A New Generation: Missionary Education and Changes in Women's Roles in Traditional Northern Thai Society

Herbert R. Swanson

Nineteenth-century American Presbyterian missionaries introduced new women's roles into northern Thai society through their churches and institutions. While appreciating northern Thai women's social freedom, the missionaries, influenced by an ideal of "true womanhood", found women's low religious status in Buddhism and lack of educational opportunities repugnant. They sought to change women's roles by educating convert women, thus creating the first corps of women professionals in northern Siam. The missionaries unintentionally secularized education and thereby expanded the social roles available to northern Thai women. In doing so, they repeated in northern Siam a pattern of the Protestant role in social change and secularization common in American social history.

In the last decades of the nineteenth century and in the midst of larger forces of social change the "Laos Mission" of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America introduced into northern Siam a new understanding of the religious and social roles of women, one which differed radically from that of northern Thai culture itself. That mission then created an educational network of schools, classes, and programmes bent on redefining the place of women in order to facilitate the Christianization of northern Thai society. Through these educational activities, the Laos Mission promoted new ideas, new attitudes, and new patterns of behaviour that challenged the fundamental elements of women's life in traditional society.[1]

Between the missionary understanding of women's roles in society and the traditional view of those roles, stood first and foremost the small community of northern Thai Christian women, converts and the

daughters of converts. These women lived in close proximity to the distinctive culture of missionary homes and institutions and experienced the fundamental change in the religious role of women which the missionaries sought for the whole region. They achieved literacy before other women; they attended the first girls' schools. From them came the first salaried class of women, namely, professional teachers. As a consequence of their educational opportunities, they played an important and active leadership role in their religion. Thus, the Laos Mission's educational work with women, the lives of northern Thai Christian women, and the events which shaped them provide a unique and relatively well documented window on the earliest stages of northern Thai women's journey from a traditional to a pluralistic, secular society.

The Laos Mission began in April 1867 when Daniel and Sophia McGilvary and their two children arrived in Chiang Mai, the region's major city. By 1900 the mission's churches, schools, and hospitals stretched across northern Siam and played an important role in northern Thai social change.[2] Like their colleagues around the world, the Presbyterian missionaries in Siam displayed a profound commitment to delivering their religious message to non-Christian women, and they quite naturally focused a portion of their attention on northern Thai women.

On the one hand, the missionaries saw much that led them to actually praise northern Thai society for the way in which it treated its women, particularly in comparison with other "heathen" races. They observed that northern Thai women received kind treatment from their men, had relatively high status, and enjoyed an unusually high degree of personal freedom and social equality. According to missionary accounts, women participated fully in family life, and they held and managed family property. Divorce laws favoured women, who could separate from their husbands and keep all of the family property for themselves. Northern Thai society also made few distinctions between men and women with regard to labour.[3] The missionaries found northern Thai women lively, comely, self-possessed, mannerly, and generally superior to northern Thai men in industriousness, family devotion, administrative ability, and even in physical health (Crooks 1942, pp. 207–16; Peabody 1881, p. 25; Bowman 1897; Irwin 1902; McGilvary 1912, p. 145).

Not every aspect of women's life in northern Siam, however, received such wholehearted praise, and the missionaries expressed particular

indignation over the passive role women played in northern Thai Buddhism. By and large, it appeared to them that women did little more religiously than sit, listen, and offer gifts to the monks and the *wat* ("temple"). Women could not be monks or even lay leaders, and northern Thai traditional religion dictated that monks could have nothing to do with women. The missionaries felt particularly troubled because, as they understood it, this lowly religious status left women ignorant. Since northern Thai Buddhism associated learning with religion and instruction with the *wat*, women simply did not learn to read and received no formal education. Society in fact frowned upon and distrusted the few women who could read. In seeming contradiction to their praise of women's place in northern Thai society described above, the missionaries observed that as a result of their lowly religious status northern Thai women tended to move in narrow social circles and that their ignorance actually made them both more religious and more conservative than men: they did not know any better (Crooks 1942, pp. 216–17; Dodd 1923, p. 307; McGilvary 1905 and 1912, p. 418).

More recent anthropological findings substantiate missionary descriptions of the status of northern Thai women within their various social spheres.[4] Most notably, A. Thomas Kirsch's study of the religious status of Thai women confirms that Thai Buddhism does, indeed, disadvantage women religiously. According to Kirsch, Thai Buddhism's spiritual programme seeks to transcend superficial worldly attachments while women's domestic and entrepreneurial activities chain them to those very same attachments. Women's natural religious state then starts at a point lower than that of men and more distant from Buddhism's ultimate goal. Indeed, the enticements of female sexuality present serious threats to the celibate detachment of monks. Women came to their lower condition through their lack of merit.[5]

Recent studies also note that the traditional Buddhist system forced women into a general state of ignorance because, as the missionaries noted, Buddhism associated learning with the *wat*. That condition prevented women from "acquiring knowledge (which included medicine and the arts) and, hence, from upward social mobility and direct political participation" (Darunee and Pandey 1987, p. 131). Changes in the educational status of women, then, provided one potential source of social change for northern Thai women.

