

CHAPTER FOUR

THE LAOS MISSION AND SOCIAL CHANGE

In June 1892, in a letter addressed to the Christian Endeavour Societies of the Presbyterian Churches of New York, the Presbyterian Mission in Bangkok gave an explanation defending their less than impressive achievement in Siam. The mission accounted for its rather minimal success by citing the strong hold of Buddhism on the Siamese and its influence in almost all facets of the people's lives. The letter stated that Buddhism was "intertwined and rooted into the smallest details of the life of the people". The writer went on to say that "Buddhism of this people is nearer to the original teachings of Budha than it is in any other part of the Orient".

In the same letter, the writer reflected upon a speech delivered by Prince Damrong in London in 1892. Prince Damrong was reported to have said:

You ask me whether we have any missionaries. Yes, we have many, I may even say more missionaries than converts. To my mind they proceed in the contrary fashion to what they ought. They begin by preaching that all that we know and all our belief in Buddhism is entirely false and that there is only one truth - the Faith which they propose to us. Then after having said this, they establish schools and do some good things. They ought to act in the opposite way, to do good things, to open schools, and then to reconcile Buddhism and Christianity, teaching what is good in one without condemning what is good in the other.¹

Damrong's speech might have come a little too late considering that the missionaries had been operating in Bangkok for more than fifty years by then, but it was instructive nevertheless. Two points emerge from Damrong's speech.

Firstly, adherents of Buddhism in Siam did not hold lightly to their religious faith. The missionaries might have offered an alternative religion, one with a doctrine of salvation from sin, but Buddhism was, to the Thais and its ruling class, a way of life. Uprooting ideas which, for generations, had been deeply imbedded in the Thais was not an easy task. Also, the concept of salvation from sin through a saviour failed to communicate meaningfully in the Thai Buddhist culture. To the Thais, sin was not as big a problem as the missionaries claimed it to be.² Thai Buddhism provided an avenue for salvation from sin. If one had committed a misdeed, one could make up for it by making merit. That could be done, for example, by offering alms to the poor by which means the Thais could accumulate *bun* (merit) and reduce their sins accordingly. Hence, unlike the Christians, most Thais (Buddhists) did not see the need for salvation from sin.

Secondly, the Thais acknowledged that the schools and other institutions introduced by the missionaries were beneficial. They welcomed and appreciated the work of the missionaries in these sectors. Damrong proposed that the missionaries introduce schools before they embark on teaching Christianity. He also suggested that the missionaries try to reconcile the differences that existed between the two religions and not to compel the Siamese to choose one or the other. But, to the missionaries, reconciling the teachings of Buddhism and Christianity was not possible. The missionaries disagreed with most of the Buddhist rituals. They hoped to spread the true teaching of Christianity as opposed to ritualistic Buddhism. Therefore the missionaries had first to remove some of the prevailing beliefs before embarking on proselytizing Christianity among the indigenous people.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, one of the first problems the missionaries encountered in practical terms was the age-old devotion to spirits and spirit-worshipping as well as other practices linked to the outbreak of diseases, calamities and misfortunes. The missionaries first endeavoured to eliminate these beliefs among the northern Thai. This they hoped to achieve by the use of modern medicine and science. With the use of modern medicine to treat smallpox and cholera, diseases believed to have been brought by the spirits, the missionaries were able to draw initial support and made a number of conversions. The missionaries took the opportunity to spread the gospel while engaging in the distribution of medicine. Having convinced the local society of the effectiveness of modern medicine, the missionaries were able to sustain a self-supporting mission hospital. Proceeds from the sale of medicine in some of the mission hospitals was sufficient to cover the expenses incurred in obtaining medical supplies and equipment.

No less problematic was the propensity of the indigenous society to worship spirits and fear the consequences of offending them. The acts of spirit-worshipping, offering of alms and merit-making were deeply rooted in the lifestyles of the indigenous people. Children were instilled with the knowledge of spirits and other traditional beliefs from young. The missionaries, however, established schools as a means to educate the children and the general population of northern Siam. Such schools were instrumental in imparting worldly knowledge, progressive ideas and religious education.

The importance of disseminating the gospel and other information related to Christianity, in the language of the indigenous people, led to the establishment of the mission press (printing house). The mission press also printed non-religious materials

such as newspapers and school textbooks. It undertook, in addition, printing for the Siamese government and the commercial sector. It was one mission department which was self-supporting.

All the activities mentioned above, although intended primarily as a means to spread Christianity, led to significant change in the northern Thai society. At the same time, the social work of the Laos Mission in the north created conditions favourable to the implementation of Bangkok's policy of centralizing power. The following is an attempt to look at some of the social work of the Laos Mission in northern Siam and the resulting impact on the northern Thai society and its ruling class.

Education

Missionary contribution in the field of education has been noted and acknowledged by many scholars. Vachara Sindhuprama in his thesis on modern education in northern Siam states that the Christian missionaries were the forerunners of the spread of modern education in Siam.³ Another scholar, Swat Sukontarangi, claims that:

Though Christianity achieved very little in converting the Thai people, it pioneered the modern system of public education.⁴

In 1879, the first all-girls' school in northern Siam was established in Chiang Mai by Mary M. Campbell and Edna S. Cole, two lady missionaries with the Laos Mission. It was then known as the American Girls' School and later the name was changed to the Dara Academy, after the northern Princess Dararatsami who was a consort of King Chulalongkorn.

The Rev. D.G. Collins⁵ started the first school for boys in 1888. This was later renamed the Prince Royal's College which became a prominent school in Chiang Mai. It had a reputation for producing qualified graduates for admission into the Siamese civil service. This was especially so during the period when Bangkok pursued a policy of centralization. Men were recruited from among the educated northern Thai to join the Siamese civil service.

Both girls' and boys' schools were established in Chiang Mai. The first school outside Chiang Mai, founded by the Laos Mission, was in Lamphun. The school was set up in 1888. Two years later, in 1890, a boys' school was founded in Lampang, followed by a school for girls in 1891.⁶ In 1892, the mission's Theological Training School was transferred from Chiang Mai to Lamphun.⁷ The school was supervised by Rev. Dodd.

