

“Missionaries, Martyrs, and Political Change in Northern Thailand in the Late 19th Century”

A talk by Dr. Don Swearer

Present: Hans Bänziger, Diane Barber-Riley, Mark Barber-Riley, John Cadet, Bernard D. Davis, Jack Eisner, Ron Emmons, Louis Gabaude, Kees Goudswaard, Oliver Hargreave, Max Herde, Reinhard Hohler, Roy Hudson, Carool Kersten, Martyn King, Fatema Rajabali, Sarah Robinson, Manija Salas, Horst Schneider, Peter Schupp, Gert Slambrouck, David Steane, Herb Swanson, Warunee Swanson, Timmi Tillmann, Edward van Tuyll, Scharmin Williams, David K. Wyatt. An audience of 28.

The full text of Don Swearer’s talk.

Martyrdom set within the broader context of persecution has been a defining feature of the history of the expansion of Christianity worldwide, including Thailand. The seminal martyrdom story in the annals of the Protestant (Presbyterian) church in northern Thailand is the death of two Thai Christian men, Nan Chai and Noi Sunya (later sources use the central Thai, Suriya) in 1869 on the authority of Chao Kawilorot, who ruled Chiang Mai from 1856-1870. The event is set within the historical context of the early years of the American Presbyterian mission in Chiang Mai and the late nineteenth century political situation in the Lao States (as northern Siam was then known) immediately prior to the emergence of the modernizing Thai nation-state during the reigns of Kings Mongkut and Chulalongkorn from 1851 to 1910. Against this historical background, I propose to examine the account of the death of Nan Chai and Noi Sunya based on missionary records and assess the impact of the story on the early history of the Protestant church in Thailand. I contend that the account of the death of Nan Chai and Noi Sunya as a martyrdom story was primarily a theological construction; that as such it reflected the long tradition of Christian martyrdom beginning with St. Stephen; that this construction was consistent with the Old School Scottish Presbyterian worldview and Second Great Awakening American evangelical sentiment of the first Protestant missionaries in Chiang Mai, Daniel McGilvary and Jonathan Wilson; and, that the death of the two "heroes of the faith" (Thai, *virabut haeng quam chǎ'a*) reinforced the cultural isolation of the Protestant Christian church in Thailand that persisted for decades.

Martyrdom and the Christian Church

Although martyrdom, both religious and non-religious, has been omnipresent in human history since time immemorial, only Christianity among the world's religions identifies martyrdom with its founder. Consequently, beginning with the stoning to death of Stephen recorded in the New Testament book of the Acts of the Apostles, martyrdom has served as a major paradigm for the Christian Church and its worldwide missionary expansion. For the early church fathers, a martyr was one who perfectly imitated the suffering and death of Jesus. Martyrs were considered to be witnesses to faith in Jesus as the Son of God (e.g., The Martyrdom of Polycarp, ca. 165 C. E.), and their courage in the face of death provided evidence of God's active power in the world. The early church fathers considered the martyr's life to be the highest fulfillment of Christian striving for perfection. Martyrdom, consequently, became a heroic virtue associated with death not only at the hands of others but also for acts of heroic self-sacrifice.

In his seven volume *History of the Expansion of Christianity from the first Christian century to World War II*, Kenneth Scott Latourette cites ample evidence that Christians "expected persecution and gloried in it," so much so that Latourette characterizes early Christianity as having a "martyr complex." Of special relevance to the martyrdom of Nan Chai and Noi Sunya is the prevalence of martyrdom stories from the nineteenth century Christian missionary enterprise

in Asia. Martyred missionaries in Cawnpore, India, included the sister of the wife of Rev. S. C. George, who was appointed by the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions to Siam in 1862. In French Indo-China between 1833 and 1840 many missionaries, foreign and native priests, and hundreds of native Christians were killed. In Korea, "persecution by the state was the lot of Christians almost from the first," and was especially virulent in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. In China, missionaries were branded as "foreign devils" and Chinese Christians as "secondary devils." The death of 188 missionaries at Paotingfu, north China, during the Boxer Rebellion is one of the best known Protestant missionary martyrdom episodes. Speaking at a memorial service 14 years after the event, Sherwood Eddy characterized the Christian missionary enterprise as nothing less than a crusade "on a far-flung battle line" to make Christians of all peoples. The first Presbyterian missionaries to northern Thailand shared a similar commitment to bring the "Lao nation" to Christ.

Christianity Comes to Thailand. The Presbyterian Mission in Siam and Laos

"Siam has not been opened by British gunpowder, but by missionary effort," said the Siamese regent in Chiang Mai when talking about the old days to an American visitor.

