan Inta stood head and shoulders above all of the other Christians, according to Wilson, and until the end he retained his strong faith. His last night was particularly painful, but even so Wilson wrote that Nan Inta sought to comfort his family and said that he was looking forward to death so that he could be with Christ and those who had gone before him. Wilson also noted that the Christian community held him in deep respect for his piety as much as for his age and position in the church.³⁶⁵

³⁶⁴Peoples to Irving, January 1884, v. 4, BFM. #232.

³⁶⁵Wilson to Irving, 31 August 1882, v. 4, BFM.

Nan Inta had been a Christian for the last sixteen years of his life and the whole of the first sixteen years of the northern Thai Christian movement. He stands as one of the three key individuals in the history of those years along with McGilvary and Wilson. He was the first baptized convert. He was the first ordained elder. His family was the first fully Christian family. He was the first convert to exercise the responsibilities of a pastor even if he did so unofficially. His death marked something of a milestone as the northern Thai church continued to grow from a small, embattled band into a regional institution. The years marched on.

Chapter Seven

Advance All Along the Line, 1884-1887

Introduction

By January 1884, the end of the beginning of the Laos Mission was on the horizon, not that its members would have had any sense that such was the case. Nonetheless, only less than two years previously the mission had survived the last serious challenge to its presence in Chiang Mai by the anti-missionary, conservative party among the ruling *chao*. Just a year earlier, it had received its first substantial reinforcement by a party of newly recruited missionaries, and even though some of the new recruits soon left because of illness the mission would never again be as small as it had been up to that time. It had also established an impressive physical presence on the banks of the Mae Ping River, and it had planted churches out in the countryside and in Lampang. Much had changed in seventeen years, and still more would change in the years to come as the Laos Mission became more and more fully and finally established in the North.

*Chiang Mai 1884*³⁶⁶

The changes that had already taken place were certainly remarkable. When the McGilvays arrived in Chiang Mai in April 1867, only a handful of Europeans had ever visited the city, and in the years that followed, not more than a large handful of Western visitors not related to the Laos Mission followed in their footsteps. Now, in the opening months of 1884, suddenly Europeans and Americans were coming out of the woodwork. Beyond the mission's own new members, there was the Rev. David Webster, his wife, and daughter, Baptist missionaries from Burma who intended to move to Chiang Mai permanently (they never did). There was a French scientist from Vietnam. There were also two representatives of the Bombay Burmah Co., a Mr. Boyce and a Mr. Ross, who were in Chiang Mai on a tour of inspection and seeking a teak concession.³⁶⁷

Most notable so far as the mission was concerned was Mr. Holt S. Hallett, an Englishman, who was on an ambitious trip of exploration surveying the feasibility of a railroad line from Moulmein in Burma through Chiang Mai to Chiang Saen in modern day Chiang Rai Province. The ultimate goal was to connect India and China by rail. Hallett was accompanied by the Rev. J. N. Cushing, a Baptist missionary working in Burma and an old friend of the Chiang Mai missionaries, who had first visited them in 1870. Hallett's accounts of his stay provide an outsider's glimpse of the life and work of the Laos Mission in its seventeenth year and are worth lingering over for a moment.

Hallett and Cushing arrived in Chiang Mai on 25 February 1884 after many long weeks on the road travelling through the dense forests of Burma and the Northern States. He was tired, worn out, and not prepared for what he was about to discover in Chiang Mai—

³⁶⁶The section is based on Holt S. Hallett, *A Thousand Miles on an Elephant in the Shan States* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1890); Holt S. Hallett, "Exploration Survey for a Railway Connection between India, Siam, and China." *Royal Geographical Society and Monthly Record of Geography* 8, 2 (January 1886): 1-20; and Holt S. Hallett, "Exploration Survey for a Railway Connection between India, Siam, and China." *The Scottish Geographical Magazine* 2, 1 (February 1886): 78-92.

³⁶⁷Hallett, *Thousand Miles*, 19; and Wilson to Irving, 5 March 1884, v. 4, BFM.

a little slice of what seemed to him to be heaven on Earth. He later wrote that when he entered the Presbyterian missionary compound in Chiang Mai, it was as if he had been transported almost magically back into civilization. There he was greeted with roses growing in the midst of “the glorious flowers and flowering shrubs of the tropics.” The scent of orange trees and pomelo trees filled the air. There was an orchard full of local fruit. He was greeted by mission homes built on the familiar bungalow style of India and Burma with wide verandas and vistas of Doi Suthep (Suthep Mountain) in the distance and the Mae Ping (Ping River) in the foreground. His hosts escorted him to one such veranda and seated him on a comfortable chair from which he could see the busy commerce on the river and on the road out front. The whole thing, he wrote, was like a “pleasant dream” right out of an Andersen fairy tale. That first day they feasted, as he claimed he never had before, on a mixture of European and American dishes that included fresh strawberries. There were violets in glasses on the table, and Hallett later remember that he, “...felt more inclined to feast my eyes and my sense of smell than to eat—everything was so tempting and so tasteful.”³⁶⁸

In the days to come, he had long and pleasant conversations with Wilson and with McGilvary, especially about the proposed rail link between India and China. McGilvary took him to visit Chiang Mai royalty including both the “king,” Chao Intanon, and Chao Ooboon-lawana, who we will remember was the daughter of Chao Kawilorot and one of the chief figures in local politics. McGilvary’s son, Norwood, went with them and spent his time playing with Chao Ooboon’s son and niece. Sophia McGilvary told Hallett that the “queen” and Chao Ooboon visited her often and she and her half-sister, Sarah Cheek, even sewed them some western-style clothes.³⁶⁹