The seemingly inconsequential educational and religious role women

played in traditional northern Thai religion offended the missionaries' sensibilities because such a condition appeared to thrust women into an "unnatural" state in spite of their freedom in other spheres. Indeed, their freedom and influence in those other spheres made their ignorance all the more reprehensible in missionary eyes because of the influence women thus exerted in daily life. They seemed to be a force for ignorance and superstition in society. Hence, the state of religious and intellectual deprivation northern Thai women seemed to suffer justified to the American Presbyterian missionaries their evangelization of women.

The Presbyterian missionaries' ambivalence regarding the roles of women in northern Thai society and their desire to change significant elements of those roles grew out of their own middle-class American Protestant ideological heritage which arranged and valued the spheres of female life quite differently from northern Thai culture.[6] While northern Thai society and culture in the 1860s and 1870s remained traditional and agricultural, the United States had experienced decades of massive socio-economic change, and the transformation of the older, more traditional household economy into a commercial, industrial economy affected every aspect of society including the roles of women. This fundamental restructuring of socio-economic roles required finding new ways of expressing family and gender relationships since by the 1840s middle-class American women no longer fulfilled their earlier role as productive, economically necessary participants in a household economy (Douglas 1977, pp. 48–55; Hill 1985, pp. 25–28; Ryan 1975, pp. 173–74, and 1981, pp. 18 ff., 231–32).

In adapting to the removal of women, particularly middle-class women, from the processes of production, American culture made women's roles the exact opposite of their roles in northern Thai society. Where northern Thai women claimed a large degree of social and economic freedom, American women found themselves living within a constricted domestic sphere which denied them social equality and economic significance (Sklar 1973, pp. 155 ff.; Welter 1966). By the same token, American social thinking turned piety into an essentially female trait and extended women's domestic sphere to include extensive participation in religious activities. Though often denied primary leadership roles in religious institutions, the American ideal of "true womanhood" gave women the essentially religious "mission" of "civiliz-

ing" men and children through the creation of a pious, moral, and tranquil home which inculcated Christian values and restrained natural male aggressiveness (Sklar 1973, pp. 85–86; Porterfield 1980, pp. 27–37, 51–56, 67–70; Welter 1966, p. 152).

A pattern of circumvention of the "cult of true womanhood" emerged by which American middle-class women quietly extended their domestic sphere to include certain activities outside the home. As the nineteenth century progressed, women worked in Sunday schools, in moral reform and benevolence societies, and eventually in professions such as teaching, which could be construed as fulfilling woman's "natural" nurturing role. The cult of true womanhood also encouraged women's education on the premise that educated mothers and wives could better carry out their special civilizing mission in life (Rothman 1978, pp. 63–70, 97–99; Miller 1979, pp. 303 ff.; Sweet 1985). The churches remained, however, the most important arena into which women extended their sphere, and the large role women played in church life led to an equally significant participation in Protestant foreign missions. After the American Civil War (1861–65), Protestant women created an extensive system of missionary boards and societies which promoted missions and sent women missionaries overseas (Beaver 1968; Welter 1978; Hill 1985, pp. 45–54). One historian concludes that missionary work represented "the first area of American life where women achieved a more or less equal professional status with men" (Smith 1970, pp. 181–82).

Those professing nineteenth-century American ideology of gender could not help but find northern Siam's alien arrangement of gender roles repugnant. However happy a woman's lot might be in some ways, the whole structure of society seemed to them to degrade women and deny them knowledge of their true womanhood. Denied that knowledge, northern Thai women could not assume their "proper" domestic role. Men went untamed and children untrained. Thus, the missionaries could not ignore the relationship of northern Thai women to their religion for at that point, they believed, the degradation of women in ignorance began. When the McGilvarys arrived in Chiang Mai in 1867, they carried with them a heritage of assumptions and premises which dictated that they must cut northen Thai women's ties to their old religion and substitute a new relationship to a new religion.

The process the Laos Mission used to Christianize northern Thai

women's roles through education began with Sophia McGilvary, co-founder of the Laos Mission, who, along with her husband, set the tone for Presbyterian work with women in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. From the moment they arrived in Chiang Mai, the McGilvary family excited attention, and for months huge silent crowds gathered around the open, porch-like *sala* ("pavilion") where the foreigners lived to stand, stare, and listen as the McGilvarys preached and taught their religion. The crowds felt particularly attracted to Sophia and the two McGilvary children, the first foreign woman and children they had ever seen. Sophia McGilvary magnified her strange appearance by going out among the crowds and talking with people about her religion in an obviously literate, educated fashion (McGilvary 1870 and 1912, pp. 78–79).