Christianity first came to Siam in the late seventeenth century when Roman Catholic missionaries represented chiefly by the Société des Missions Étrangères of Paris began propagating their faith in the kingdom of Ayutthaya during the reign of King Narai (1656--1688). After an initial degree of success that led to the establishment of several chapels and a seminary, anti-French sentiment following King Narai's death resulted in the expulsion or imprisonment of French priests and monks. By 1828, the date of the arrival of the first Protestant missionaries in Bangkok, there were only six Catholic churches in the country, and it was not until 1841 that the first Vicar Apostolic of Siam, Jean-Baptiste Pallegoix, was appointed. Pallegoix, a keen observer and student of Siamese culture, left historical accounts that provide a major resource for understanding mid-nineteenth century Siam.

Protestant mission work began in Bangkok in 1828 during the reign of Phra Nangklao, Rama III (1824-1851), with the arrival of the Rev. Carl A. F. Gutzlaff, a German medical doctor, and the Rev. Jacob Tomlin, of the London Missionary Society, but it was not until 1840 when the Rev. and Mrs. William P. Buell became the first American Presbyterian missionaries to Siam. After the Buell's departure in 1844, the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions assigned the Rev. and Mrs. Stephen Matton and Dr. Samuel R. House to Bangkok in 1847. The Rev. and Mrs. Daniel McGilvary and the Rev. Jonathan Wilson, who were to open the Presbyterian mission station in Chiang Mai in 1867, were appointed by the Board in 1858.

To say that the early Protestant missionary efforts at conversion met with limited success is a glaring understatement. From 1831 to 1849 twenty-two American Board missionaries counted no converts and American Presbyterian missionaries in Bangkok baptized their first Thai convert after being in the country for nineteen years. Kenneth E. Wells, the author of a history of the Protestant church in Thailand, who served as a Presbyterian missionary from 1927 to 1967, cites the following reasons for this lack of success: missionaries knew little or nothing about Siam; travel to and within Siam was tedious and long and many missionaries either were forced to return home because of debilitating illness or died in the field; and, perhaps of even greater importance, believing that all forms of Thai cultural religion--Buddhism, animism--were evil, they created a Christian community divorced from its indigenous cultural roots that mirrored the American Presbyterianism of their day.

Rama III's ambivalent attitude toward Christian missionaries may also have inhibited their evangelistic efforts in Siam, a situation that changed with the accession of Rama IV, King Mongkut, to the throne in 1851. Prior to assuming the throne, as the abbot of Wat Bowoniwet, Mongkut was tutored in English and science for eighteen months by the Rev. Jesse Caswell, a

Presbyterian appointed under the American Board. His relationship with Caswell and his longstanding friendship with Dan Beach Bradley, arguably the most important American missionary to go to Thailand, helped to dispose him favorably toward the missionaries. During the reigns of King Mongkut and his son-successor, King Chulalongkorn, relationships between American Presbyterian missionaries and the extended royal family were marked by cordiality. They expressed their gratitude to the missionaries for their numerous contributions to modern medicine, education, and government. These included the following: The Rev. Dr. Daniel Beach Bradley (Siam residence, 1850-1873) is remembered as the father of modern medicine in Thailand; at the invitation and sponsorship of King Chulalongkorn, the Rev. Samuel G. McFarland (residence, 1860-1878) founded King's College, the first government school; his son, Dr. George McFarland, at age twenty-five became the superintendent of the new Sirirat Hospital as well the dean of its medical school and was decorated by the king with a royal title; his brother, Edwin, invented the first Thai typewriter and served as secretary to the distinguished H.R.H. Prince Damrong, Minister of Interior; and another brother, William, was private secretary to H.R.H. Prince Bhanurangsi, the Minister of Defense. These were outstanding and noteworthy contributions that led to the growing modernization and inevitable Westernization of Siam as a modern nation-state.

Daniel McGilvary and Jonathan Wilson arrived in Bangkok on June 20th 1858. McGilvary and Wilson were classmates and graduates of Princeton Seminary where they came under the influence of Dr. Charles Hodge, an exponent of Old School Scottish Presbyterian theology and a strong proponent of foreign missions. This theological worldview had a profound influence on their work among the Lao and the relationship of the emergent Protestant church in the north to its cultural environment.

McGilvary's interest in the Lao developed soon after his arrival in Bangkok when, in 1859, on a trip to Petchaburi, south of Bangkok, he encounters a colony of 10,000 Lao war captives. Subsequently, in 1861 McGilvary moved to the Petchaburi mission where he reports that the Lao appealed to him as a people of "more stamina and less levity than the Siamese." He also regarded them as more likely candidates for conversion since they had, "a system of religion much nearer Christianity than Buddhism; holding to a creator and governor of the universe... Buddhism consequently has no hold on them, except as it has been adopted a little by degrees as the religion of the ruling race." As McGilvary was to discover after reaching Chiang Mai, however, the Lao character was not quite as Calvinistic as he thought and Buddhism was more culturally ingrained and socially definitive than he had realized.