As much as anything else, however, Hallett was taken with the phenomenon of “witchcraft” (*phi ka*) and the missionaries’ role in combating it as a pernicious superstition. In his account of his journey, *A Thousand Miles on an Elephant in the Shan States*, Hallett devoted an entire chapter to the subject in which he praised the missionaries for their efforts to change people’s thinking about the spirits; and he observed that the mission compound had become a virtual refugee camp for those accused of being witches. At the time of his visit, there were sixteen families of “witches” living in the compound.³⁷⁰

In a later address before the Royal Geographical Society, he acknowledged how helpful the Laos Mission had been to him personally and went on to state that he was,

...highly pleased at seeing the esteem that [the missionaries] were held in by not only their converts, but by the princes and people throughout the country. Their influence in eradicating the most deleterious superstitions of the people was evidenced by many of the princes and chief men in cases of illness calling in their aid instead of that of witch-finders and conjurers. By their having checked the ravages of small-pox through

³⁶⁸Hallett, *A Thousand Miles*, 94-96; Cushing made similar comments, esp. contrasting the mission’s condition on his 1870 visit with 1884. See J. N. Cushing, “A Journey into Northern Siam.” *BMM* 65, 2 (February 1885): 39-41.

³⁶⁹Hallett, *A Thousand Miles*, 102-103, 118-119.

³⁷⁰Hallett, *A Thousand Miles*, 110.

bringing vaccination into the country, and by their open protection of so-called witches and wizards who had had their homesteads ravaged and had been driven from their villages. By their unwavering kindness, unselfishness, conciliation, and by their tact, they had gained the good-will of all, and were looked upon as benefactors by many people outside their own flock.³⁷¹

Hallett's enthusiasm for the Laos Mission is understandable given that Chiang Mai for him was close to the ends of the Earth and exceedingly remote from the centers of the civilized world as he understood civilization. His feelings and impressions may not be that surprising given the fact that members of the mission, especially McGilvary, were at his side and his interpreters not only of words but also of Chiang Mai itself. Still, it is also true that he was, as McGilvary put it, "not a pious man" even if he was a moral one who did not travel on the Sabbath. Hallett's enthusiasm, that is, was for the "civilizing" work of the mission more than for its religious ends.

Hallett's portrait of the Laos Mission in early 1884 serves to remind us, in any event, of just how much things had changed in the seventeen years since the McGilvary's first arrived in Chiang Mai. Back in 1867 they had to live in very difficult circumstances in a small sala on one of Chiang Mai's main thoroughfares. They were alone in a distant, alien world. Initiating and then maintaining an American missionary presence was a herculean task that included daunting physical, political, technical and technological, cultural and social, institutional, administrative, and especially religious challenges.

We observed at the beginning of this story how preposterous it seems that a group of nineteenth-century American missionaries should think that they could go off to far-away Chiang Mai and change the religion and the lives of its people. Perhaps it was preposterous, but Hallett does help us to see, beyond all of these challenges and the vagaries of human life itself, how much the Laos Mission did achieve in just seventeen years. Most striking, perhaps, is the image of Norwood playing with a young prince and princess in the palace as if that was something one just did. His father hobnobbing with the local royalty was simply part of his daily reality to be taken entirely for granted. Impressive also is the image of sixteen refugee families depending on the mission for protection from their neighbors for survival itself. Over the course of the years, the missionaries had become both skilled at the games of state and local politics *and* an agency for social service and justice, the first of its kind in Siam's northern dependencies. From their own perspective, however, the most impressive single thing that the Laos Mission had achieved was to establish the Christian church in the Northern States. For them, as we have seen, all the things that impressed Mr. Hallett were means to that one great end. They did not separate civilization from Protestant Christianity, so that working to establish the former was simply one step in gaining a foothold for the latter.

One other image sticks in our minds, and that is the idyllic portrayal of mission life with its roses, orchards, substantial and comfortable homes, fabulous meals, and magnificent views of the river in the foreground and mountains in the distance behind. That image also impresses us with how much the mission had achieved in seventeen years, but we

³⁷¹Hallett, "Exploration Survey...", *Royal Geographical Society and Monthly Record of Geography*, 16.

should not be fooled into thinking that actual life in the real world of the Laos Mission was all a bed of roses—far, far from it. The roses, orchards, good food, and grand vistas only partially compensated for the debilitating climate, social isolation, political uncertainties, and anxious concern for the “lost souls” around them that were a part of daily life for a missionary living in Chiang Mai in the 1870s and 1880s.