Thus, the very fact of her physical presence and that of the many missionary women who came after her introduced new images of how women might conduct themselves generally and religiously. Over the years, missionary women reinforced their high visibility through frequent contacts with Chiang Mai royalty and the Bangkok government's local officialdom. They also extended that visibility by frequent trips into even the most remote parts of northern Siam (Crooks 1942, pp. 127–31; Swanson 1982, pp. 302–4, 307–8). At the very least it must be said that the presence of educated missionary women teaching religion as religious functionaries suggested to northern Thai society that women might be other than what they were traditionally.

Although the persecution of Christians in 1869 and the social pressure thereafter slowed the emergence of a convert community, missionary evangelism in general and work with women in particular finally led to the conversion of the first two northern Thai women in January 1876. During the next few years, the number of women joining the mission's churches increased slowly but steadily.[7] As of the late 1870s, a few northern Thai women took the initial steps towards a religious life quite different from that of traditional religion. Those steps began when, for the first time, women by their own choice withdrew from their traditional religious sphere and joined a voluntary association of other individuals who had made the same choice. Joining such an association created a new set of expectations of and responsibilities for women converts.

Among those expectations, literacy stood as one of the most important. The missionaries believed that all Christians should be able to read the Bible, that literacy contributed to spiritual growth, and that literacy made converts more intelligent and faithful Christians.[8] They sometimes postponed baptizing converts until they learned to read, and they showed much more enthusiasm for converts who did learn to read. Converts, missionaries thought, confirmed the seriousness of their intent by learning to read.[9] Sophia McGilvary initiated literacy work among women in 1868 when she established a small women's literacy class. Eight years later, in 1876, she started a girls' literacy class which led, in turn, to the founding of the Chiang Mai Girls' School in 1879 (McGilvary 1878). From its inception the Laos Mission placed much of its hope for transforming women's lives on literacy and learning.

Years later, Daniel McGilvary reflected on the reasons behind the founding of the girls' school, and his justification unconsciously but quite accurately reflected the nineteenth-century American Protestant ideology of gender. He believed that the Christian community required educated, intelligent Christian women to raise Christian families, convert non-Christian husbands, and provide suitable wives for Christian men. He argued that northern Siam's uxorilocal family structure made the education of women all the more important because of the influence women exerted in the home (McGilvary 1912, pp. 177–78). McGilvary began with the American conception of the religious importance of women, combined that conception with the high domestic status of northern Thai women, and extrapolated an evangelistic strategy for Christianizing northern Siam through women's education.

The consequences of this evangelistic strategy unfolded in the lives of Christian girls and women such as Chantah, daughter of one of the two converts executed during the persecution of 1869. After her father died and while still a child, Chantah went to live with the McGilvarys, and in 1875 she reached an age when she could care for the McGilvary's son and work as a domestic servant. In addition to learning to read, her education in the McGilvary household included learning to sew and to perform American-style household chores. When Sophia McGilvary began that girls' class in her home, Chantah took on the role of teacher's helper as an extension of her domestic duties. In 1879 two young missionary teachers, Mary M. Campbell and Edna S. Cole, arrived in Chiang

Mai to take over McGilvary's class of six girls and turn it into a formal school, and McGilvary sent Chantah over to help them teach and to study under them as well. In that more formal institutional setting, the missionary teachers promoted Chantah to what amounted to the position of assistant teacher.[10]

By the end of 1879 the new girls' school grew to include eighteen boarding students, twelve day students, and a smattering of younger boys. Although some of these children did not come from Christian homes, most did, and within the first fifteen months of the school's existence eleven of its students joined the Chiang Mai Church as members (Peabody, 1881, pp. 26–32). Campbell and Cole encouraged the girls to board at the school under their watchful supervision because, as a later missionary teacher wrote: "One can have so much more influence over the girls when they are under one's control all the time" (Fleeson 1893). At one point in 1882, Cole had eight homeless girls living with her permanently, and she consciously attempted to create for them a pious, disciplined, and literate environment with the hope that some of them might become church leaders. One of these girls, Buk, eventually took Chantah's place as the assistant teacher in the Chiang Mai Girls' School and held that position until 1885 when she, like Chantah before her, married and quit teaching (Cole 1882*b*, 1883; Warner 1885).