In December 1860, prior to his move from Bangkok to Petchaburi, McGilvary married Dr. Bradley's daughter, Sophia. Bradley also was interested in the possibility of a mission to the Lao, and toward that end had cultivated a friendly relationship with Chao Kawilorot during the Prince's triennial trips to pay tribute to the King of Siam. In visits to the Bradley home, the Prince showed a keen interest in the Siamese language printing press and in the smallpox vaccine Bradley had developed. Bradley may even have vaccinated some of the chao nai (members of the royal family) who accompanied Chao Kawilorot. Because the Prince was in Bangkok when McGilvary and Sophia Bradley were married they took the opportunity to pay him a visit with a gift of wedding cake. McGilvary appealed to Chao Kawilorot to open a mission in Chiang Mai, but it was not until October 1866, that he was able to secure permission from both the Prince of Chiang Mai and King Mongkut.

Departing from Bangkok on January 3rd 1867, McGilvary, his wife Sophie and their two children, reached Chiang Mai on April 3rd after an arduous three-month trip upriver and overland. One can only imagine the physical discomfort of their first year. Arriving at the peak of the hot season, attired in long, heavy, dark Victorian clothing, their first home was a twelve by twenty foot sala, a semi-open rest house near the central market area, where daily they were gawked at by crowds of

curious country folk. While their crowded and exposed living conditions must have been stressful, at the same time their situation gave the McGilvays an opportunity to teach and for Daniel to practice rudimentary medical skills such as sewing up wounds, setting broken bones, and vaccinating against smallpox. From the outset the practice of medicine, especially dispensing quinine and smallpox vaccinations, proved to be a crucial aspect of the Presbyterian mission to the Lao. After living in Chiang Mai for ten months, the McGilvays were joined by Jonathan Wilson and his wife in February 1868.

The Presbyterian Mission in Chiang Mai, Chao Kawilorot, and the Death of Nan Chai and Noi Sunya

The McGilvays began their work in Chiang Mai with high hopes and expectations of the success for their mission. In Bangkok Chao Kawilorot seemed "not only willing for us to go but pleased at the idea and voluntarily offered to give us a [building] lot and also the timber for our house and to furnish a house in the meantime." Although he granted McGilvary permission to teach Christianity, one assumes the Prince expected that McGilvary would treat endemic health problems--smallpox, malaria, goiter--and open a school, but that he would be no more successful than the Siam mission in Bangkok in making converts.

Both McGilvary and Wilson testify to the initial friendliness and interest of Chao Kawilorot and other royal family members, writing that they were allowed to teach "without restraint;" that the Prince and his family would visit them to hear Sophia play the harmonium, and they were warmly welcomed at the palace; and that, "He [the prince] has been very kind and gracious... whenever any of us have met him, and the good will of the people has stood a test that in such a country as this seems little less than miraculous." Chao Kawilorot also provided two houses to the missionaries without cost.

After two years the fledgling Presbyterian mission had ample reason for optimism. In August 1869, just two months prior to the martyrdom of Nan Chai and Noi Sunya, McGilvary voiced little suspicion that the missionaries or the little band of seven native Christians faced persecution:

"I think I can say that I never began a year's labor with more faith in God's promises or the ultimate and possibly not distant triumph of the Gospel. Yet we know not what trials may await us, or how the rulers will be affected by our present beginnings or what oppositions it may awaken. But we have no apprehension of this kind of trouble. Our relationship with the king and authorities are about all we could ask. We never met his Majesty... that we do not meet with a kind reception. We have had another good opportunity or two to preach the Gospel to his Majesty to which he listened attentively."

The reasons for what appears to have been an abrupt turn of events in the fortunes of the Chiang Mai mission cannot be determined precisely from the missionary record and, consequently, are a matter of educated inference. The mission's unexpected early success relative to the Siam mission was assuredly one cause. By August 1869, seven converts had been baptized. The first was Nan Inta, a former Buddhist monk, baptized on January 3rd 1869. He became the first elder in the church in May 1876, and later the first Lao evangelist. In relatively quick succession, in May and June Noi Sunya, Nai Boon Ma and Saen Ya Wichai received baptism soon to be followed by the August baptisms of Nan Chai, Pu Sang, and Noi Kanta. Four of the seven new Christians were people of some influence. Like Nan Inta, Nan Chai was a former monk and Jonathan Wilson's teacher of the Lao language; Noi Sunya was a folk medicine practitioner and employed to help tend Kawilorot's cattle; and Ya Wichai was a Saen or official in the government of the chao of Lamphun. Furthermore, two of Kawilorot's daughters had shown more than a polite interest in the missionaries and their message and McGilvary also reports optimistically that one of the Princes was convinced of the truth of Christianity and was considering conversion. This increasing

interest in Christianity encouraged McGilvary's optimism but also left him with a nagging anxiety, "I have the impression that this year will be a crisis in the history of the mission. Should a few others make public profession, it will probably decide whether any stand will be taken by those in authority against it."

