

## **History of Baptist Ministries in Thailand**

Research by Rev. Dick Worley, 2017

The beginning of Protestant Christian work among the Teochiu people is found in Siam (Thailand). Dr. Robert Tolbert states that “The Baptist Mission at Bangkok in Siam was the training ground for missionary work in China.” American Baptists entered Siam in 1833, missionaries coming from the mission work already started in Burma. Rev. John Taylor Jones and wife, Eliza, transferred from working in Burma to Siam. They had worked with Mon people and came to Siam to work with Mon and Siamese. But they found Chinese receptive to the Gospel and opened their house to about 15 Chinese meeting there. Rev. Jones baptized three Chinese in the Chao Phraya River in 1833. When he arrived in Bangkok from Burma Rev. Jones found that the majority of people in Bangkok were Chinese, a little over half of the population of 500,000. He wrote a letter to American Baptists asking them to send missionaries to work with the Chinese.

Rev. William Dean and his wife, Matilda, sailed from Boston in 1834 on a small ship that took five months to reach Burma, making no stops on the way. After a short time in Burma, Dr. and Mrs. Dan Bradley and Miss Adeline White, Congregationalist missionaries, who were assigned to work with Siamese, and Rev. and Mrs. Dean took one month to sail on that small ship to Singapore. Rev. and Mrs. Dean had been reassigned as missionaries in Burma to work with Chinese in Siam. In Singapore Mrs. Dean died giving birth to a daughter. While transferring to a boat to take them up to Bangkok, they were attacked by pirates in Singapore bay. Rev. Dean was speared through his wrist, but they escaped. The Bradleys helped take care of Rev. Dean’s baby daughter and he proceeded to his first missionary assignment alone. Other

missionaries who came in those early years suffered great loss. Not many years later one missionary wrote, “This is the tenth missionary wife connected with the Chinese mission who has died in the last four years.” Rev. William Dean was missionary to the Chinese for 50 years, 27 years in Siam and 22 years in China. In those 50 years he had three wives, losing his wives to disease. He spent fourteen of his first twenty years alone. He spoke Teochiu fluently and was literate in written Chinese.

To have a perspective of the difficulty of being the first missionary to Chinese in Siam in those days, being supported by Christians in America who knew little about Asia, Rev. Dean’s entrance into Siam in Bangkok came only 66 years after the Burmese had destroyed Ayudhaya. When the first American missionaries, Adoniram and Ann Judson, sailed from Boston, America had declared its independence from Britain and had become a nation only 25 years earlier. The Judsons sailed first to India in 1812, which was governed by Great Britain. The War between Britain and the United States was from 1812 to 1814. The Judsons had to leave India and go to Burma. When missionaries came to Siam, they had support from Christians in America, but it took two years to write a letter home and get a reply. With many deaths and basically cut off from home, these were the missionaries that first brought God’s Good News to Chinese and Thai in Siam.

When he first arrived in Bangkok, William Dean studied the Teochiu language. It is said that he first preached in the Teochiu language to thirty-four Chinese in August, 1835, a month after reaching Bangkok. On July 1, 1837 Rev. William Dean organized the first Protestant church in the East, the first Chinese church in all of Asia. There were three Chinese and eight missionary charter members. The first location was at Wat Kok near the Chao Phraya River. That church is in existence today, known as the Maitrichit Chinese Baptist Church. In 1839 six

were added to the church. In 1841 another seven Chinese were baptized. In 1842 Rev. William Dean was assigned to Hong Kong and he took two of the Bangkok church members with him. They became founding members of the first Baptist Church in Hong Kong, organized on May 28, 1843, with Teochiu people. Rev. Dean was the pastor and had prepared a church constitution which was signed by Hok Heng who came from the Bangkok church, and by two others who had recently been baptized. Rev. J. L. Shuck and his wife had been assigned to Chinese in Siam, but soon moved to Hong Kong. They established work among Cantonese. This is where historical events affected mission work. In the United States in the 1840s the question of slavery split the North and South. The American Baptist Missionary Board took the position that no missionary having slaves could be appointed. As a result of differences between Baptist churches in the North and South, 8 Southern States organized their own Southern Baptist Convention on May 8-12, 1845. From the original American Baptist Mission organization, the Northern Baptists re-organized as the American Baptist Missionary Union on May 21, 1846. After the Baptist churches split between the North and the South, missionaries were given the choice as to which society they would serve. In Hong Kong, the ministry of Rev. Shuck with Cantonese Baptists came under the Southern Baptists, and the ministry of Rev. Dean with Teochiu Baptists came under the American Baptists. These connections are the same today.