In 1888, when the Girls' School had three northern Thai assistant teachers, another of the girls who studied and lived with Cole and Campbell achieved a new status, that of "head assistant teacher". Kom Tip, daughter of the first northern Thai convert, had not only boarded at the Girls' School but also helped Cole and Campbell as an interpreter. By the time she became head assistant teacher, she too had long lived within the counter-culture of missionary homes and institutions, a culture based on the values and attitudes of middle-class American Protestantism. Unlike Chantah and Buk, however, when Kom Tip married she continued to teach although not at the Girls' School. Under the auspices of the mission, she started a small school on the porch of a missionary home in Lamphun.[11]

The lives of Chantah, Buk, and Kom Tip suggest a pattern by which teaching emerged as a profession among northern Thai Christian

women. Chantah began as a servant girl residing in a mission home before she became the first northern Thai woman to earn her living as a Western-style professional educator. Buk attained a similar position after also living in a mission home. She, however, did not begin her teaching career as a servant but rather as the product of the Girls' School itself. Kom Tip's advancement to the position of head assistant teacher evolved the teaching profession one step further, giving northern Thai women administrative as well as classroom responsibilities. The process reached a culmination of sorts in 1892 when the Girls' School promoted Nyawt Huan, one of its assistant teachers and a former boarding student, to the position of full teacher, without any mention of being a missionary assistant. She held that position for ten years (McGilvary 1903).

The process which began with Chantah and culminated with Nyawt Huan set the pattern for the emergence and early expansion of the teaching profession in northern Siam. By 1896 ninety-eight students, including seventy-seven boarders, had studied at the Chiang Mai Girls' School. Two-thirds of its students were Christians, many of whom planned to return to their homes to start small village church schools. The school had three assistant teachers and one full-time northern Thai teacher, all former pupils. Meanwhile, Katherine Fleeson in Lampang opened the mission's and the region's second girls' school and repeated the pattern of Chiang Mai. She began with a small group of girls, some of whom lived with her, and from this informal beginning developed a full-fledged boarding school which opened in 1893 with twenty-five students. The Lampang school eventually developed its own corps of northern Thai women teachers.[12]

As the Laos Mission opened new stations beyond Chiang Mai and Lampang, the pattern of those two stations repeated itself again and again. Within weeks of the opening of the Phrae Station in 1893, for example, both women missionaries there began teaching informal literacy and religious education classes to groups of girls and women. At the end of two years, more formal, regular classes for women and for girls emerged.[13] At the Nan Station, founded in 1895, a number of unsuccessful attempts to start mission schools for both boys and girls finally achieved success for girls in 1911 when Eula Van Vranken founded a

girls' boarding school. Eventually that school became a source of women teachers, not only for other Christian schools, but also for government schools (Swanson 1982, pp. 299–300).

Another pattern also emerged. While the early educational efforts in the various mission stations seldom led to the founding of formal schools immediately, missionary commitment to women's literacy created clusters of literate girls and women in even remote parts of the region. In later years, the missionaries continued to conduct women's literacy classes in their homes, churches, and distant villages; and they peppered their letters and reports with examples of women learning to read under adverse or in unusual circumstances. They cited, for example, the case of *nang* ("Mrs") Kiang, who taught herself to read after her conversion to Christianity and within a few years could lead group Bible studies on her own (Dodd 1923, p. 308). Missionary accounts particularly relished instances of older women who learned to read. *Pa* ("aunt") Tien Ta, for example, learned to read in 1898 at the age of sixty-three, and *pa* Dee learned to read both the central and northern Thai scripts after she was converted in her old age.[14]

Of these older women, the life of *pa* Wan, a Bible woman at the mission hospital in Chiang Mai, provides particular insight into how literacy and learning influenced the lives of northern Thai women. In 1890 *pa* Wan enrolled in the Laos Mission's otherwise all-male Theological Training School to improve her understanding of Christianity and her ability to discuss her religion with non-Christian patients. The missionary principal of the school noted that the male students, most of whom were mature adults and converts, showed *pa* Wan the deference due her age.[15] These men, in short, readily integrated *pa* Wan's literacy and her presence in a theological school into their understanding of the proper sphere of women. She incurred none of the suspicion and loss of respect imposed upon the extremely rare literate woman in traditional society.

In the deference her fellow students paid *pa* Wan and in the pride her missionary mentors felt for her, lay also the seeds of a profession, one that came into its own only after 1905 when the Laos Mission began hiring large numbers of "Bible women" to teach reading and the Bible to Christian as well as non-Christian women. Some of those women exercised a great deal of influence in their local churches, and their

position amounted to nothing less than the first *religious* profession and only the second profession of any type, after teaching, open to northern Thai women.[16] The religious educational work of the Bible women further emphasized and promoted the positive identification of women, religion, and education among northern Thai Christians.