In Nan, however, several attempts were made by the missionaries before a "somewhat permanent school" was established in 1907. Prior to 1907, the mission school at Nan operated on a very irregular basis. Nan's remoteness, being situated to the extreme east of Chiang Mai, made travelling to and from the station extremely difficult. It was both time and energy consuming to travel this distance. Apart from that, the station was very isolated from the other stations. For more than a decade after the station was established, very few missionaries posted to Nan could endure the hardship of serving there. Most of the missionaries who were sent to Nan fell ill and left the station within a few months of their posting. Thus, the mission school conducted by them was suspended between the period of their departure and the arrival of new missionaries.⁸

The system of education, as introduced by the missionaries, was different from the traditional monastic type of education common in Siam. Until the arrival of the missionaries, monastery education was the only type of education available in northern Siam. It was offered by the Buddhist monks. This type of education was meant exclusively for the boys. At the monastery, a young Thai boy learnt to read ancient scriptures and the Buddhist gospel of salvation.

As mentioned earlier, through the initiative of the American Presbyterian missionaries, education for girls was offered for the first time in northern Siam. It was only with the setting up of such schools by the missionaries that girls in northern Siam availed themselves of formal education. The missionary form of education differed vastly from the traditional type of education. Its objective, curriculum, language of instruction, and teaching staff set the stage for the beginnings of a new type of education in northern Siam.

The missionary schools provided both religious and secular education. Subjects taught included arithmetic, geography and music, although special attention was given to Bible instruction, moral and religious training. As for the medium of instruction, the schools used northern Thai (Lan Na), English and central Thai (Siamese). In the beginning, northern Thai which was the native language of the majority of the people of northern Siam was more frequently used because a larger percentage of the literate northern Thai read only the northern script (Lan Na). Central Thai (Siamese) was also introduced because the pioneer missionaries had acquired knowledge of the language during their stay in Bangkok and Phetburi. Apart from that, most books and source materials used by the missionaries were also in the Siamese language. In later years, some of these were translated into northern Thai.

The most significant step towards the widespread use of northern Thai began with the establishment of the Chiang Mai Mission Press in 1892. Prior to 1892, most books and prayer instructions were printed in the Siamese language at Bangkok. The Mission Press hastened the printing of books translated from the Siamese into Lan Na. In short, a larger circulation of materials in the Lan Na language ensued following the establishment of the Mission Press.

The mission schools for both boys and girls were planned and operated wholly by the missionaries. The mission schools were entirely independent of Siamese supervision. There were no government schools in Chiang Mai at that time. The Siamese Department of Education was established only in 1887.⁹ The mission schools were, however, governed by the Board of Education of the Presbytery of North Laos. The Presbytery, formed in 1883, had a few sub-divisions. These implemented Presbytery policies. The Board of Education of the Presbytery was responsible for overseeing educational activities and for providing financial aid to needy students.

The mission schools were also bound by the lifestyle and culture of the northern Thai. School terms were determined by the rice planting cycle. Most of the northern Thai were farmers who grew rice for consumption and exchange. Rice was also used to pay taxes and to pay fees to the mission schools. In 1888, students attending the Chiang Mai Boys' School, for instance, paid 15 buckets of rice.¹⁰ In addition, boarding students were required to provide for themselves with clothing and bedding.

The missionaries followed the rice planting cycle when they planned the school terms. During the planting and harvesting seasons, children were required to assist in the fields. Schools could not proceed with lessons owing to the high percentage of absentees. It was not uncommon for mission schools to remain closed during the rice

planting season and resume lessons after the harvesting season. Thus, school vacations tended to coincide with the planting seasons so that the children could help their elders to till the soil and plant rice.

Apart from regular schools for boys and girls, Sunday schools were conducted within the premises of the church or at the school building. The first Sunday School was started by the Laos Mission in November, 1876. Children were taught to read Siamese and the shorter Catechism, a short prayer book which was available in the Siamese language. Sunday schools were attended by not only children but also a large number of the church members who lived within reach of the schools; these attended classes regularly.

In 1889, the Chiang Mai Theological Training Class was founded. Classes were offered both in the morning and evening. Working members, particularly adult members, had an opportunity to receive theological education in the evenings with the setting up of this class.¹¹ As a result of education obtained in both the theological and secular fields, some of the graduates of the mission schools became assistants to the missionaries and teachers in the schools. Native teachers in both the schools and the churches were instrumental in drawing many other natives into the Christian faith. Wider outreach was therefore possible owing to the assistance of native teachers. In Chiang Mai, native teachers taught during the week and conducted regular Sunday service.

The missionaries increasingly encouraged the teaching of the Siamese language. There were various reasons for the pro-Siamese language policy adopted by the missionaries. Firstly, they were familiar with the language. Most of the missionaries, particularly pioneer missionaries such as McGilvary and Wilson, had spent a few years

in Bangkok before they moved up north to Chiang Mai. While they were in Bangkok they had spent time learning the Siamese language.

Secondly, the missionaries were aware of Bangkok's influence and its intention to establish a centralized bureaucracy. This point was well indicated in their reports and other written accounts. An article contributed by a missionary in Siam which appeared in the North Carolina Presbyterian, dated 30 April 1875, mentioned that King Chulalongkorn was making rapid progress in introducing reforms in the internal affairs of his government.¹² Part of his plan was to strengthen Siam's political control of the provinces and the outlying tributary states.

Thirdly, the proclamation of the Edict of Religious Toleration in northern Siam, in 1878, following the troubles which arose between the Laos Mission and the rulers of Chiang Mai, demonstrated that Bangkok was sympathetic to the missionaries. Furthermore, the proclamation indicated that Bangkok, through her Commissioner in Chiang Mai, had begun to extend more assertively her political influence in northern Siam. The Laos Mission in turn welcomed the centralization policy of Bangkok. It is conceivable that the promotion of the Siamese language by the missionaries was also a means of securing Bangkok's continued support.

Perhaps, the most appealing feature of the Christian Mission school was the teaching of English. In Siam, the teaching of English by the missionaries was especially significant and highly valued by the Thais because it was offered at a time when there were no other means of acquiring knowledge of that language. In the light of its growing trade and diplomatic ties with Western countries, the Siamese government gave emphasis to English. Knowledge of English was beneficial to candidates aspiring to become government officials.