Hallett invited McGilvary to join Cushing and him on the next leg of their journey as a guide and translator; he promised that McGilvary would be given ample time to engage in evangelism along the way. It was an invitation that McGilvary could not refuse. They left for Chiang Saen on 3 March 1884.³⁷²

The Laos Presbytery

After Hallett’s visit, the work and daily life of the mission and its churches continued on in the days that followed, and the campaign to convert the people of the North to Christianity and to import the structures and the ways of Western Christianity into the North continued apace. It is important, thus, to emphasize that the Laos Mission was an American *Presbyterian* mission, and its members assumed that its primary responsibility in the North was, as we have seen, to establish, nurture, and expand churches—*Presbyterian* churches. Presbyterians, as they understood the matter, practice a particular form of the Christian faith, which includes its own particular brand of church government. The fundamental unit of that government was the local church, which was governed by an elected board of elders called “the session”. Most churches had “ministers” (clergy) who were not members of the church but who did preside over the session and could vote when the occasion arose. Churches were organized into presbyteries and it was to these presbyteries that the ordained clergy belonged. Presbyteries were, in turn, organized into synods, and at the top of the pyramid stood the general assembly. In this system of government, individual churches must belong to a presbytery. There is no such thing as an “independent” congregation. As we saw earlier, when the mission organized the First Presbyterian Church, Chiang Mai, in 1868 that congregation was enrolled in the Siam Presbytery, and the mission’s churches continued to be members of that presbytery until 1885. The Siam Presbytery, we should note, was itself a member of the Synod of New York, which in turn was a member of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. Nothing could have been more natural to the Presbyterians in Chiang Mai. Their churches, after all, were Presbyterian churches.

It was, however, an awkward arrangement because of the great distance between Chiang Mai and Bangkok, which made it imperative that the northern churches have their own presbytery. Thus it was that on Wednesday, 17 June 1885, four missionary clergymen and two northern Thai elders met at the home of the Rev. Jonathan Wilson in Chiang Mai “to organize themselves into a presbytery to be known as the Presbytery of North Laos” (frequently rendered simply as “the Laos Presbytery”). The Rev. Daniel McGilvary preached the opening sermon, taking as his text Acts 2.33. The presbytery elected the Rev. S. C. Peoples as its first Moderator and the Rev. Chalmers Martin as its temporary Stated Clerk. By this act, the Laos Mission created the first formal regional church structure in northern Siam. Like its sister presbytery to the south, the Laos Presbytery

³⁷²McGilvary to Irving, 3 March 1884, v. 4, BFM.

was formally enrolled as a presbytery of the Synod of New York of the Presbyterian Church U. S. A.³⁷³

The Mission and Its Churches, 1886³⁷⁴

In February 1887, just two months shy of the twentieth anniversary of the McGilvarys landed in Chiang Mai and less than two years after the founding of the Presbytery of North Laos, the Rev. William Clifton Dodd, a recently appointed missionary to the Laos Mission, took pen in hand to write the presbytery's "Narrative for the Year ending Oct 1886." Such narratives, frequently entitled, "Narrative on the State of Religion in the Presbytery," were common among presbyteries in the United States and functioned as annual reports on the condition of their churches. This particular narrative, the very first for the Laos Presbytery, provides us with a unique look at the state of the northern Thai church in 1886 and, more largely, is a summary description of the journey of the Laos Mission as well.

The Northern States Christian Community. According to the statistics that accompanied the minutes of the presbytery for 1886, the Laos Presbytery still had only the original four churches with which it began the year before. Chiang Mai First Church, the oldest and largest of the four, had 325 communicant (i.e. full) members, followed by the Mae Dok Daeng Church with 78, Bethlehem Church with 20, and the Lampang Church with 10 members. In the course of the year from October 1885 to October 1886, the presbytery had added 109 communicant members while recording a loss of 17 (4 members died, 10 were suspended, and 3 were excommunicated). The churches had a total of 12 northern Thai elders (*thao kae*), 4 deacons (*dekun*), and 450 "scholars" attending its Sunday schools. Dodd began his narrative by observing that the work of the Chiang Mai Church had been "enlarged" over the course of the year beginning in October 1885; it now had separate prayer meetings for both men and women on Sunday afternoons and a joint meeting on Friday afternoons. The church's worship services were better attended than ever before, and the congregation's chapel was becoming too small for it. Dodd noted that roughly 400 people attended the communion service that was held during the presbytery meeting in October, most of them being Christians. Although he does not state as much, this was surely the largest gathering of northern Thai Christians to date. His narrative then lingers over the fact the church added 72 new communicant members during the year. Dodd writes of these new members,

The character of the applicants is cause for gratitude because of the prestige it gives our work among the people. During the year there have been four Government officers received and a large number of men of good families and in good circumstances—men who are not presumably prompted by such low motives as hope of pecuniary help from the missionaries or of social

³⁷³ See "Records of the Laos Presbytery, 1885 -1920," Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia. A microfilm copy is available at the Payap University Archives, Chiang Mai.

³⁷⁴ This section is take from Herb Swanson, "Dodd's Narrative: The State of the Northern Thai Church in 1887." *HeRB: Herb's Research Bulletin 2* (June 2002) at herbswanson.com.

advancement. The character of the converts has been such that a Government official was heard to say that the missionaries, being shrewd men, picked the best material out of which to make Christians.

If Dodd is correct and if he quotes the observation of the government official accurately, the Laos Mission's Christian movement in the North was attracting new members from neither the top echelons of northern Thai society nor from its lowest. One hesitates to call such individuals by the term "middle class," but it might not be entirely inaccurate to do so. As indicated in Chapter I, the common people in the Northern States enjoyed some degree of independence and the social-political hierarchy tended to be somewhat "loosely structured" to a degree that blurred the lines between the social elites and the rest of society.