While Rev. Dean was in Hong Kong the membership of the Teochiu Baptist Church in Bangkok in 1848 was only twenty-three. In 1850 the Chinese congregation had increased to thirty-five members. William Dean preached to the Chinese and spent much time speaking to visitors who came to his floating house on the river. Rev. John Jones translated the Siamese Scriptures and prepared tracts. Those early missionaries were very active in evangelism. In 1844 a chapel was started outside of Bangkok. These years foreigners were not well thought of

by the royalty and government because of European expansion and the opium trade. In 1850 there were a number of bad incidents where those connected with the foreign missionaries were treated badly. In 1851 two tragedies befell the Baptist Mission. Their complete compound burned to the ground, destroying buildings, chapel, libraries, school and personal effects, and the complete printing plant was ruined. That included the second edition of John Jones' Siamese New Testament translation, which was a great loss. The second tragedy for the Mission was John Taylor Jones died of dysentery after serving the Lord 18 years in Siam. This left the Mission without anyone as fluent in the Siamese language to continue that work.

It was in 1863 that the last American Baptist missionary left Siam, leaving the Chinese church without any missionary assistance. But in 1864 William Dean returned from Hong Kong and China to work another 20 years in Siam (1864-1884). The Baptist work was then confined to work with the Chinese as the work with Siamese was closed in 1869. For many years only the Deans remained in Siam to work with Chinese. The Teochiu Baptist church grew from 35 members in 1853 to 53 in 1867, and 78 in 1872, and to 500 by 1883. From the founding of the first Chinese church in 1837 to 1866, 51 Chinese were baptized in Siam. In 1867 Rev. Dean baptized another 40 Chinese. Many of these new believers were from outstations outside Bangkok. In 1868 two new churches were organized at the outstations. Two chapels were also built and dedicated. Soon after, the first pastor ordained in the Baptist work was appointed. In 1874 when Dean was the only Baptist missionary for Chinese, large additions to the church were made in Bangkok and in four outstations: 11 baptisms in one, 17 in another, 25 in a third, and 84 in a fourth. In 1875 another 90 were baptized, making a total of 317 members. In 1877 there were six churches with 418 members, with 61 baptized during that year. That year there were seven chapels, two ordained and six un-ordained preachers, and five outstations.

By 1894 American Baptists had no missionaries in Siam, and the growth of the Chinese churches went down. One record shows that after 1884 membership in the Chinese churches decreased rapidly until there were only 13 members in 1889. In 1910 there were 88 members.

There was some contact between American Baptists and Maitrichit Church in the 1930s, even though American Baptists had not had missionaries in Thailand since the last missionaries left in 1863, contact between the Baptist churches in Swatow and Maitrichit Church continued. Missionaries in Swatow, China, had over the years been given special assignment to keep contact with the church in Bangkok. In 1935 Dr. Groesbeck of the Swatow field came to Thailand and brought American Baptist funds to help the Maitrichit Church purchase property and construct its new church building. The property for the church on Maitrichit Road, one rai, was purchased as well as property on Charoen Krung Road for use as a cemetery. Those properties were purchased in the name of the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society, and the deeds are still held in that name. The design of the Maitrichit Church building was patterned after the Chinese Chamber of Commerce on Sathorn Road. The new church was dedicated in 1935.

After World War II, when the communists took over China, all foreigners were forced out of China, and their properties were confiscated. All the American Baptist mission property in China was taken over by the communist government. American Baptists continued work among the Teochiu people in Hong Kong. An American Baptist missionary assigned to work with Karens in Burma, Rev. A. Q. VanBenschoten, traveled into northern Thailand in 1949, investigating Karen churches that had been established by Karen missionaries. It was decided by the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society that American Baptists would re-enter Thailand to work among the Karens in northern Thailand and the Chinese in Bangkok, mainly with the Maitrichit Chinese Baptist Church. Contact was made with Maitrichit Church leaders,

with the offer to come in to Thailand to work with Maitrichit Church. It was also decided that American Baptists would come back into Thailand at the invitation of Maitrichit Church and the Church of Christ in Thailand.

At the same time, the Southern Baptist International Mission Board in 1949 decided to begin new work in Thailand, assigning 13 missionary families to that task. Within the first five years, from 1949-1954, seven Baptist churches were established. In 1951 Grace Baptist Church in Bangkok was their first self-supporting church. As more Southern Baptist missionaries came to Thailand, in 1971 the Thailand Baptist Churches Association was established. The Baptist Church Foundation, a legal property holding body, was established in 1977 because of purchasing property for ministries, such as the Baptist Book Store, Baptist Student Center, Thailand Baptist Theological Seminary, and Baptist Mass Communications all in Bangkok, as well as the Baptist Encampment on the seashore near Pattaya. It was the policy of the Southern Baptist Mission to purchase property for missionary housing, which would be held by their Foundation. Also in 1977 the Thailand Baptist Churches Association joined with the Baptist 12<sup>th</sup> Pahk, Karen 19<sup>th</sup> Pahk, and Lahu 18<sup>th</sup> Pahk in the Church of Christ in Thailand to establish the Thailand Baptist Convention with 50,000 members. However, over the years this Convention didn't result in any effective fellowship.