In northern Siam, McGilvary taught English to members of the ruling class and that too was, according to McGilvary, "at the request of a few of the rulers". His testimony with regard to members of the ruling class whom he taught for an hour every day, was that "they were anxious to learn".¹³ Children of the common people attended the mission schools because they hoped for a job with the government and, as such, wanted to equip themselves with some knowledge of English and Siamese. Children of the ruling elite and nobility, the boys in particular, were, on the other hand, sent to mission schools so that they could learn English directly from native English speakers.

Apart from schools for boys and girls, the missionaries also conducted a Theological Training School and a Vocational School. These schools which were attended mostly by Christians aimed to create a skilled native Christian community. The Theological School was intended to train young native Christians in future ministry duties and to assist the church leaders.

Another noticeable feature of the Christian mission schools was the importance placed on education for women. The earliest attempt to provide some form of education for girls in northern Siam was made by Mrs. McGilvary in 1873. Mrs. McGilvary began with less than ten children of Christian converts, teaching them on the veranda of her house. She taught them very basic skills such as sewing, arithmetic and art. The necessity to provide education for females appeared a priority to the missionaries. Their argument for promoting education for females was that a woman was responsible for raising a family and maintaining a household. She was, therefore, in the position to mould the thoughts and behaviour of a child. The simple rationale here is that "when you educate a woman, you educate a family". Thus, the missionaries invested time and hope in the field of education for females. This was to ensure the

creation of strong Christian families in order to sustain a strong Christian community. The curriculum of education for females involved all aspects of household maintenance, religious and moral teaching, and health instruction.

The most significant contribution of mission education, apart from emphasizing education for females, was in laying the foundation of a system of public education, hitherto not available in northern Siam. This paved the way for the creation of more competent and literate male and female northern Thai.

However, the mission schools which provided the locals with Siamese instruction also facilitated Bangkok's extension of political control into the northern region. Educated northern Thai with knowledge of Siamese and English acquired at the mission schools were absorbed into the new branches of government departments established by Bangkok in the north. The contribution of mission schools towards this end was significant at least until 1893. In that year, a Siamese civil service training school was established in Chiang Mai by Phraya Songsuradet, Bangkok's Commissioner to the north.¹⁴ The school referred to as *rongrien fek had karatchakan* in Siamese was a preparatory school for producing graduates with the skills and qualifications needed for the administration of the newly reformed government of King Chulalongkorn.¹⁵ Subjects taught at this school included law and regulations, patterns of local government and the Siamese language.¹⁶

Subsequently, the Siamese government itself began to establish schools in the north. In 1894, the Siamese government founded a school at Lampang. The school taught children of the ruling princes elementary Siamese and arithmetic. The following year, another school was founded, this time at Nan.¹⁷ These schools focused mainly on imparting professional skills to the students and they were, in the words of a northern

Thai scholar, "training schools for civil servants and nothing more".¹⁸ Vachara Sindhuprama goes on to say that the Siamese government "did not put real effort in promoting education in the provinces before 1898".¹⁹

The government schools served to produce qualified personnel to meet the demands for manpower created by the changing administrative system of Siam. The government paid more attention to providing education to the princes and nobility class than it did the general populace. This strategy was aimed at gaining co-operation and support from the northern aristocrats. Having gained their support or having prepared them with the skills required to administer a more efficient bureaucracy, Bangkok was able to implement a centralized administrative policy throughout Siam with greater ease. The Siamese language was emphasized over Lan Na and through this Bangkok established a uniformed bureaucracy and a more united nation. The imposition of Siamese as the official language in public schools in the northern states of Siam helped to facilitate assimilation between the north and other parts of Siam. The linguistic division between the north and south was gradually obliterated.

Therefore, in the 1890's, there were three types of schools in northern Siam. These were the Buddhist monastic schools, the mission schools and the government schools. The majority of the male northern Thai still attended monastic schools. Government schools catered largely to the children of the nobility. The initial response to government schools was discouraging. Mission schools drew wider response from Christian converts and, to some extent, was attended by children of princes too. The princes and nobles preferred their children to study English from the native English speakers; as such they sent them to mission schools. Eventually, the mission schools emerged as the more popular schools compared to the government schools. The Chiang

Mai girls' and boys' schools started by the missionaries are two of the more popular schools in Chiang Mai today.

Medical Work

Mission work in the medical field was the most successful of all the mission departments. Villagers plagued by cholera, malaria and goitre sought medical treatment from the mission hospitals. Missionary doctors also travelled to the outskirts and distributed medicine. The general health of both the Christians and non-Christians in Chiang Mai and its suburbs improved as a result of the medical services offered by the Laos Mission.

After the founding of the Laos Mission, McGilvary and Wilson, resident missionaries of the Laos Mission in Chiang Mai, began to distribute quinine (*ya khao* or white medicine) and treat small pox by vaccination. In 1875, Dr. Marion Cheek,²⁰ a medical missionary arrived in Chiang Mai. A makeshift hospital and a dispensary were set up soon after his arrival. Since then the northern Thai of all ranks, both princes and commoners, were able to seek medical treatment. In 1880, an arm surgery was conducted on a northern Thai by Dr. Cheek. It was the first surgery done in Chiang Mai using modern medical methods.²¹

Apart from providing medical treatment and facilities, mission hospitals were instrumental in imparting modern medical knowledge to the locals.²² The training received by the locals when assisting the missionary doctors helped to disseminate knowledge in health care among the northern Thai. Local medical assistants were also able to convince a larger percentage of the northern Thai to seek treatment at the mission hospitals. These assistants were useful particularly during medical tours; they

helped in the distribution of medicine in times of an epidemic. The tours also provided the assistants an opportunity to gain experience and knowledge in prescribing drugs and treating minor ailments. In later years, the assistants supplied medicine to villagers living in areas remote from Chiang Mai and began to manage and maintain the mission's medical dispensaries. Some of the young men were trained at the dispensaries. These people were able to read prescriptions and attend to the sale of drugs most commonly called for such as quinine.²³ An example of a reliable medical assistant was Chanta who was trained by Dr. A.M. Cary. In 1889, he managed the Chiang Mai station's dispensary and collected 2212 rupees from the sale of medicine.²⁴