Why should people of a moderate, middling social standing convert to Christianity? In the 1880s, it was not a popular thing to do, and in spite of the Edict of Toleration there was still some open persecution of converts and, more generally, a good deal of social and religious pressure against conversion. Again, if Dodd's observations are correct, many of the converts had no financial incentive to become Christians, so why did they convert? We have struggled with this question from the very beginnings of the northern Thai church in 1869, and Dodd's narrative, unfortunately, sheds no new light on it. We may surmise, at the least, that the missionaries' religious message was in and of itself important. Something in that message caused a not inconsequential number of northern Thais to take the bold, unusual step of changing their religion—this in spite of the fact that the missionaries also demanded that they make a clean break with Buddhism, animism, and much of their former lives in northern Thai society.

Dodd also reports that between October 1885 and October 1886 the Laos Presbytery handled eight disciplinary cases that ended with the presbytery exercising "severe" discipline. He reported that four of the eight cases successfully accomplished "the reformation and restoration of the offenders." By "severe" discipline, Dodd evidently means that these eight were suspended from communion or, possibly, excommunicated, with the result that four of the eight repented of whatever wrong they had committed and were reinstated into the church. The most frequent causes for such discipline included taking part in Buddhist rituals or in spirit propitiation rites, often having to do with traditional medical care. They also included sexual improprieties and other moral infractions. Although Dodd provides no details, the Presbyterian missionaries normally insisted on this type of discipline in order to protect the "purity" of the churches as well as to serve as warnings to other members. We should note that these acts of discipline were in keeping with a similar pattern in the United States. What is interesting in this case is that half of those who suffered the loss of face of having been suspended or excommunicated were willing publicly (as was usually the case) to confess their faults and humbly ask for re-admittance into the church. While the numbers involved are not large, that willingness reinforces the sense that there was something significant in the Christian message and/or in belonging to the church. For some, at least, even public shame could not defeat their resolve to be Christians.

Sophia McGilvary and Women's Education. Dodd moves on in his report to discuss the state of Chiang Mai Church's Sunday school. He admits that a lack of missionary personnel to oversee and staff the Sunday school had resulted in its classes meeting

somewhat irregularly. He highlighted, in any event, one important feature of the Sunday school, namely the large women's class of 50 or 60 women that was taught by Sophia McGilvary with the assistance of two of the new crop of missionaries, Isabella Griffin and Elizabeth ("Lizzie") Westervelt.

Throughout this history of northern Thai Christianity, the role of the Laos Mission and especially its women members has been an important theme. As we have seen, the mission pioneered women's education and provided northern Siam's first salaried positions for women, hiring them as servants, teachers, and Bible women. We have also alluded to the significant role Sophia McGilvary played in this story, one reflected yet again in Dodd's narrative.

It is difficult for the historian actually gauge the significance of Sophia's role, however, for the simple reason that historians depend on documents, and we have precious few from Sophia. She, unfortunately, left the chore of communicating with the Board of Foreign Missions to her husband and otherwise seems to have done as little as possible to call attention to herself. The consequence is a decided lack of historical information about her work, her person, and the earliest movements towards the missionary education of women. Still her role during these twenty momentous years must stand second in importance only to her husband, Daniel. She too suffered through the early, intense months and years. She too shared her faith over and over with the curious. She gave impromptu concerts to the novelty seekers on her little pump organ. She taught literacy to men and women. She gathered young girls on her front porch in the first Western-style stab at women's education. She worked on a northern Thai translation of the Gospel of Matthew. She, along with her step-sister, introduced upper class northern Thai women to Western fashions, surely not a small thing in 1880s Chiang Mai. She hobnobbed with royalty while also training northern Thai women how to work in her American-style home. And here in the narrative we find her being instrumental in Chiang Mai Church's large women's Sunday school class—again engaging in educating northern Thai women in ways they had never been educated before. Although the Sunday school was less intense than the girls' school it was, nonetheless, another institution for teaching women to read (in Siamese, no less) and to gain their own understanding of their religious beliefs.

It is little wonder, then, that in later years the people of the North, the general public as well as the converts, called Sophia, "*mae khru luang*"—"the great mother teacher." Daniel was known as "the great father teacher," and *both* of them earned their respective titles of respect.

Theological Education. As suggested in the narrative, Dodd's primary educational concern had to do with theological education. He writes,

There is only one candidate for the Ministry under instruction nor is there any provision for such instruction or any looking in that direction. It is the great need of the Presbytery, and one which only the smallness of the mission force has prevented them from meeting. For many reasons a boy's school which shall provide theological instruction, as it seems warranted and demanded, is imperatively needed and it is hoped will soon be provided.

At this relatively early stage, the Laos Mission still intended to develop theologically trained leadership for its local churches. What is of particular interest here is that Dodd thought that the best way to establish theological education would be to start a boy's school. It is not clear exactly what he had in mind, but it does seem a curious way to proceed, as it would take some years for boy's school students to work their way up to theological studies. There was no guarantee that they would be interested in such studies or that they would want to become pastors. In any event, the mission did start a boys' school the following year, 1888, followed in 1889 by a training school for evangelists.

Expanding Northward. Dodd felt that there was a pressing need for theological training because of the growing success of the mission's evangelistic work, especially in what is now Chiang Rai Province, north of Chiang Mai. Nan Ta, the northern Thai church's leading elder and the person under theological instruction, had recently made a tour to that area and returned with an enthusiastic report. He was especially impressed by the fact that so many conversions had taken place in one village that the local temple had fallen into disuse. There had been at least two missionary trips to the north during 1886, and a delegation of Chiang Rai converts had also come down to Chiang Mai asking for missionary assistance. Dodd noted that, "As a result of these visits, there are now six or eight villages between Cheung Mai and Cheung San which include from one to a dozen or more members each." The mission's evangelistic success, however, was clearly straining its ability to minister to and train the growing number of converts, which meant that the local converts had to take increased responsibility for themselves.