The missionary emphasis on education for women succeeded, in fact, in drastically altering within the mission's convert community the traditional relationship of women to religion, literacy, and learning. One of the most striking examples of this change took place in 1885 when a group of "inquirers" at Ban Chang Kam, south of Chiang Mai, asked the Laos Mission to send someone to teach them more about Christianity. With neither missionaries nor church leaders available, the mission sent two girls from the Chiang Mai Girls' School. They taught the potential converts reading, hymn singing, the Bible, and other religious subjects. Perhaps most significant of all, they also led worship in mixed gatherings of men and women, something as generally unacceptable in nineteenth-century American Presbyterian churches as it was unheard of for traditional Buddhist rites in northern Siam.[17] In another case that came to the missionary's attention, two girls' school students impressed a village non-Christian with their articulate, educated manner, particularly when it came to discussing religious subjects. In 1899, the Chiang Rai Church elected three of its women members to official positions in the church. And the mission credited yet another student of the girls' school with convincing several people around her home in Chae Hom to convert to Christianity.[18]

Florence Crooks, a missionary who first arrived in northern Siam in 1904, succinctly summarized the ways in which the Laos Mission changed the religious and social roles of northern Thai Christian women through education. She remembered the traditionally disadvantaged state of northern Thai women and their consequent illiteracy. She remembered also how Christian women became literate and concluded that in northern Siam, "We have now a new generation of Lao women" (Crooks, 1942, pp. 216–17).

The changes that took place in the relationship of women to education and, by extension, religion formed the key ingredient in the creation of the "new generation". The initial phase in the creation of the new generation addressed the issue of the relationship of education to

religion before any other issues since women could not have attained literacy and education until the religiously grounded negative equation of women and education changed. Women's social change in northern Siam began, then, with the desacralization of education so that women's traditionally lower religious condition no longer disqualified them from an education. Prior to any other agency of social change in northern Siam, the Laos Mission initiated that desacralization process. Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century missionary work among northern Thai women, especially within the Christian community, therefore formed the earliest stage of later, more pervasive changes in the roles of women in northern Thai society.

It seems ironic, however, that social change in northern Thai gender roles began through the agency of a foreign religious movement pursuing patently religious ends. The Laos Mission did not, of course, intend to secularize education. It sought rather to change the relationship of women and education so that they could receive a Christian education that would promote the Christianization of northern Siam and produce a corps of literate women who would actively promote their religion in their families, among their neighbours, and through leadership in their churches.

Religious beliefs, then, motivated the first attempts to modify the traditional role of women in religion and education. Missionary strategy sought to "domesticate" northern Thai women in accordance with the American ideology of gender, which assigned the home as the primary sphere of women's activity, so that northern Thai women could learn the theory and the practice of new social and religious roles. That "domestication" included the experience of living in and serving as domestic servants in missionary homes, of living in missionary schools, and of working for missionary institutions. Domestication, in order to achieve its goals, removed girls and women from traditional society and placed them in a missionary counter-culture. Thus, Anabelle Briggs (1901), a missionary in Chiang Rai, wrote of eight young, newly married Christian girls: "In the missionary homes these girls were taught to sew, cook, wash dishes, serve the table, sweep, etc., and in the school to read and write. In both places they were taught to think."

For the first members of the "new generation", living in middle-class American Protestant missionary homes and institutions intensified and

focused social change and grounded the missionaries' religious agenda in a much broader experience of new work habits, ways of ordering time, means of systematization, and a sense of discipline. All of this contributed to removing mission school girls from their traditional socio-cultural system and its restrictions on women's education. The domestication of Christian girls in missionary homes and institutions taught them how to live and work in organizational settings unknown in traditional society. Those homes and institutions prepared girls culturally for professional employment, and then provided the first significant source of jobs available to trained, salaried women (Katzman 1978, pp. 134–37, 171; Bledstein 1976, especially pp. 25 ff.).

In spite of missionary intentions to change the focus but preserve the traditional association of religion and education, however, the consequences of their work prepared the way for removing education from the domain of religion entirely. It provided models for women's education and highly visible, widely travelled, and socially respected examples of educated women, namely women missionaries themselves. It trained teachers who were later employed in government schools educating women. It produced a widely spread corps of literate women who were able to teach other women how to read.

For the greater numbers of Christian women who lived in less intimate proximity to the missionary counter-culture, literacy and learning had a less immediate but no less significant meaning. Through them the secularization of education seeped into the countryside. They learned to read and many of their daughters went to school without any apparent loss of the respect otherwise due to them. Some of them entered the traditionally male religious domain by teaching Sunday schools and small church-related schools of their own. They taught reading and the rudiments of other skills to non-Christian neighbours and to their own daughters (Swanson 1982, p. 300; 1984, pp. 77–78, 126–27). Like the better-educated products of missionary girls' boarding schools, these women also promoted the quiet desacralization of education in northern Siam.