Hospitals were also used as institutions to teach religion. Medical missionaries and local teachers conducted night classes within the premises of the hospital. Beginning from 15 September 1890, the Mission started a night school which was conducted at the Chiang Mai hospital compound.²⁵ A northern Thai woman called *pa* (aunt) Wan²⁶ taught at the school. Wan was later the first female northern Thai to enter the otherwise all-male training school for Christian workers.²⁷

In the 1880's and 1890's, the parent church in the United States encouraged its churches to be self-supporting. Most churches in Siam were experimenting with the idea of becoming self-supporting. In the case of the Laos Mission, the concept of a self-supporting institution was first implemented in the medical branch of its work. But the missionaries had first to promote among the northern Thai, followed by years of persistent teaching, the idea that medicine had a monetary value. Traditionally, the northern Thai offered payment in kind. These could be in the form of food, textile, fruits and household articles; payment was made in return for medicine obtained from the missionary doctor.²⁸ Whereas when McGilvary first arrived, people were hired to

take the *ya khao* (quinine) to demonstrate its healing power,²⁹ in 1890, quinine was sold to the local people almost every day.³⁰ The receipt from the sale of medicine helped to sustain a mission hospital. It thus became self-supporting.

In 1891, Dr. James McKean of the Chiang Mai station reported that the receipt of fees and sale of medicine was sufficient to cover the expenses of the medical department and to purchase additions to the stock of instruments.³¹ This was the case at the Chiang Mai station. In Nan, however, a self-supporting medical department was not possible. Owing to the scarcity of money in the state, people continued to pay in kind.

In 1896, John H. Freeman reported from Nan that:

... the general system of paying is yet far from being established. The struggle for self-support in the department will be a long and hard one, for money is exceedingly scarce in the province.³²

Indeed, one of the limitations of the system of payment in cash arose from the scarcity of money in circulation in northern Siam. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, with the increasing number of wage labour in the forest industry and the influx of Chinese traders, the situation changed. There was more cash in circulation in northern Siam.

The Chinese retail trade, however, had an adverse effect on mission dispensaries. In the 1890's, mission hospital dispensaries were the only source of supply of medicine. When the demand for medicine, particularly quinine increased, the Chinese shopkeepers began to import them from Bangkok. By 1901, medicine, especially approved brands of quinine, could be bought at various Chinese shops and market stalls in and around Chiang Mai.³³ This affected the sale of medicine at the mission dispensaries. Decreasing income from the sale of medicine made the maintenance of a

self-supporting hospital increasingly difficult. The report of the medical department of the Chiang Mai station for 1901 stated that:

Our lessened receipts have left us with a very considerable deficit - about fourteen thousand rupees - on the treasurer's books, but with very considerable assets on our shelves.³⁴

Mission work in the field of medicine, however, received support in terms of patronage and financial assistance from Bangkok. The Chiang Mai hospital was built on a piece of land purchased and donated by Prince Pichit, a half-brother of King Chulalongkorn.³⁵ Prince Pichit or *Krom Mun* Pichit Pritchakon was the appointed Royal Commissioner to the northern states between 1884 and 1885.

Medical work initiated by the missionaries in Chiang Mai also drew considerable support from the princes. In 1890, one of the many patients treated at the Chiang Mai Mission Hospital was Prince Sonapandit who was also a half-brother of King Chulalongkorn. Sonapandit was then an appointed *khaluang* (commissioner) to the northern states. When writing to the Prince to acknowledge receipt of payment for medical services rendered, McKean of the Laos Mission said that:

... the missionaries both here and in Bangkok feel much indebted to His Majesty's Government for many favors shown to us.³⁶

Sonapandit replied, thanking Dr. McKean, and congratulated the missionaries on their good work. Many other incidents of a similar nature indicate that the missionaries of the Laos Mission enjoyed cordial relations with the Bangkok government.

The impact of the mission's medical department in evangelical outreach was especially evident in Lamphun. The Lamphun station was established in 1891 and, within a year of its operation, nine persons who had received medical benefits from the

station's medical department, embraced Christianity. W.C. Dodd, resident missionary of Lamphun, reported that:

The medical work has done more than any other form of missionary work could have done, in the same time, at least in securing as the favour of the princes and a lead upon hundreds of their people.³⁷

Royal patronage and support in granting land for the construction of hospitals and financial aid were factors which almost certainly assured the success of the mission's medical department in northern Siam. The mission's medical work was further enhanced when both princes and officials sought medical treatment from the missionary doctors. The ruling princes placed considerable faith in the medical work of the missionaries and did whatever they could to support the introduction of modern medicine into northern Siam. A case in point was the act of the Governor of Chiang Mai. In early 1893, the Governor issued an order conferring on Dr. James McKean, resident physician at Chiang Mai, complete authority to vaccinate the local people.³⁸

By the end of 1893, the medical department of the Laos Mission had reached out to almost 8000 people. This figure did not include the number of northern Thai who came in contact with the Laos Mission either through direct evangelism or by way of the many tours conducted by the missionaries. Proceeds from the sale of medicine from the Chiang Mai station for that year were sufficient to pay for all expenses of medicine, instruments and assistants.³⁹ Indeed the Chiang Mai station hospital was a good example of a self-supporting medical institution.

In 1894, support from the ruling class towards medical mission work was further reinforced when a cholera epidemic broke out in Chiang Mai. The Chief of Chiang Mai sought the advice of Dr. James McKean. The Chief then instructed, as advised by

McKean, that all cholera patients should be isolated. The Chief also provided temporary hospitals to house the cholera victims.⁴⁰

Apart from that, some of the missionary physicians, at the request of the Siamese government, extended medical services to the government officials and soldiers. In 1905, Siamese government officials and soldiers stationed in Nan and Chiang Rai were placed under the medical care of missionary physicians in that place.⁴¹ According to the missionaries, such work done for the government "furthers rather than hinders their influence as missionaries".⁴²

Famine Relief Fund

In the 1890's, mission work of a social nature branched out further to include aid extended to families and individuals affected by famine. Mission work in this department also received Bangkok's sanction and recognition. The 1890's was a period which provided many occasions for greater interaction between the central government and the Laos Mission in the north. At the same time, the missionaries sought assistance from Bangkok to aid its relief programmes. These provided crucial occasions for Bangkok to demonstrate its increasing concern over the northern provinces. The missionaries were also useful to Bangkok because, through them, Bangkok was kept informed of happenings in the northern states.