In and of themselves these conversions to Christianity might not have distressed Kawilorot; however, the missionaries' zeal to convert, their total rejection of the Lao religious-cultural synthesis of Buddhism and animism, and their demand that baptism required an absolute loyalty to the church posed a dangerous threat to his political authority, and the well-established socio-economic system of *corvee* labor. Regarding the first, missionary records bear ample testimony to their conviction that Lao religious beliefs and practices were a heathen, superstitious, idolatry that must be totally rejected. The Lao were regarded one of the "tribes yet in darkness" and the Presbyterian mission was portrayed as a station on the "great missionary map" engaged in the battle to "overthrow Satan's kingdom." Although McGilvary found Buddhism to be a more ethical religion than Brahmanism's "disgusting and often obscene rites," Buddhism's noble ethics simply meant that it was "harder to overthrow." But, overthrown it must be--totally--as an "indispensable prerequisite toward embracing the Gospel." Or, in McGilvary's metaphorical characterization, before a "new superstructure can be reared, the 'old foundation' must be raised."

The system of *corvee* labor was an integral part of the patron-client structure of Lao society which, in turn, was linked to the absolute authority of the *chao muang* ("lord of the kingdom"). In January 1869, and on several subsequent occasions, Nan Inta refused his patron's request to work on the Sabbath, thereby challenging the traditional requirements of the patron-client system and demonstrating, "that his new allegiance and faith meant more to him than the traditional system to which he had previously adhered." Ostensibly, a similar situation pertained regarding the killing of Nan Chai and Noi Sunya. Chao Kawilorot had issued a command that the inhabitants of several villages, including Mae Bu Kha where Nan Chai and Noi Sunya resided, were required to provide timber to repair the city wall. That they had failed to comply with the order of the *chao muang*, was the ostensible reason given for the execution of the two Christians, a fabricated excuse in McGilvary's eyes. Would they have been killed had Nan Chai and Noi Sunya obeyed the Prince's order in a timely fashion and so met their *corvee* obligation? History does not provide an answer, although had they done so Kawilorot would have been unable to use their lack of compliance as the excuse for their murder.

The historical record does tell us, however, that by mid-1869 Chao Kawilorot wanted to banish the McGilvarys and Wilsons from Chiang Mai. He had little control over the historical forces beginning to transform his kingdom and challenge his authority that included Chiang Mai's tributary subservience to Bangkok; lawsuits over British-Burmese teak concessions pending before the British Consul; and the threat of Shan incursions from the north that could be exploited by the Siamese. However, the Prince could rid himself of the aggravation created by the American missionaries and authorized by King Mongkut. It is possible, furthermore, that a personal grudge factored into the Prince's feelings. Among the people McGilvary vaccinated for smallpox was his daughter's son who subsequently died. Although the princess and her husband, Chao Intanon, who succeeded his father-in-law to the throne of Chiang Mai in 1871, assured McGilvary that they did not consider him to be responsible for their son's death, one wonders whether or not Kawilorot harbored feelings of resentment and anger.

Whatever factors influenced the *chao muang*, I propose that his behavior can be seen as a series of strategies aimed at forcing the missionaries to leave Chiang Mai. The first was to have the McGilvarys and Wilsons recalled by the government in Bangkok. With the apparent help of a Portuguese adventurer by the name of Fonesca, who had offered his services to the Prince of Chiang Mai having become persona non grata in Siam, the *chao muang* petitioned the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Bangkok to recall the missionaries on the pretext that their presence had

created a drought responsible for a rice famine. The Minister sent the petition to the Rev. Noah A. McDonald, the acting American Consul, who refuted the charge, pointing out that the shortage of rainfall was quite wide spread in the north and began a year before McGilvary arrived in Chiang Mai. He concluded his letter to the prince with the tongue-in-cheek comment that he would "enjoin the missionaries to do nothing in the future to cause a famine."

There were additional signs that the presence of the McGilvays and Wilsons in Chiang Mai was becoming increasingly politically tenuous and that Kawilorot might employ more severe measures to force the missionaries' departure. On September 5th 1869, an agent of the British Borneo Company told them of a rumor that Chao Kawilorot was devising a plan to expel the new Christians from the kingdom. McGilvary's assessment of this possibility reveals a preoccupation with evangelism that may have blinded him to the political realities of the situation. Moreover, it also pointed to his belief that persecution could have a potentially positive effect on the growth of the church: "...[expelling the new converts] would not have been so great a disaster. These men had no great possessions to lose. Their banishment would only plant the Gospel in other provinces or other lands." Leaving aside McGilvary's culturally biased reference to possessions, his observation typifies the nineteenth century missionary attitude that persecution and martyrdom promote the growth of the church.