On the one hand, as we have seen, the mission felt the need for a program of theological training that would provide leaders for the northern Thai churches. On the other hand, Dodd also explained that in a number of the mission's "outstations" the converts were holding something of a cross between a prayer meeting and a Sunday school class. They studied the northern Thai catechism (based on the Westminster Shorter Catechism), the central Thai language Bible, and sang hymns and prayed together. The narrative takes an optimistic view of these developments, and of these groups, it adds, "In some cases there has been a daily prayer meeting. This fact and the love every where manifested toward the Shorter Catechism give hopeful evidence of piety among these scattered disciples." The only immediate cloud on the horizon was the scarcity of hymnbooks. The enthusiasm for their faith that many recent converts were still showing in the 1880s is particularly notable. That commitment reinforces the sense that missionary Christianity was genuinely attractive to some northern Thais, although the number remained small relative to the general population. That is to say, Christianity did not count as a "people's movement" except in a very few specific locations, such as the Chiang Rai community where the temple had reputedly fallen into disuse.

Regional Churches. In the context of the growth of the Christian constituency northward in the region of Chiang Rai, Dodd turns to the state of the three other churches besides Chiang Mai Church. The picture was not uniformly rosy, and it seems that in some places the initial enthusiasm converts had for their new faith was waning. Dodd was plainly concerned about the situation of the Bethlehem Church, located near Sarapee. Although the congregation had a Sunday school and enjoyed the capable leadership of a "faithful elder," it had dwindled in numbers from 27 in 1880, when it was founded, to just 17 members by 1886. Dodd comments that, "Experience here has led to a policy of

conservatism in organizing small independent churches." The contrast with the Mae Dok Daeng Church, situated some 20 kilometers east of Chiang Mai, may have reinforced the mission's reluctance to form small, one-village churches. That congregation extended across several villages and continued to be the "gem" of the Laos churches, as Daniel McGilvary had called it in 1884.³⁷⁵ Dodd states of Mae Dok Daeng, "Although the church has to depend almost wholly on its own members for leadership it has made steady growth." Although Dodd did not draw the contrast between the Bethlehem Church and the Mae Dok Daeng Church, it seems likely that the Laos Mission learned from experience that larger congregations extending over several villages worked better than small churches limited to one community. Dodd's comment about the Bethlehem Church all but says as much. In years to come, the mission generally only formed "regional" churches that covered extensive swatches of territory. Indeed, First Church in Chiang Mai was the premiere example of the regional church model since scattered, isolated members in a wide geographical area were put on its membership roles.

The Mae Dok Daeng Church, thus, epitomized what it was that the Laos Mission was seeking to create throughout the North—lively, well-led, inspiring, and growing Christian churches. In mid-January 1884, McGilvary led a "Week of Prayer" out at Mae Dok Daeng, and his account of the trip brims with enthusiasm. He wrote that the church was "hungry to hear the word," "faithful in the observance of the means of grace," and displayed "an earnestness in their worship which is truly charming, and particularly so among the young people of whom there is a large proportion in the congregation." In sum, he observed that the Mae Dok Daeng Church "is becoming the gem of our Laos churches." McGilvary went on to note that even the congregation's children could read enough Siamese to sing out of a Siamese hymnal. He summed up his visit by writing, "On Sabbath it seemed as if the whole congregation numbering seventy or seventy five might have been baptized as I trust and believe many of them were baptized by the Holy Spirit."³⁷⁶ A year later, it had surpassed Bethlehem Church in membership as well as in the quality of its congregational life.³⁷⁷ According to the Rev. Chalmers Martin, a new member of the Laos Mission, "The people [at Mae Dok Daeng] seem united, firm in faith, and active in the work of the Lord, and they are led by a number of men and women of character and piety."³⁷⁸ They took their faith seriously and they had capable local leaders, women as well as men.

McGilvary, who knew this church best, made the further observation that the Christian faith of its members was not a matter of convenience. Noting a particularly large increase in its members in the last half of 1885, he reported that there was also substantial local opposition to conversion to the extent that their modest chapel had been burned "by an incendiary" in 1884, and it had not been rebuilt. He also observed that the village of Mae Dok Daeng was located in a fertile region, which he took to be a matter of concern. He wrote that he hoped that the prosperity of these Christians would not spoil their faith. He once again, however, praised the congregation, writing, "Maa Dawk Daang is one of

³⁷⁵ McGilvary to Irving, 19 January 1884, BFM.

³⁷⁶ McGilvary to Irving, 19 January 1884, v. 4, BFM.

³⁷⁷ Wilson to Irving, 21 January 1885, v. 5, BFM.

³⁷⁸ Martin to Mitchell, 21 July 1885, v. 5, BFM.

our best working churches.”³⁷⁹ Local resistance to the church suggests that it neighbors saw the same thing the missionaries did, namely a growing and committed Christian faith emerging in their community. Where the missionaries took heart at this new religious phenomenon, those neighbors feared it and tried to halt its growth.