In 1892, Lampang and Phrae experienced a major rice shortage. A general rice crop failure in the preceding two years was the cause of the shortage. Most of the *phrai* (commoners) were without land, cattle, money and seed rice. They had either sold off their property or mortgaged their land to wealthier land owners. In addition, most peasants had borrowed money extensively to buy rice and, as a result, reduced

themselves to slavery.⁴³

The middle and ruling classes too were not spared from the difficulties resulting from the rice shortage. The ruling class, despite having a largely decreased supply of rice, had to feed an increasing number of slaves and dependents. The failure of the rice crops resulted in much suffering among the people and, in some places, in serious famine.⁴⁴

The missionaries set up a Famine Relief Fund to deal with the problem. The Fund, set up in 1892, was managed by two committees, namely, the Seed Rice Committee and the Food Rice Committee. These committees performed two categories of work: firstly, to purchase and distribute rice among those suffering from famine and, secondly, to transport rice from various places where rice was not scarce to Chiang Mai through Tak (Raheng). The Seed Rice Committee distributed, in 1892, a total of 750 baskets of seed rice, with an average of two baskets per person, among needy farmers in Lampang. The Food Rice Committee concentrated on providing rice for consumption to farmers during the planting season. This was because rice supply, which was harvested and stored in public granaries (*chang khao*) from the previous season, was acutely limited in supply during this period. In the post-planting season, however, the missionaries were more careful in the distribution of rice. Only the destitute and people who could not fend for themselves were granted aid.

Altogether, four main rules were laid down with regard to the eligibility of people who could receive aid from the Famine Fund. These were:⁴⁵

- i) Only the starving are to be considered eligible to receive aid.
- ii) Rice and not money shall be given whenever it is at all possible.
- iii) The condition and not the class shall decide the question of aid; whether heathen or Christian, slave or freeman of whatever class, the starving shall be fed.
- iv) No money shall be loaned.

In the same year, the missionaries visited and offered aid to nineteen villages. During the visit, a total number of 550 baskets of rice were distributed. An additional 6000 meals of cooked rice were also distributed and an average of 1000 individuals were estimated to have received rice aid from the missionaries.⁴⁶

Relief work organised by the missionaries received due recognition from the Siamese King. When a letter was sent to King Chulalongkorn to notify him of the condition of his people in Lampang, an immediate reply was received from the office of the Royal Private Secretary. It was stated that:

... you [missionaries] were so good as to lay before His Majesty the state of sufferings of the people caused by famine in the North West Laos Province and also detailing the relief work done and the fund contributed by your Mission and of the Foreign residents.
 ... His Majesty views with great pleasure and full appreciation the benevolent work of your Mission for the relief of His people from this miserable state of famine and [would like] specially to convey through you His Majesty's sincere thanks to your Mission and all other philanthropists who had taken parts in the charitable work.⁴⁷

A Commissioner of Relief was despatched from Bangkok with the necessary provisions to the north. Meanwhile, Bangkok instructed the Royal Commissioner in northern Siam to take immediate measures to relieve the people of the hardship caused by the famine.⁴⁸ All these instructions from Bangkok came only after the missionaries had notified the Bangkok government of the famine in the north. It was in this context

that the missionaries were alleged to have acted as informants to the central government over matters in the north.

During the 1903 famine in Lamphun and Lampang, Prince Damrong, Minister of the *Mahatthai*, ordered rice supplies to be sent from Tak (Raheng) to the *Chao luang* of Lamphun.⁴⁹ Subsequently, a telegram was sent through the Minister for the United States Legation in Siam, Hamilton King, to the Rev. Taylor of the Laos Mission. The Minister informed Taylor that Prince Damrong had ordered the *Chao luang* of Lamphun to provide rice to any persons considered needy by Taylor. Later, the Consul credited to the account of the North Laos Mission a sum of 956 ticals for the purchase of rice which had been made in aid of famine sufferers.⁵⁰ Damrong placed greater faith in the missionaries than he did in the person of the *Chao luang* of Lamphun. According to the telegram, Taylor was advised to:

... take any needy people to the *Chow Luang* and that this telegram shall be considered an order on the *Chow Luang* for rice.⁵¹

Printing and the Chiang Mai Mission Press, 1892

In 1892, a new line of mission activity was inaugurated with the founding of the Chiang Mai Mission Press,⁵² the first in northern Siam.⁵³ The missionaries had been considering the establishment of a mission press since the purchase of a font of Lan Na (northern Thai) type by Dr. S.C. Peoples in 1890. The aim of setting up a mission press was mainly to print books and religious tracts in northern Thai.

The press started with Rev. D.G. Collins, Superintendent of the Boys' School, as its first manager.⁵⁴ In its first year of operation, 2000 copies of a 12 page tract was published by the press.⁵⁵ The tract explained the essence of Christianity and was

translated into northern Thai by Mrs. McGilvary. A sum of \$ 25 was collected from the sale of these books in Chiang Mai and an additional \$ 175 was received for printing work done for the commercial sector.⁵⁶

Pupils from the Chiang Mai Boys' School were employed to assist at the Mission Press. When D.G. Collins started the operation of the mission press, he sought help from a Lao boy who had some working experience in the operation of the D.B. Bradley printing house in Bangkok. Collins remained the manager of the Mission Press from the time of its inception until his death in 1917. During this period, the press recorded considerable growth in the volume of production and printing facilities.