William A. Clebsch points out that from the colonial era of the seventeenth century onwards American Protestantism has mounted a number of social reform campaigns aimed at the Christianization of American society. Those reform campaigns, he notes, generally resulted in success in a number of different areas of society, including the spread of literacy and education for religious purposes. Clebsch goes on to indicate, however, that American society at large claimed those reforms for its own without allowing Christianization itself to take place. Society secularized Protestant reforms, and a pattern of social change emerged in which Protestantism, though it initiated and promoted the change, failed to attain its goal of greater control over society through that change (Clebsch 1968, especially pp. 1–2). Arguably, a similar pattern emerged in northern Siam. The Laos Mission initiated and promoted changes in the religious and educational status of women which led, in turn, to changes taking place but did not result in the intended Christianization of northern Siam.

No brief account and analysis of the missionary impact on women's traditional roles in northern Thai society can encompass the complex forces which contributed to their influence. As early as the 1870s, for example, the Laos Mission received substantial, perhaps crucial, support from a number of women in the Chiang Mai royal family.[19] In later years, the mission's total educational, medical, and technological programme of social change received even greater support from the Bangkok government. On another level, the Laos Mission and the Thai Government changed the very content of education so that it had little to do with traditional religious concerns, thus making the development of women's education all the easier (Wyatt 1969). The introduction of printing into northern Siam promoted the secularization of literacy and all things connected with books and writing (Swanson 1988).

Yet, through all of these complexities shine a few fundamental themes. Women's education became possible only when society no longer associated women's religious status with learning and literacy. The Laos Mission initiated the process of dissociation by creating a counter-cultural environment which prized, produced, and employed literate women. In measured stages, domestic service and residence in missionary homes and boarding schools transformed village and town girls, the daughters of illiterate mothers, into professional educators. Meanwhile, older women, common women, and rural women found through the Laos Mission and its churches their own means of joining the "new generation". They and their more well educated sisters carried the matter

of women and education to the point where literate women no longer seemed strange or sacrilegious.

Underlying even these fundamental themes, however, the earliest stages in the secularization of education and its extension to include women grew out of a peculiar mingling of northern Thai and American Protestant definitions of women's social roles. Where northern Thai traditional culture allowed women considerable social freedom and influence, post-traditional American Protestant culture did not. And where the Americans identified women with piety and gave them access to education, the northern Thai did not. In the mixing of these contradictory conceptions of gender roles, northern Thai women first acquired meaningful access to literacy and learning without losing their status in other social spheres. The missionaries, whatever their intentions, initiated a process which gave literacy and formal education a new meaning, which in turn removed them from the religious sphere of northern Thai culture. In the end the American cult of true womanhood, experienced by millions of American women as an oppressive ideology, provided northern Thai women a means for expanding and preserving their social freedoms and rights.

NOTES

1 This article refers to the present-day nation of Thailand by its nineteenth-century name "Siam" and to its people as "Thai". The "Laos Mission" took its name from the western and central Thai (Siamese) habit of calling the northern Thai "Lao". By "traditional society" is meant a society which recognizes only one central system of meaning by which all of life is organized. See Berger (1967).
2 Histories of the Laos Mission are found in McGilvary (1912); McFarland (1928); and Wells (1958). For recent studies of particular aspects of Laos Mission history see Hughes (1982) and Swanson (1984).
3 Curtis (1903, pp. 99–108); Backus (1884, pp. 440–44); McGilvary (1869; 1871; 1877; 1912, p. 144); Wilson (1880); Dodd (1923, pp. 306–7).
4 Potter (1976, especially pp. 118–19, 124–27, 141–46); Potter (1977, especially pp. 101, 123); Davis (1973); Kingshill (1976, pp. 98 ff.).