On September 11th, the day Nan Chai legally became a client of Kawilorot's younger daughter and ostensibly under her protection, he was ordered to return home immediately by his village headman. He was staying with McGilvary but the order caused him such apprehension that he left for Mae Pu Kha village at dawn the morning of the 12th, not even waiting for Sunday morning worship. On September 13th 1869, the missionaries' servants suddenly vanished and at the same time the stream of visitors to their homes mysteriously stopped. Concerned by this turn of events, McGilvary and Wilson visited the chao muang's executive officer who reassured them that there was no plot against Christians and, as if to prove this was the case, he ordered McGilvary's cook to return. The absence of Noi Sunya, whom the missionaries had not seen since September 5th, and Nan Chai prompted Wilson to walk to Mae Pu Kha village to check on their whereabouts. Their wives, reportedly out of fear for their lives, "pretended...that their husbands had gone to the city to visit us. Mr. Wilson noticed that one of the women had tears in her eyes as she spoke. Puzzled rather than satisfied by the result of the visit Mr. Wilson returned with the hope that...the men were still alive."

As it turned out, the worst happened. On Monday morning September 13th 1869, an armed party seized the two Christians and marched them to the district headman's home where they were reportedly interrogated, incarcerated, and left bound throughout the night. After Nan Chai was seized, his wife hurried to inform McGilvary but was intercepted along the way by an agent of the village headman and warned that she would be killed if she informed the missionaries. Even though there were reasonable suspicions that Nan Chai and Noi Sunya had been killed, it appears that only on September 26th did the McGilvays and Wilsons learn definitively that on the morning of September 14th the two had been taken into the jungle and executed. Prior to that date, the missionaries, uninformed about what had transpired, lived in anxious trepidation. Their situation called to McGilvary's mind the imprisonment and suffering of the famed Baptist missionary to Burma, Adoniram Judson, and his wife Ann in Ava in 1825. Identifying with the Jewish exiles of the Old Testament whose nation had been destroyed, McGilvary reported to the Board of Foreign missions, "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 today, and one where we believe the Gospel is to have one of its greatest triumphs when the obstacles shall be removed."

For two months the missionaries lived in uncertainty regarding their future and the future of the Lao Christians, even though visitors now regularly dropped by and life resumed a more normal

routine. There were many groundless rumors--that there were warrants for the arrest of Christians and others associated with the missionaries, and that the boatman with whom McGilvary had entrusted letters to Bangkok had been murdered. When McGilvary's communications eventually reached the Presbyterian missionaries in Bangkok, they took up the matter with the Siamese regent. He agreed to send a commissioner to Chiang Mai to review the case accompanied by the Revs. N. A. McDonald and S. C. George. The commission arrived in late November with a letter from King Mongkut addressed to Chao Kawilorot requesting that the missionaries be allowed to remain unmolested or leave if they wished. The letter did not refer directly to the death of Nan Chai and Noi Sunya. At the audience with the Prince on the morning of the 28th McDonald spoke of the recent problems encountered by the missionaries and the Lao Christians but did not refer directly to the death of the two Christians. Kawilorot allowed that he had put to death of couple of his slaves for failing to comply with his orders but made no allusion to the fact they were Christians. McGilvary responded to the chao muang's remarks by accusing him of lying and of murdering the two men because they were Christians. In astonishment and rage at McGilvary's challenge, the old Prince angrily blurted out that he had killed them because "they had embraced the Christian religion. And he would continue to kill every one who did the same. Leaving the religion of the country was rebellion against him and he would so treat it." The story of McGilvary's blunt challenge to Kawilorot has been handed down in the annals of the Church of Christ in Thailand as a heroic example of the "honored father-teacher's" (phokhrø luang) courage, and a major reason for the fortitude of the Protestant church in the Northern States.

In the aftermath of the meeting, McGilvary and Wilson were urged by the royal commissioner, McDonald, and George to leave Chiang Mai as Kawilorot's future course of action was unpredictable. Wilson decided to move his family to Raheng, now Tak, and establish a mission there. McGilvary, believing that Kawilorot would not take precipitous, drastic steps against him was determined to stay in Chiang Mai, hoping that the mission that had such promising beginnings could continue. Calling on the chao muang the morning after the commission meeting, McGilvary was cordially received by the Prince and assured that the missionaries could remain until after he returned from his upcoming trip to Bangkok. McGilvary calculated that this reprieve would give him at least six more months in Chiang Mai. As it turned out, on the return trip to Chiang Mai Kawilorot fell ill and died before reaching the city, an event that led to a change in the political climate under Chiang Mai's new ruler, Chao Inthanon, who looked more favorably on the mission.