In Mae Dok Daeng and other rural communities scattered across the modern-day provinces of Chiang Mai, Lamphun, and Chiang Rai, then, the Christian movement took root. It was, in fact, an indigenous movement of modest proportions dependent upon its own local leadership as much as it was on missionary patronage. The mission was located in Chiang Mai, and it had a very limited staff in the 1880s. It simply could not supervise the daily lives of its congregations, a task that fell instead to local leaders. By the measure of Mae Dok Daeng, we must observe again, it was also a movement whose members frequently embraced Christianity for religious reasons and not simply economic or social ones. Missionary patronage did afford some converts with economic and social advantages, and it cannot be denied that some individuals converted as a matter of convenience. The mission itself strongly discouraged such conversions, and, in the 1880s at least, so did northern Thai society. In Christian terms, individuals and families converted as a matter of faith; they put their trust in the Christian message as taught to them by the missionaries. Thus, McGilvary could sense the work of “providence,” that is God’s will, in the lives of individual converts and their emerging faith communities, and he could argue that it was the Holy Spirit that was at work in the hearts of women and men, leading them to a new religious faith.

Medical Work and Evangelism. Having dealt with the three churches in Chiang Mai State, Dodd turned to the sole congregation located beyond Chiang Mai, the Lampang Church. This church had been founded in 1880 (as had Mae Dok Daeng and Bethlehem) and subsequently suffered through a period of repression during which its chief elder, Chao Phya Sihanot, had been imprisoned. The result was a feeble church, but Dodd saw hope for the congregation in the fact that Dr. S. C. and Mrs. Sarah Peoples had recently moved to Lampang. The Peoples were holding worship in their own home and that of an elder, and Sarah Peoples had started a Bible training class that met Sunday mornings. Dodd writes, “The character of the work has been largely preparatory. The people were at first distrustful of the motives of the Missionaries and their confidence had first to be won.” The primary way they had gone about gaining the trust of the people was through Dr. Peoples’ medical work, which Dodd claims had been very successful. That success highlights one of the most important themes in the history of the northern Thai church, the role of medicine as a tool for evangelism. As we have seen, Daniel McGilvary was the pioneer in the use of Western medicine for gaining the good will of the northern people as well as converts. As a lay physician, McGilvary showed considerable skill at doctoring. He particularly used quinine to good effect, and the cures resulting from even a quarter of a tablet seemed miraculous to the general populace. In 1869, he wrote a series of articles for the *North Carolina Presbyterian* promoting the general use of missionary medicine. In those articles, he drew parallels with Jesus’ use of healing and also urged that successful medical cures helped to “tear down” the great edifice of northern Thai religious “superstition” by showing the people that disease was caused by natural forces rather than the spirits. While it is not clear that the northern Thai

³⁷⁹ McGilvary to Mitchell, 5 January 1886, v. 5, BFM.

interpreted the healing given them by missionary medicine in quite this way, there is no question that medical care played a key role in missionary evangelism.

Dodd's Conclusion. Dodd summed up his narrative description of the state of the northern Thai churches by observing that there had been "advance all along the line." He drove that conclusion home by pointing out that during the last year the Laos Presbytery's four congregations had shown a 38% increase in membership, compared with a mere 2.75% rate of growth for the Presbyterian Church USA world-wide. The year, he also noted, had seen missionary work extended into several new villages with still more communities "urgently waiting" for missionary visits. In light of this growth and these opportunities, he again stated that, "A native ministry is emphatically demanded and steps must be taken as soon as possible for their education and training." He concluded his narrative with the statement that, "Meanwhile we can not neglect the appeals of the starving multitude. God's blessing has given success in answer to prayer and to consecrated service; but that success means expanding fields and growing needs." These closing words indicate that Dodd saw in the statistical growth of the Laos Presbytery's churches something of the true measure of their success during the year as well as a clear indication of the pressing needs created by that growth. From what we have already seen, however, it is also clear that he did not see statistical growth as the only source of optimism regarding the present state of the churches. He also put great store in the quality of many of the converts and their commitment to their new faith. Still, the fact that he closed with statistics indicates something of the importance he gave to numerical growth. His closing comment also shows his personal commitment (and that of the whole Laos Mission) to geographical expansion as another important measure of success. This enthusiasm for growth and expansion is hardly surprising, of course; indeed, that enthusiasm lay at the very heart of the reason for the Laos Mission in the first place. The McGilvarys, Wilsons, and their colleagues came to northern Siam because they firmly believed that the eternal fate and temporal happiness of the northern Thai people lay in their conversion to Christianity. They were committed to the salvation of the people as a nation, not just to individual northern Thais. They could, thus, not help but feel enthusiastic about the growth in the membership of their churches by nearly one-third in one year.

The Conversion of Saen Kam & His Family

Saen Kam and his family first appeared in this narrative in Chapter IV (p. 76). They lived, we saw, at Mae Dok Dang and was associated with the church there. In the way these things worked in those days, he was at one and the same time an important local political figure and, legally, a slave of a member of the Chiang Mai royal family. In the late 1870s Saen Kam became interested in the Christian faith and, according to missionary correspondence, acknowledged its truth, but he could not see his way to conversion. It was too great a risk for one in his complicated situation. This is how matters stood for some ten years until, finally, in July 1885, he and other members of his family asked to be baptized. At that time, according to McGilvary, Saen Kam tore down his spirit shrine in McGilvary's presence and declared himself to be relieved and happy to fully put his trust in God. At that time, he also asked to deposit a sum of money with the mission sufficient to buy the freedom of the 16 members of his family. He told McGilvary they could not trust anyone else to discharge this trust except the missionaries

and the Christian community.³⁸⁰ The Rev. Chalmers Martin, one of the recently arrived missionaries, less than three weeks later wrote to the Board that he had been out to Mae Dok Dang to hold communion and baptize 16 new converts including eight members of Saen Kam's family. He described Saen Kam as having been a "zealous Buddhist" who had long been "too timid" to convert.³⁸¹