There were two categories of literature printed at the Chiang Mai Mission Press. Mission-related literature, both religious and educational, for the purpose of evangelism, was intended to be given priority by the press. But, the press also engaged in commercial printing, aimed especially at making profits to enable the press to be self-sustaining. In practice, it was the second category that was given greater emphasis (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1: **Production Figures of the Chiang Mai Mission Press: 1892-1910**
(drawn from available data).⁵⁷

Year	Mission Related (%)	Commercial (%)
1892	36.6	63.4
1896	46.2	53.8
1898	70.8	29.2
1899	15.1	84.9
1900	23.7	76.3
1901	1.3	98.7
1902	29.4	70.6
1903	20.8	79.2
1904	20.2	79.8
1905	44.4	55.6
1906	42.4	57.6
1907	48.7	51.3
1910	43.1	56.9

Among the more significant publications of the Chiang Mai Mission Press was the Nangsu Sirikitissap (NS), also called the Laos Christian News.⁵⁸ It was a Laos Mission monthly publication and the first issue was published in 1903. The Nangsu Sirikitissap, a 12-page publication,⁵⁹ contained articles of interest from Asia, Europe and North America.⁶⁰ In short, it contained international news as well as mission-related information. An average of 1000 copies were circulated monthly and this was remarkable given the travelling limitation and poor communication in northern Siam. Its circulation was further said to have been comparable to the largest daily in Bangkok then.⁶¹ Between 1906 and 1907, more than 2000 copies of the newspaper were distributed in the country districts.⁶²

The Nangsu Sirikitissap was widely read because it was the only newspaper which provided international news in the northern Thai language. Furthermore, the

Nangsu Sirikitissap contained Sunday School lessons. Under this section, the paper featured daily readings, notes and questions, hence emphasizing the educational nature of this paper.⁶³ The Nangsu Sirikitissap also drew contributions from the locals. In 1905, for example, the annual report for the Chiang Mai Station indicated that the number of native contributors to the newspaper had increased.⁶⁴ The determination shown by the missionaries to ensure the dissemination of more global knowledge among the northern Thais undoubtedly helped to enlighten the latter. In other words, the Nangsu Sirikitissap, then the only newspaper in northern Thai, was an important agent of change.

The Mission Press also produced the first textbooks for public education in northern Siam. Large amounts of printing were, in addition, done for commercial purposes to serve the needs of the business sector (such as the foreign teak companies), public services department (such as the post office), and the Siamese agencies of local government in Chiang Mai. In 1898, the total revenue collected from printing done for commercial purposes was 4925 rupees. This was about double the revenue earned the preceding year which amounted to 2725 rupees.⁶⁵ The Chiang Mai Mission Press also printed a translation of a Siamese law book into Lan Na (northern Thai). This was to facilitate the use of Siamese law by local officials and village headmen in northern Siam.⁶⁶

As it is possible to discern from the Table provided earlier, data available for the period between 1892 and 1910 (with the exception of the year 1898), indicate that the Mission Press printed a higher percentage of commercial-related information as opposed to mission-related information. In 1901, for example, commercial-related printing accounted for almost 99 % of the total production by the Mission Press. It

appears then that the Chiang Mai Mission Press liaised closely with the business sector as well as the Siamese government throughout this period, and thus a large share of the printed material was produced to meet their needs. The manager of the Mission Press, D.G. Collins, reported in 1904, that:

The Siamese government continues to be our chief customer. We do work for all its different departments. We also do considerable work for the two large teak wood companies, the British Consulate and bill heads for all the leading stores of the place.⁶⁷

In fact, it has been said of the Chiang Mai Mission Press that, "its presence accelerated processes favourable to the government's policy of centralizing power".⁶⁸ In other words, the Mission Press facilitated the penetration of Bangkok's policies and Siamese bureaucracy into northern Siam. For instance, Siamese law book printed in the northern Thai language, as undertaken by the Mission Press, was widely circulated among the ruling officials in the northern states of Siam and, gradually came to replace the traditional laws of that place.

Apart from that, the Mission Press printed textbooks for public education in the northern states of Siam. The curriculum of these schools emphasized Siamese language and the workings of the Siamese government. As such, the Mission Press actually disseminated information which was favourable to the policies of the central government. The Chiang Mai Mission Press, coincidentally or by design, played an important role as an agent to hasten the process of change in northern Siam. But, it should be pointed out that in the process of introducing change and facilitating centralization, the Mission Press indeed lost sight of its very reason for existence.⁶⁹ The primary reason for the establishment of the Press was to disseminate information in Lan Na. It was important to translate and print in Lan Na because very few northern

Thai were able to read any other script, central Siamese included. Despite having started off with the singular aim of printing and publishing in Lan Na, the press contributed to the waning of the Lan Na script. The paradoxical situation occurred mainly because the missionaries, who had been the beneficiaries of much favours from the central government, continued to need the latter's support. Thus, they were cautious not to antagonise the Siamese government's language policies.

Still, the Chiang Mai Mission Press did act as a mechanism for evangelism and greatly assisted the spread of knowledge among the people in northern Siam. It introduced the printing and information technology into northern Siam. And because, initially, it used the Lan Na language, it helped, to some extent, in the development of Lan Na Thai literature. Later, however, owing to the Bangkok government's policy of establishing a single national language for the kingdom, the Siamese language was taught throughout Siam and the Mission Press too began to publish more in Siamese and the use of the Lan Na language waned.

Relations with Bangkok

The missionaries got along very well with central government officials sent from Bangkok to the northern states. Reports from the missionaries to the Home Board constantly spoke of the good relations between the Laos Mission and Bangkok officials, and the good work that the Bangkok officials had achieved in the northern states. A report in 1896 specifically made references to the relations between missionaries and Bangkok as opposed to that between the missionaries and the northern ruling class. According to the report:

The Siamese Commissioner and his wife and his assistant as well are warm personal friends. With the Laos officials we are on less intimate terms⁷⁰

Other reports paid tribute to the developmental work introduced by the Siamese officers. For example, John H. Freeman wrote of the Siamese Commissioner that:

... under his charge the whole character of the district has been changed, robbers suppressed, jungles cleared, roads made, a canal joining the Me Nan and Me Yom has been dug.⁷¹

The missionaries also enjoyed good relations with various other representatives from Bangkok. At least as far as the medical work was concerned, support from Bangkok came from the highest authorities, the princes and rulers. All these elevated the importance of the mission's work in the field of medicine.