Whether the death of Nan Chai and Noi Sunya could have been prevented if the missionaries had forcefully interceded remains open to speculation. Although McGilvary and Wilson were assured by the Prince's executive officer that there was no plot against Christians, why did McGilvary not accompany Nan Chai, an anxious, frightened new convert, to Mae Pu Kha village on that fateful day he was incarcerated? Had he done so, as Nan Chai apparently told his wife, he and Noi Sunya would have been spared. And, given the climate of fear explicitly described by the missionaries, how could Wilson not have realized that the tears in the eyes of one of the spouses revealed a truth that he chose to ignore? We might speculate that fear for the safety of his family played a role in Wilson's behavior, and that McGilvary's total dedication to sustaining the mission at all costs might have influenced his.

Although Nan Chai had become the client of Chao Kawilorot's daughter, he was employed by the missionaries who thereby entered into a patron-client relationship with him. Perhaps the Prince's actions were calculated to undermine the development of missionary patronage and thus challenge his own authority. Given the chao muang's earlier attempts to get rid of the McGilvarys and Wilsons by appealing to the government in Bangkok and then by spreading rumors to the effect that the Christians would be expelled from Chiang Mai, it might be inferred that the primary reason behind the extreme measure now taken by Kawilorot was to force the

missionaries to leave. Even the angry exchange between McGilvary and the Prince at the meeting of the commission could be explained in this vein. Was the Prince's outburst at the meeting a statement of actual intention, or might it be read as an outspoken, angry response to a man who had transgressed northern Thai convention regarding behavior toward royalty; had challenged the Prince's authority; and, whose patronage Kawilorot hoped to eliminate by killing Nan Chai and Noi Sunya, two of his clients. As Herb Swanson notes, the Lao, in particular Kawilorot, saw the mission as trying to create a "new pattern of patron-client relationships in which it [the mission] rather than the traditional rulers was lord."

The Declining Power of the Chao

The chief factor [behind the killing of Nan Chai and Noi Sunya] was not religion but the resentment of the old Prince, the Lord of Life, at seeing pass away the old order in which all significant moves and decisions rested on his approval.

When Kawilorot's order that a number of Christians perform *corvee* labor on Sunday was ignored, the chao luang interpreted this recalcitrance as yet another threat to his authority. To deal with this situation, Kawilorot executed two converts in September 1869 as a warning to others.

For Chao Kawilorot the killing of Nan Chai and Noi Suriya was primarily an exercise in princely authority. He had absolute authority regarding the governance of the kingdom. He promulgated laws, levied taxes, and exacted labor for public works such as roads and irrigation canals. In addition, he conscripted able bodied men as soldiers, adjudicated cases ranging from small offenses to murder and levied punishments as he saw fit, including death. His was, however, a declining power that was being increasingly eroded by events beyond his control: The passing of the old order of which the Protestant Mission was only one manifestation, upset the old Prince of Chiangmai. Lawsuits by Burmese timber merchants had been filed against him, the King of Siam had gradually cut into his authority and he felt that the missions were undermining his hold on his subjects.

As the vast teak reserves in the north became an increasingly valuable global commodity, especially for the British ship building industry, Burmese timber men who held British citizenship negotiated logging concessions with Kawilorot and the chaos of the other northern city-states. Most of the cut teak was transported down the Salween River through British Burma to Muolmein to be shipped to England. By 1858/9 teak exports from Muolmein amounted to nearly four hundred thousand pounds with the largest share of the teak coming from the Chiang Mai region. The Bowring Treaty of 1855 that gave extraterritorial rights to British subjects, reciprocal consular representation, and set a low ceiling on import and export duties, greatly widened the scope of British commercial activity in Siam, including the northern teak forests. The extraterritorial rights granted to Burmese and Shan under the treaty threatened the chaos' control over an increasing number of loggers.

Because the teak forests were considered to be the property of the chaos of the northern city-states, Burmese-British loggers competed with one another in their negotiations with individual chaos. To win concessions lessees had to pay special fees and bribes. A chao might even lease the same forest to two competitors, or having leased a forest a chao might seize the licensee's property once the trees had been felled. As a consequence, there were many lawsuits. Prior to the Bowring Treaty these lawsuits were tried in the courts of the Northern States but the courts were run autocratically, followed traditional law codes such as the Laws of King Mangrai (Mangraisat), or were decided by ordeal. Furthermore, proceedings often dragged on interminably. Understandably, the loggers who held British citizenship objected. After the treaty, cases could be appealed to the British Consul in Bangkok who could override a decision made by the Thai Court for Foreigners but cases could still drag on for years. The situation was finally resolved by the Chiang Mai treaty of 1874 that established a dual government in the north, that of

the chao and a Thai commissioner (kha luang). The latter dealt with cases involving British subjects and regulated timber lease registration. The net effect was to strengthen the power of the Bangkok government in the north at the expense of authority of the chaos. This trend continued until, by the turn of the century, the north was no longer a collection of semi-autonomous tributary states but a centralized region (monthon). The patronage system at the basis of the chaos' power and authority was gradually replaced by the political and economic structures of an early modern nation-state controlled from Bangkok.