As Saen Kam had feared, there were repercussions and consequences to his converting to Christianity. There had been a history of local persecution of Christians in Mae Dok Daeng including the burning of the congregation's modest chapel in 1884. At some point after the conversion of Saen Kam's family, a high ranking *chao* went out to Mae Dok Daeng and seized three of the girls in his family to become part of "the king's theatre," which also made them part of his "harem". McGilvary immediately went to the Siamese "Judge" (*kha luang*) and asked him to intervene, which the judge said he would do but only "unofficially".³⁸² It was only two years later that the missionaries learned the true extent of the persecution this new Christian family faced. Saen Kam died on 21 May 1887. McGilvary and Dodd (who was taking his first elephant ride) went out to Mae Dok Daeng to visit the family and McGilvary reported that,

We learned many things about the family that were new to us, especially we did not know how they had been ridiculed last year after the children had been taken into the palace. They were tauntingly told, among other things, that it would not have happened if they were not Christians.

McGilvary concluded that Saen Kam died a sincere Christian, and the mission would continue to do what it could to redeem his family from slavery.³⁸³

The story of Saen Kam and his family, as personal as it is, serves to summarize the experience of the first generations of Christian converts in the Northern States. Surely, Dodd in his narrative had this family in mind as he described the state of the churches in 1886. We recall again, then, that the northern Thai converts tended to convert as families rather than individuals. However, it seems from what evidence we have that usually only part of a family converted; in Saen Kam's case eight of 16 members of his family became Christians. We also note again the point made by Dodd that some of the converts were individuals of local standing. They were not, the mission was insisting, simply in it for the money or other self-serving advantages. In fact, we see again that in the 1880s conversion frequently had unpleasant consequences, including especially tension with one's neighbors who feared that the converts refusal to engage in spirit propitiation could endanger the whole community.

Finally, we cannot but return to the central issue of "soft conversions". Saen Kam actually took the route into Christianity that Nan Inta had proposed in 1868: go slow, ease into things, and don't push it. McGilvary and Wilson utterly rejected a go slow approach as showing a lack of faith in God, the idea being apparently that outside of baptism and open conversion one functionally remained outside of the faith. The first converts

³⁸⁰ McGilvary to Mitchel, 3 July 1885, v. 5, BFM.

³⁸¹ Martin to Mitchell, 21 July 1885, v. 5, BFM.

³⁸² McGilvary to Cornelia, 24 September [1886], McGilvary Family Papers.

³⁸³ McGilvary to daughter [Cornelia], 18 May 1887, McGilvary Family Papers.

acceded to this missionary view of things, and we have seen the bloody consequences of their doing so. Saen Kam did not accept the call for openly converting to Christianity—at least not for ten years. On the one hand, the “go slow” approach to conversion still, in the end, led to his becoming a Christian, and he was able to bring family members along with him. We can never know, of course, but we still have to wonder how differently things might have been if McGilvary and Wilson had allowed their new converts to ease into things and not challenged the authority of the *chao* by insisting on open conversions and the strict keeping of the Sabbath. The early converts were as sincere as Saen Kam. Would they eventually have become more open in their new faith? It seems very possible and maybe even likely. On the other hand, we should also observe that Saen Kam and his family did not escape persecution entirely before their baptisms. People knew that they were sympathetic to the missionary religion, and they suffered for it.

We have emphasized the role that the Laos Mission played as an agent of social and cultural change. The establishment of a new religion in the Northern States counts as one of the most consequential of those changes. It was, furthermore, not just consequential because it introduced American concepts of the separation of church and state and of religious pluralism but also because it changed the way hundreds of northern Thais thought about spirituality and religious faith. They no longer adhered to the teachings of the Buddha and engaged in propitiation of the spirits. They now followed the teachings of Jesus and worshipped the Christian God. *That* was not a small change.

Conclusion

Hallett’s 1884 description of his visit with the Presbyterian missionaries in Chiang Mai and Dodd’s 1887 report on the state of the Laos Mission and its churches both paint a picture of the 1880s as a time when the labor of twenty years came to fruition. The mission was stable and its force was beginning to grow. The churches were no longer brand new, but in the aggregate they continued to grow and to attract members that did credit to the new religion. The missionaries had become a largely accepted part of the landscape, and their medical services were particularly valued. The struggles and dangers of the mission’s earlier years were, in a sense, validated; in their own parlance, God had answered many of their prayers. The future seemed genuinely hopeful—so long as one did not hope that *all* of the North would become Christian and “civilized” in an American sense of the term.

Conclusion

Dodd's Narrative, summarized in the last chapter, can be taken in a couple of different ways. It can be seen as a celebration of the accomplishments of the Presbyterian mission in the Northern States over two difficult, sometimes dangerous, and always challenging decades. We can also take it as a bit of a propaganda piece intended to remind the Board of Foreign Missions and the churches in the United States that the Laos Mission was worth investing in. It deserved more attention than it often received. Dodd and his colleagues would have insisted that it was both true that the Laos Mission had accomplished a good deal under the most trying of circumstances *and* that it was worthy of the support of the churches at home.