In the 1890's, Bangkok was in the midst of trying to incorporate the northern states into the central Siamese administration. It was in need of many honest and competent officers to help it achieve its goal. The appointment of new officers meant increasing expenses. At that time, not many officers from Bangkok were willing to take up posts in the north owing to the difficulties in communication between the two places. Most officers from Bangkok were also very condescending towards the northern Thai. Apart from that, some of the officers posted to the north were corrupt. *Phraya* Phetphichai (or Jinjarujinda), Siamese Commissioner in Chiang Mai between 1887 and 1888, was suspected of having been bribed by the *Chao muang* of Chiang Mai into reopening the gambling dens which were closed down by his predecessor, Prince Pichit, in 1884.⁷² Phetphichai was also known to be sympathetic towards the local chiefs and tried to accommodate their demands. This policy of favouring the Lao

and often encouraging the locals to ignore central government policies was called *phrachob Lao*⁷³ (courting the Laos' favours)⁷⁴. Phetphichai was also found to have misappropriated government money (*ngoen luang*) amounting to 16, 377 rupees, while he was serving as a Bangkok Commissioner in the north.⁷⁵ Eventually, Phetphichai was asked to return to Bangkok and a new Commissioner to the north was appointed.

Given the state of Bangkok's limited resources in terms of manpower and finances, on the one hand, and the threat posed by foreign powers to the security of its northern frontier, on the other, the Bangkok government concentrated on political rather than social reforms. Schools and hospitals were not their immediate concern. What Bangkok failed to provide to the northern Thai, was compensated for by the work of the missionaries. Through the mission schools, hospitals and dispensaries, the northern Thai availed themselves of these social benefits. Thus, Bangkok encouraged and supported the missionaries in the north towards that end.

In summation, it may be reiterated that, in establishing schools, hospitals, dispensaries and a printing press, in addition to their work in helping to alleviate famine, to educate young girls and to promote the use of the Siamese language, the Presbyterian missionaries of the Laos Mission were, in fact, playing a major role in effecting social change in the northern states of Siam.

They were also instrumental in introducing Western ideas to the people of northern Siam and this, in turn, helped to introduce the northern states of Siam to the Western world and, to some extent, to the Siamese in central Siam as well. It is not far-fetched to say that they, indeed, paved the way for the coming of European traders to exploit the rich teak forests of that region.

¹ BOFM, Rev. F.L. Synder to Y.P.S.C.E's of the Presbyterian Churches of New York City, Ratburee, Siam, 30 June, 1892, Roll. 185, Vol. 8.

² Philip J. Hughes, Proclamation and Response: A Study of the History of the Christian Faith in Northern Thailand, Chiang Mai: Payap University Archives, 1989 (second edition), p. 29.

³ Vachara Sindhuprama, 'Modern Education and Socio-Cultural Change In Northern Thailand, 1898-1942', Ph.D. thesis, University of Hawaii, 1988, p. 5.

⁴ Swat Sukontarangsi, Development of Thai Educational Bureaucracy, Bangkok: National Institute of Development Administration, 1967, p. 139, cited in Vachara Sindhuprama, 'Modern Education and Socio-Cultural Change in Northern Thailand', p. 5. See Footnote (1).

⁵ D.G. Collins was born in Ohio, U.S.A. in 1855. He worked in Chiang Mai from 1887 and founded the Chiang Mai Boys' School (later the Prince Royal's College). He also managed the Chiang Mai Mission Press.

⁶ Vachara Sindhuprama, 'Modern Education and Socio-Cultural Change In Northern Thailand', p. 65.

⁷ BOFM, W.C. Dodd, "Report of the Lampoon [Lamphun] Station, 30 Nov, 1892", Roll. 188, Vol. 22.

⁸ Herbert R. Swanson, "Advocate and Partner: Missionaries and Modernization in Nan Province, Siam, 1895-1934", in JSEAS, Vol. 13, No. 2, Sept 1982, p. 299.

⁹ Vachara Sindhuprama, 'Modern Education and Socio-Cultural Change in Northern Thailand', p. 63.

¹⁰ BOFM, D.G. Collins, "Report of the Boys School, 1888", Roll. 188, Vol. 22.

¹¹ BOFM, W.C. Dodd, "Report of the Chiang Mai Theological Training Class For Year Ending 31 Oct, 1889", Roll. 188, Vol. 22.

¹² NCP, 30 April, 1875.

¹³ BOFM, D. McGilvary to Dr. Lowrie, 12 Oct, 1880, Roll. 183, Vol. 4.

¹⁴ Vachara Sindhuprama, 'Modern Education And Socio-Cultural Change in Northern Thailand', p. 66.

¹⁵ Saratsawadee Prayunsathien, "Krabuankanruam huamuang prathetsarat Lan Na Thai khao su suan klang (Ph. S. 2427- 2476), [Process of Consolidating the Tributary States of Lan Na Thai/Northern Thai States into the central state, 1884-1933], in Warasan

Sangkhomsat, Chiangmai University, Vol. 5, No. 1, Apr-June 1981, p. 33.
Saraswadee, however, gives the founding date for the school as 17 October, 1896 (R.S. 115). See Footnote 49 on the same page.

¹⁶ Vachara Sindhuprama, 'Modern Education and Socio-Cultural Change', p. 66.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 67.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Like Daniel McGilvary, Marion Cheek was a North Carolinian. He had also studied at the Bingham School. In Siam, Cheek married Sarah Bradley, daughter of D.B. Bradley and half sister to Sophia McGilvary. As such, both Daniel McGilvary and Marion Cheek were sons-in-law of D.B. Bradley.

²¹ BOFM, J. Wilson to Dr. Lowrie, 23 July, 1880, Roll. 183, Vol. 4.

²² BOFM, James McKean, "Report of the Medical Missionary Work in Chiang Mai, Laos for 10 months, Jan 21-Nov 30, 1890", Roll. 188, Vol. 22.

²³ BOFM, A.M. Cary, "Report of the Medical Mission Work at Chiang Mai for year ending 30 Sept, 1888", Roll. 188, Vol. 22.

²⁴ BOFM, D. McGilvary, "Annual Report of Chiang Mai from 1 Oct, 1888 to 30 Nov, 1889 and Statistical Report", Roll. 188, Vol. 22.