5 Kirsch (1985). For similar comments related specifically to northern Thai women, see Mougne (1984).
6 Martin King Whyte argues that the status of women in traditional societies varies from social sphere to social sphere and that the indicators of status do not correlate from sphere to sphere so that it is difficult to speak of *the* status of women or *the* role of women generally. See Whyte (1978), especially pp. 167–84.
7 McGilvary (1912, pp. 102–17, 170); Daniel McGilvary to Irving, 22 February 1876 and 11 December 1876, Records of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, at the Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia, USA (hereafter cited as *BFM*), vol. 3. Northern Thai church statistics show that the number of church members rose from 9 in 1876 to 83 in 1880, 884 in 1890, and 2,440 in 1900. Missionary records indicate no gender imbalance. See Swanson (1984, p. 170).
8 Laos Mission to Executive Committee, Board of Foreign Missions, 30 September 1868, *BFM*, vol. 3. On the relationship of literacy to intelligence see Swanson (1984, p. 26).
9 "Sessional Records of the First Presbyterian Church of Chiang Mai", *passim*, in Records of the American Presbyterian Mission, at the Payap University Archives, Chiang Mai; Daniel McGilvary to Irving, 4 December 1872 and 11 December 1876, *BFM*, vol. 3; Jonathan Wilson to Irving, 18 July 1870, *BFM*, vol. 3.
10 *Woman's Work for Women* 11 (May 1881): 152; McGilvary (1878); Peabody (1881, pp. 26–27); Cole (1882*a*); McGilvary and Chanta (1882).
11 Peabody (1881, p. 26); *Woman's Work for Women* 5 (May 1890): 121; Eliza Westervelt to Mitchell, 14 January 1891, *BFM*, vol. 8; William C. Dodd to Mitchell, 8 July 1892, *BFM*, vol. 9.
12 Denman (1897); Fleeson to Mitchell, 2 May 1892, *BFM*, vol. 9; W.A. Briggs to Mitchell, 7 October 1892, *BFM*, vol. 9; Fleeson (1893, pp. 7–8).
13 W.F. Shields, 30 August 1894, *BFM*, vol. 11; *Woman's Work for Women* 9 (May 1896): 129.
14 *Laos News* 1 (October 1904): 92; Irwin (1897).
15 Dodd (1923, pp. 262–63); William C. Dodd, "Report of the North Laos Mission Training School for the Year 1891", *BFM*, vol. 9.
16 *Laos News* 2 (October 1905): 76; Laos Mission Annual Meeting Minutes, 1905, *BFM*, vol. 280; Laos Mission Annual Report, 1908, *BFM*, vol. 281; McFarland (1928, pp. 277–78).
17 Chalmers Martin to Mitchell, 21 July 1885, *BFM*, vol. 5.
18 Dodd (1923, pp. 270–71); William C. Dodd to Mitchell, 29 April 1892, *BFM*, vol. 9; Mission Station Reports, 1899, *BFM*, vol. 16; Mission Bimonthly

Letters, April 1899, *BFM*, vol. 22; Hugh Taylor to Mitchell, 22 September 1891, *BFM*, vol. 9; Jonathan Wilson, Lampang Station Annual Report, 1894, *BFM*, vol. 22.

19 McGilvary (1912, pp. 81–82, 145, 180–87, 256–57; 1877*a*; 1877*b*); Jonathan Wilson to Irving, 27 December 1882, *BFM*, vol. 4.

References

Backus, Mary, ed. *Siam and Laos as Seen by Our American Missionaries.* Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publications, 1884.

Beaver, R. Pierce. *All Loves Excelling: American Protestant Women in World Missions.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968.

Berger, Peter. *The Social Reality of Religion.* Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967.

Bledstein, Burton J. *The Culture of Professionalism: The Middle Class and the Development of Higher Education in America.* New York: Norton, 1976.

Bowman, Mary A. "The Medical Missionary versus the Laos Doctor". *Woman's Work for Women* 12 (November 1897): 301.

Briggs, Anabelle K. "Re-Stationed and Looking About". *Woman's Work for Women* 16 (May 1901): 130.

Clebsch, William A. *From Sacred to Profane America: The Role of Religion in American History.* New York: Harper & Row, 1968.

Cole, Edna S. Letter dated 12 December 1881. *Woman's Work for Women* 12 (May 1882*a*): 148–50.

______. Undated letter. *Woman's Work for Women* 12 (November 1882*b*): 366–67.

______. "The Laos Mission". *Woman's Work for Women* 13 (March 1883): 82–83.

Crooks, Florence Bingham. *Tales of Thailand.* Private Printing, 1942.

Curtis, Lillian Johnson. *The Laos of North Siam.* Philadelphia: Westminster, 1903.

Darunee Tantiwiramond and Shashi Pandey. "The Status and Role of Thai Women in the Pre-Modern Period: A Historical and Cultural Perspective". *SOJOURN: Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 2 (February 1987): 125–49.

Davis, Richard. "Muang Matrifocality". *Journal of the Siam Society* 61 (July 1973): 53–62.

Denman, Katharine. Undated letter. *Woman's Work for Women* 12 (January 1897): 18–19.

Dodd, William Clifton. *The Tai Race.* Cedar Rapids, Iowa: Torch Press, 1923.

Douglas, Ann. *The Feminization of American Culture.* New York: Knopf, 1977.

Fleeson, Kate N. "First Boarding-School for Girls at Lakawn, in Lao Land". *Woman's Work for Women* 8 (January 1893): 7–8.

Hill, Patricia R. *The World Their Household: The American Woman's Foreign Mission Movement and Cultural Transformation 1870–1920.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1985.

Hughes, Philip. *Proclamation and Response: A Study of the History of Christian Faith in Northern Thailand.* Chiang Mai: Payap College Manuscript Division, 1982.

Irwin (Bowman), Mary A. Undated letter. *Woman's Work for Women* 17 (March 1902): 79.