While the commercial interests of the British in the north abetted the transformation of the Northern States into a monthon of the Siamese nation, American Presbyterian missionaries contributed to the Siamization of the Lao region. The Chiang Mai treaties of 1874 and 1883 were a crucial watershed in the first process; the 1878 Edict of Religious Toleration played a similar role in the second.

The instrumental cause behind the Edict of Religious Toleration was the first Christian wedding in Chiang Mai, the marriage of Nan Inta's granddaughter. The groom was one of McGilvary's students preparing for the ministry who's patron was Chao Tepawong, the brother of the uparat, the viceroy or "second king" who opposed the mission and harassed native Christians. On the day of the wedding, the titular head of the groom's family refused to sanction the marriage unless he received the traditional 'spirit fee' of six rupees. Because McGilvary saw such payment as a religious act "since it recognizes the spirits and guardians and protectors of the family," and "when one becomes a Christian that allegiance is cast off," the wedding had to be postponed until the confrontation could be resolved.

McGilvary and Dr. Marion Cheek, who joined the Presbyterian mission in 1874, appealed for support to Phaya Thepworachun who was appointed in 1877 as the first resident Siamese commissioner in Chiang Mai, and also to Chao Intanon and his wife. Although all three were sympathetic, they would not override the uparat who refused to approve the wedding without the payment of the 'spirit fee' demanded by the head of the groom's family. McGilvary wrote, "He [the uparat] has us just where he wanted us to be. If our young people could not marry, our work would be virtually stopped." The uparat's opposition proved to be a fatal mistake, however, because it actually hastened the chaos' loss of authority and power.

At the royal commissioner's urging, McGilvary appealed to King Chulalongkorn not only to allow Christian marriage without the payment of the traditional 'spirit fee', but to guarantee the same civil and religious privileges as non-Christians, and also to exempt Christians from compulsory work on the Sabbath. The commissioner, himself, also requested that his own powers over the chaos be expanded. On September 29th 1878, the commissioner notified McGilvary that the King had granted him enlarged powers "including power to make proclamation of religious toleration in the Lao states." The Edict of Religious Toleration, promulgated on October 8th, applied only to the Lao states and not the entire nation, but it was a crucial turning point in the history of the Protestant church in the north. Protected by the authority of Bangkok's official sanction, the mission was now poised to embark on a decade of expansion that included establishing mission stations in Lamphun, Chiang Rai, Phrae, and Nan, and several hospitals and school. Through the establishment of schools and the propagation of a Christian literature in Siamese, Presbyterian missionaries became collaborators with Bangkok in the Siamization of the nation.

The Edict was the first document that officially referred to the royal commissioner as pu samret rachakan, "he who fulfills the king's work," and "marked the passing of the sceptre from the hands of the Princes of Chiang Mai." In denying McGilvary's request that marriage within the church be exempt from the traditional 'spirit fee', the uparat thereby "...hastened...[the] centralization of government which Siam was waiting for," so that now the Lao states were no

longer a feudal dependency but consolidated into the Kingdom of Siam.

Becoming Martyrs: The Missionary View

"These were stirring days [i.e. the martyrdom] and gave to the church in the North the heritage of faith that places it with the churches of the apostolic age."

The missionary narrative of the death of Nan Chai and Noi Sunya is found in several different sources, however, both missionary and Thai Christian accounts rely primarily on the correspondence and records of McGilvary and Wilson who were in Chiang Mai at the time but were not eye-witnesses. Consequently, since all versions of the event reflect a common our-story they tend to be similar. Ambiguities in the narrative, itself not eye-witness, the absence of attribution regarding specific details, and the fact that there are no non-missionary or even non-Christian corroborating sources, make it difficult to sort out the actual facts from interpretation. In the January 2nd 1870, session minutes of the First Presbyterian Church, Chiang Mai, that records the deaths of Nan Chai and Noi Sunya, McGilvary clearly indicates that accounts of the event are based on hearsay ("And from all we know of their behavior..." or inference ("We have never been permitted to learn..."). While not questioning the veracity of the event, ambiguities in the record prompted Prasit Pongudom, Department of History, Church of Christ in Thailand, to query in what sense the story was "fact" (ruang ching) or "legend" (tamnan). I take up Prasit's question and suggest that, although the death of Nan Chai and Noi Sunya at the behest of Chao Kawilorot is not in question, in the light of historical, political, and personal variables, the meaning of the event is contingent; and, that in the hands of McGilvary, Wilson, and other missionary interpreters, it becomes a martyrdom story.