Hallett's 1884 visit actually suggests that they were not wrong in their sense of accomplishment. As best we can tell from the distance of many decades and limited evidentiary sources, the Laos Mission in its first two decades had a remarkable impact on Chiang Mai and was just beginning to have an equally profound impact on its sister cities in the North. On April 1st, 1887, twenty years after the McGilvary's landed in Chiang Mai, the mission had exerted a wide range of Westernizing influences on especially that city—everything from introducing a new religion to making Western ladies' fashions available to members of the royal family. Their medical impact, at times, seemed almost miraculous in its ability to prevent small pox and cure malaria. Politically, they had established an alliance with both the more "liberal" faction of the Chiang Mai governing elite and with the Siamese government and managed to overcome every challenge to their very presence in the North. Educationally, they had introduced Siamese literacy to the North and initiated revolutionary changes in the religious and social status of women. Religiously, they had successfully established a religious movement based on a strange, alien religious faith by creating a growing number of rural Christian groups in scattered communities across Chiang Mai State—and a small church in Lampang as well.

Great changes lay just over the horizon, however, which changed the historical trajectory of the Laos Mission and its churches. Politically and socially, the Siamese state increasingly projected its authority in the North so that, as we've suggested before, the Laos Mission actually found itself in a new place: Siam. It took time for Bangkok to fully incorporate transform its northern dependencies into provinces, but in the 1890s that process began to accelerate. This meant that the mission played less of a political role and the missionaries no longer had to play politics in order to survive in the North. At the same time, other Westernizing forces gained influence in the North so that the mission's role in that kind of cultural and social change became less and less dominant.

The greatest change after 1890, however, was the increasingly important role of the mission's institutions in its life. From the beginning, McGilvary and Wilson had imagined that the Laos Mission would found schools, hospitals, and a printing press; but by 1890 it had succeeded only starting a permanent girls' school. Attempts at a boys' school failed. Each new medical doctor appointed to Chiang Mai started up a "hospital," always made up of bamboo huts, but none of them lasted. It was only after 1890 that the mission successfully founded a boy's school, a hospital, and a press in Chiang Mai. And after that it started up schools and hospitals in its other stations so that by 1907, twenty years after our story ends here in 1887, those institutions dominated the life and work of

the mission. Most of the missionaries worked in the institutions, and most of the mission's funding went to their maintenance and expansion. They became the dominant form of missionary patronage, and its evangelistic activities dwindled in significance. In theory, the institutions were meant to be agents of evangelization. In practice, they eclipsed evangelism as well as work with the churches.

This is to say that if we read Dodd's narrative without knowing what was to come next, we would imagine a future for the Laos Mission and the northern Christian community that, in fact, never happened. The Laos Mission in 1907 was in a very different place from where it stood in 1887. Now, it is true that it was also in a very different place in 1887 from what it was when it started in 1867, but the difference is that 1887 was generally speaking a culmination of the previous 20 years while the next twenty years actually diverged from the past.

The break with the past, however, was in no way absolute. The churches continued to grow. Evangelism did get attention. The mission continued to introduce the North to the ways of the West. Some resistance to and even oppression of Christians still occurred, if less frequently than before. The story of the Laos Mission and of the religious movement it founded are, after all, one story, but it is a story with two grand epochs, the first of which comes to an end as the second one dawns in the years at the end of the decade of the 1880s and the first years of the 1890s.



On a personal note, what I have always found fascinating about the tale told here is its almost Jekyll and Hyde duality. Ostensibly, this is a religious story about a group of American Presbyterian missionaries who believed that people of other religions were damned and set out to "save" them from their damnation. I've never been comfortable with this aspect of the story. The Laos Mission, at times, seems both arrogant and downright colonialist in its attitudes toward the people of the North. And yet there is so much more to their work and their accomplishments than that.

The Laos Mission introduced Western medicine to the North and thereby saved tens of thousands of lives. It rescued people from the ugliest kinds of social prejudice. It revolutionized the role of women in religion and in society. It shared a religion that not a few northern Thais, though still a small minority, found meaningful enough to risk the displeasure of neighbors and relatives by converting to it. More largely, it was a key agency for Westernization, a grand social and cultural transformation that was coming to the North anyway, but the Laos Mission may just have been a somewhat more humane, less greedy and dominating agent of that coming change.

This same Jekyll and Hyde dynamic was hardly unique to the Laos Mission or to the 1860s to the 1880s. If we include the Catholics in the mix of evangelization and Westernization, Western missionaries had been at this sort of thing for centuries. American Protestant missionaries themselves had been evangelizing and civilizing "the heathen" since colonial times, American Indians being their first target. And in the vast majority of these cases missionaries proved themselves to be much more successful at the civilizing part than the evangelization part of their mission. That is to say, that they were

better agents of Westernizing social and cultural change than they were at converting masses of people to their religious faith. Such was the case in the Northern States.

That being said, it has been my personal privilege to be actively involved in a northern Thai Church, the Suwanduangrit Church, Ban Dok Daeng—the old Mae Dok Daeng congregation founded in 1880. My distaste for old-time missionary attitudes about people of other faiths remains fully intact, but it is also tempered by the fact that the members of the church find the Christian faith personally meaningful. They (most of them, not all, of course) are committed to it and try as best they can to live out its teachings. It is, in my humble estimation, a good thing that there is a Suwanduangrit Church.

Jekyll and Hyde. Welcome to history: the grand story of the human race, an ongoing mixture of triumph and tragedy. I am troubled by the way so many of my co-religionists arrogantly damn all of those who don't think about God the way they do. And I am thankful for my church. Amen.

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