Irwin, Robert. "In Laos Homes". *Woman's Work for Women* 12 (April 1897): 94.

Katzman, David M. *Seven Days a Week: Women and Domestic Service in Industrializing America.* New York: Oxford, 1978.

Kingshill, Konrad. *Ku Daeng — The Red Tomb: A Village Study in Northern Thailand.* 3rd ed. Bangkok: Suriyaban, 1976.

Kirsch, A. Thomas. "Text and Context: Buddhist Sex Roles/Culture of Gender Revisited". *American Ethnologist* 12 (May 1985): 302–20.

McFarland, George B., ed. *Historical Sketch of Protestant Missions in Siam, 1828–1928.* Bangkok: Bangkok Times Press, 1928.

McGilvary, Daniel. Undated letter. *Foreign Missionary* 28 (July 1869): 29–32.

______. Letter dated 28 June 1869. *Foreign Missionary* 28 (March 1870): 229.

______. "Laos Mission". *Foreign Missionary* 30 (May 1871): 368–71.

______. Letter dated 10 October 1876. *Foreign Missionary* 35 (February 1877*a*): 283–84.

______. "Monthly Concert Siam". *Foreign Missionary* 35 (May 1877*b*): 355–66.

______. Letter dated 17 July 1878. *Foreign Missionary* 37 (December 1878): 217.

______. "Discouraging Disappointments and Interesting Incidents". *Laos News* 2 (January 1905): 14–15.

______. *A Half-Century among the Siamese and the Laos: An Autobiography.* New York: Revell, 1912.

McGilvary, Margaret A. "From Schoolroom to Bridal". *Woman's Work for Women* 18 (May 1903): 111.

McGilvary, S.B. and Chanta. "Letter from a Laos Woman". *Woman's Work for Women* 12 (May 1882): 149–50.

Miller, Page. "The Evolving Role of Women in the Presbyterian Church in the Early Nineteenth Century". Ph.D. dissertation, University of Maryland, 1979.

Mougne, Christine. "Women, Fertility and Power in Northern Thailand". Paper read at the International Conference on Thai Studies, 22–24 August 1984, Bangkok.

Peabody, Helen. *Mary Margaretta Campbell: A Brief Record of a Youthful Life.* Cincinnati: Silvius and Smith, 1881.

Porterfield, Amanda. *Feminine Spirituality in America: From Sarah Edwards to Martha Graham.* Philadelphia: Temple University, 1980.

Potter, Jack M. *Thai Peasant Social Structure.* Chicago: University of Chicago, 1976.

Potter, Sulamith Heins. *Family Life in a Northern Thai Village: A Study in the Structural Significance of Women.* Berkeley: University of California, 1977.

Rothman, Sheila. *Woman's Proper Place: A History of Changing Ideals and Practices, 1870 to Present.* New York: Basic Books, 1978.

Ryan, Mary P. *Womanhood in America: From Colonial Times to the Present.* New York: New Viewpoints, 1975.

______. *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790–1865.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

Sklar, Kathryn Kish. *Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973.

Smith, Page. *Daughters of the Promised Land: Women in American History.* Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1970.

Swanson, Herbert R. "Advocate and Partner: Missionaries and Modernization

in Nan Province, Siam, 1895–1934". *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 13 (September 1982): 296–309.

______. *Krischak Muang Nua: A Study in Northern Thai Church History.* Bangkok: Chuan Press, 1984.

______. "This Seed: Missionary Printing and Literature as Agents of Change in Northern Siam, 1892–1926". In *Changes in Northern Thailand and the Shan States 1886–1940,* edited by Prakai Nontawasee. Southeast Asian Studies Program Comparative Research Award Report no. 1. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1988.

Sweet, Leonard I. "The Female Seminary Movement and Woman's Education in Antebellum America". *Church History* 54 (March 1985): 41–55.

Warner, Antoinette. "Chieng Mai–Laos". *Woman's Work for Women* 15 (April 1885): 122.

Wells, Kenneth E. *History of Protestant Work in Thailand, 1828–1958.* Bangkok: The Church of Christ in Thailand, 1958.

Welter, Barbara. "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820–1860". *American Quarterly* 18 (Summer 1966): 151–74.

______. "She Hath Done What She Could: Protestant Women's Missionary Careers in Nineteenth-Century America". *American Quarterly* 30 (Winter 1978): 624–38.

Whyte, Martin King. *The Status of Women in Preindustrial Societies.* Princeton: Princeton University, 1978.

Wilson, J. Undated letter. *Woman's Work for Women* 10 (May 1880): 151.

Wyatt, David K. *The Politics of Reform in Thailand: Education in the Reign of King Chulalongkorn.* New Haven: Yale University, 1969.

HERBERT R. SWANSON is the Head of the Office of History, Church of Christ, Thailand.