McGilvary's letters to the Board of Foreign Missions uplift three martyrological themes: by their death the martyrs gain the crown of heaven; they emulate the pattern of the dying Stephen commending their souls to heaven; and, "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." In this vein, Dr. Daniel B. Bradley, McGilvary's father-in-law, records in his diary that his reading at a prayer meeting in Bangkok of McGilvary's account of the martyrdom created a "thrilling effect," and that, "the two native Christians who were executed by order of the king did like the martyr Stephen, call on the name of the Lord Jesus."

The most fulsome missionary description of the martyrdom was written not by McGilvary but by Jonathan Wilson in a letter to the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions dated January 3rd 1870. This description as well as other reports Wilson sent to the Board reveal him to be a man of poetic inclination:

"Alas! That we should have to write of blood, the blood of the saints shed by the sword of a merciless despot? Our little church was planted so lovingly and tenderly by the Good Savior, that we expected soon to become a numerous people. Our first disciple is now fleeing for his life. Two are hiding among their friends. But--the happiest of us all are in heaven--Nan Chai and Noi Sunya are singing the song of redeeming love."

Wilson describes the capture, incarceration, and execution of Nan Chai and Noi Sunya in considerable detail, including Nan Chai's own words, without attributing his information to particular sources. There is no documentary evidence that any Christians witnessed their death nor does Wilson report that he talked to an observer of the event, although Nan Chai's wife spent some time at the district chief's house with her husband before he was tried. Wilson reports that Nan Chai said to her, "Tell the missionaries that we die for no other cause than we are Christians." The trial, if it can be called that, consisted of asking Nan Chai and Noi Sunya if they

had "entered the religion of the foreigners" and when they replied, "yes," they were condemned to death.

Wilson provides a moving account of Nan Chai's execution replete with Biblical overtones. Before he was killed the martyr interceded for the innocent, "'You may kill us. We are prepared. But I beg you not to kill those who are in the employ of the missionaries. They are not Christians and are not prepared to die.' What a noble forgetfulness of self in that earnest request for the lives of others." With the hour of the martyr's death at hand, Wilson paints a scene reminiscent of the Biblical portrait of the crucifixion: "And now after a long and weary night of painful watching, the morning of Tuesday the fourteenth dawns upon them. The hour has come. They are led out into the retirement of the jungle. They kneel down. Nan Chai is requested to pray. He does so, his last petition being, 'Lord Jesus receive my spirit.' The tenderness of the scene melts his enemies into tears."

References to the martyrdom of Nan Chai and Noi Sunya, sometimes in conjunction with subsequent harassment of Christians, appear in the early nineteenth century in missionary monographs, the *Laos News*, devoted exclusively to the Lao mission, and *Women's Work for Women*. These accounts reinforce the picture drawn by McGilvary and Wilson. In 1871, the Rev. N.A. McDonald who accompanied the Siamese commissioner from Bangkok to Chiang Mai in 1869 wrote, "The two...died as courageously and as triumphantly for the faith, as any in that long list of martyrs which the history of the Church has to record." Forty years later, another Presbyterian missionary in Chiang Mai opined that the ground of the Northern States had been consecrated by the blood of the martyrs, implying that Nan Chai's and Noi Sunya's death laid the ground work for a strong church.

Time doesn't permit to discuss in detail the impact of the death of Nan Chai and Noi Sunya on the development of the Protestant church in northern Thailand. Let me conclude simply by suggesting that their death, whether a martyrdom in the definitional sense or not, affected the fledgling Protestant church in northern Thailand in two principal ways: first, it inhibited the growth of the church, and, second, it served to reinforce and prolong its cultural isolation. Herb Swanson proposes that the martyrdom impacted negatively on the fledgling Protestant church among the Lao in four principal ways: 1) that the majority of converts after 1869 came from distressed lower classes who converted more for social rather than spiritual reasons; 2) Kawilorot's persecution nipped in the bud any possibility that Christianity might become a mass movement and from that time forward was seen as the "religion of the foreigners;" 3) the martyrdom and its aftermath was decisive in aligning the missionaries with the growing power of the Siamese elites, creating a hierarchical divide between the mission and the church; and, 4) the growth of the church was stunted for over a decade until after the promulgation of the Edict of Toleration.

Herb's contention that the martyrdom had an unmitigated negative effect on the development of the Protestant church among the Northern States needs to be set within the Lao cultural and social context. The ideological beliefs and cultural biases that McGilvary, Wilson, and the other early Presbyterian missionaries brought with them brooked no compromise with a context they saw as religiously heathen, morally defective, and socially deficient. Consequently, conversion demanded forming a community outside of the Lao socio-cultural, political synthesis. The fact that Christianity was perceived by the Lao as a "foreign religion" had as much or more to do with the missionary view that the Lao lived in a realm of darkness ruled by Satan, as with the persecution of Christians by Chao Kawilorot and later harassment by Chao Intanon's viceroy.

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