²⁵ BOFM, James McKean, "Report of the Medical Missionary Work in Chiang Mai, 21 Jan-30 Nov, 1890", Roll. 188, Vol. 22.

²⁶ The BOFM report, however, states the name of the lady as Pah Won. The name has been corrected from Pah Won to *pa* (meaning "aunty") Wan based on an article written by Herbert R. Swanson, "A New Generation: Missionary Education and Changes in Women's Roles in Traditional Northern Thai Society", in SOJOURN, Vol. 3, No. 2, 1988, p. 196.

²⁷ BOFM, W.C. Dodd, "North Laos Reports, Chiang Mai Station Ending 30 Nov, 1890", Roll. 188, Vol. 22.

²⁸ BOFM, James McKean, "Report of the Medical Missionary Work in Chiang Mai, 21 Jan-30 Nov, 1890", Roll. 188, Vol. 22.

²⁹ Lillian J. Curtis, The Laos of North Siam, New York: Fleming H. Revel, 1903, p. 257.

- ³⁰ Ibid.
- ³¹ BOFM, James McKean, "Report of Chiang Mai Station, 1 Dec, 1890-1 Dec, 1891", Roll. 188, Vol. 22.
- ³² BOFM, John H. Freeman, "Report for the year 1896", Roll. 188, Vol. 22.
- ³³ BOFM, "Report of the Medical Department of Chiengmai Station for the year ending Nov, 1901", in North Siam Reports, 1900-1910, Roll. 290, Vol. 281.
- ³⁴ Ibid.
- ³⁵ BOFM, James McKean, "Report of the Medical Missionary Work in Chiang Mai, 21 Jan-30 Nov, 1890", Roll. 188, Vol. 22.
- ³⁶ Ibid.
- ³⁷ BOFM, W.C. Dodd, "Report of Lamphun Station, 30 Nov, 1892", Roll. 188, Vol. 22.
- ³⁸ BOFM, Stanley K. Phraner, "Report of the Chiang Mai Station for the year 1893", Roll. 188, Vol. 22.
- ³⁹ Ibid.
- ⁴⁰ BOFM, Nellie McGilvary, "Report for the Chiang Mai Station for the year 1894", Roll. 188, Vol. 22.
- ⁴¹ Laos News, January, 1905, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 19.
- ⁴² Ibid.
- ⁴³ BOFM, Report of Laos Famine Fund Exec. Comm., 1892", Roll. 188, Vol. 22.
- ⁴⁴ BCR (Chiang Mai), 1891, p. 1.
- ⁴⁵ BOFM, Report of Laos Famine Fund Exec. Comm., 1892", Roll. 188, Vol. 22.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid.
- ⁴⁹ NA, R.5. M. 2.25/37, Copy of telegram sent by Mr. Hamilton King to Taylor,

(signed) 15 July, 1903.

⁵⁰ NA, R.5. M. 2.25/37, Copy of telegram sent by Mr. Hamilton King to Taylor, 24 July, 1903.

⁵¹ NA, R.5. M. 2.25/37, Copy of telegram sent by Mr. Hamilton King to Taylor, (signed) 15 July, 1903.

⁵² The Mission Press appears not to have had an official name. Reports refer to the press as the Mission Press. Because the Press was located in Chiang Mai, some writers refer to it as the Chiang Mai Mission Press. This section on the Mission Press is largely based on Herbert R. Swanson's, "This Seed: Missionary Printing and Literature As Agents Of Change In Northern Siam, 1892-1926", in Prakai Nontawasee (ed.), Changes in Northern Thailand And The Shan States, 1886-1940, Singapore: Southeast Asian Studies Program, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1988.

⁵³ BOFM, E.B. McGilvary, "Report for the Chiang Mai Station, Dec, 1891-Dec, 1892", Roll. 188, Vol. 22.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Herbert R. Swanson, "This seed Missionary Printing and Literature as Agents of Change in Northern Siam", p. 186.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 181.

⁵⁹ Laos News, January 1905, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 26.

⁶⁰ Herbert R. Swanson, "This Seed: Missionary Printing And Literature As Agents Of Change In Northern Siam", p. 181.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² BOFM, M.B. Palmer, "Chiang Mai Station Report for the year 1906-1907", Roll. 290, Vol. 281.

⁶³ BOFM, James McKean, "Annual Report of Chiengmai Station, for the year ending 31 Oct, 1904", Roll. 290, Vol. 281.

⁶⁴ BOFM, Comm. on Mission Report, "Annual Report of the Laos Mission for the year ending 31 Oct, 1905", Roll. 290, Vol. 281.

- ⁶⁵ BOFM, J.H. Freeman, "Annual Report of Cheung [Chiang] Mai Station, 1898", Roll. 188, Vol. 22.
- ⁶⁶ Herbert R. Swanson, "This Seed: Missionary Printing and Literature as Agents of Change in Northern Siam", p. 183.
- ⁶⁷ BOFM, D.G. Collins, "Report of the Laos Mission Press for the year closing 31 Oct, 1904", Roll. 290, Vol. 281.
- ⁶⁸ Herbert R. Swanson, "This Seed: Missionary Printing and Literature as Agents of Change in Northern Siam", p. 197.
- ⁶⁹ Ibid.
- ⁷⁰ BOFM, John H. Freeman, "Report for the year 1896", Roll. 188, Vol. 22.
- ⁷¹ BOFM, John H. Freeman, "Report for the year 1895", Roll. 188, Vol. 22.
- ⁷² M.R. Rujaya Abhakorn, "Changes in the Administrative Systems of Northern Siam, 1884-1933, in Prakai Nontawasee (ed.), Changes In Northern Thailand And The Shan States, 1886-1940, Singapore: Southeast Asian Studies Program, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1988, p. 78.
- ⁷³ Saratsawadee Prayunsathien, "Krabuankanruam huamuang prathetsarat Lan Na Thai", p. 29.
- ⁷⁴ As translated by M.R. Rujaya Abhakorn, "Changes in the Administrative Systems of Northern Siam", p. 93.
- ⁷⁵ Saratsawadee Prayunsathien, "Krabuankanruam huamuang prathetsarat Lan Na Thai", p. 30.