Southern Baptists sent many missionaries to work in Thailand. In 1982 the Southern Baptist missionaries included 32 couples and 17 single missionaries, totaling 81 missionaries that year. It is recorded that in 2009 Southern Baptist related churches in Thailand after 60 years totaled 100 churches with 10,000 members.

American Baptist missionary ministries in Thailand developed in a different way. After the initial contact was made with the Karens in 1949, it was in 1952 that American Baptists decided to re-enter Thailand, mainly to work with the Karens in the north and Chinese in the central area.

American Baptist ministries in Thailand were more concentrated in sending missionaries among the hilltribes people in northern and western Thailand. Besides the emphasis in evangelism, helping the Karen churches establish new churches and form the Karen Baptist Convention, missionaries saw the need to help the livelihood of the Karen people to have a better life and to develop self-supporting churches. There was a strong agriculture ministry, establishing the Center for Uplift of the Hill Tribes (CUHT) which was an experimental station introducing new crops, fish ponds, and sheep, and as the Bible school training center for Karen pastors. Another emphasis was education, establishing three schools and a number of hostels for hilltribes children to live close to other schools they attended. It became apparent that medical help was needed, so clinics up in the mountain areas and a fully staffed hospital in MaeSariang near the Burma border were established. Another hospital in Sangkhlaburi, near Three Pagoda Pass into Burma, was established in cooperation with Disciples and American Baptist missionaries. Missionary wives helped village women develop hilltribes handicrafts to sell as a means of income. There was also ministries of writing and publishing materials in the Karen language. Later the hilltribes ministries expanded to work among the Lahu, Akha and Lisu tribes. A strong ministry developed in Chiang Mai to protect girls and young women from taking them to many places in Thailand and overseas for the sex trade.

Rev. Carl Capen who spoke fluent Teochiu, was born in Kakchieh, and had served in Kityang and Chaoyang, was chosen to lead the American Baptist re-entry into Thailand. He was

appointed to be Mission Secretary and Treasurer and asked to re-establish close relationships with the Teochiu Chinese. Four other missionaries who had served in the Teochiu area of China were re-assigned to Thailand. In the years that followed 30 couples and 9 single missionaries were assigned to Karen and other hilltribes work, and for Chinese work 9 couples and 4 single missionaries were assigned. Those assigned to other cooperative work with the Church of Christ in Thailand and administrative work were 6 couples and 2 single missionaries. Over the years until 1995, a total of 110 American Baptist missionaries served in Thailand. Baptist missionaries from other countries wanted to enter Thailand. In 1974 the American Baptist Mission changed to be the Thailand Baptist Missionary Fellowship, with missionaries from Australian Baptists, Swedish Baptists, British Baptists, Japan Baptists, Philippine Baptists and missionaries from Hong Kong and Taiwan joining in mission work in Thailand. With the need to purchase property for two hospitals, schools, hostels, and church related property, the American Baptist Mission in 1965 established the legal property holding Christian Service Foundation (Baptist).

When American Baptists re-entered Thailand in 1952 there were 350 members in Maitrichit Church. Rev. Lim Pwe Ngi was pastor and Timothy Chao was church secretary. Dr. C. S. So was chairman of the Board of Deacons. In 1954 Maitrichit Church had 372 members when it withdrew from the 7<sup>th</sup> Pakh of the C.C.T. over authority differences.

The membership of the Maitrichit Chinese Baptist Church has fluctuated over the years. Before the 12<sup>th</sup> Pakh of the Church of Christ in Thailand, the Chinese Baptist association of churches, was organized in 1959, in 1957 there were 476 members. In 1959 the 12<sup>th</sup> Pakh was established with only two Chinese Baptist churches, the Maitrichit Chinese Baptist Church and the Huakunjae Baptist Church. In 1964 the membership rose to 629. In 1972 there were 739

members. In 1974 there were 1,044 members. In 2017 Maitrichit Chinese Baptist Church in Bangkok has 2,745 members with six ordained pastors and a total of 15 pastors and pastor's assistants.

The latest statistics I have for the 12<sup>th</sup> Pahk is in 2013 there were 79 churches and 113 chapels, with a total membership of 26,079. There were 38 ordained pastors, and a total of 204 pastors and 198 pastor assistants. The 12<sup>th</sup> Pahk in 2013 had one Bible school and three private church schools.

The strength of Maitrichit Church has been strong lay leadership, meaningful worship services, effective children and youth programs developing youth to become leaders of the church, strong ministries with women and men, outstanding music, a strong Sunday School program, a strong mission outreach called Maitrichit Mission, leadership of other churches in the 12<sup>th</sup> Pahk, and establishment of Su Lip Tsing Kwang School and Sammuk Christian Academy, and effective pastors and a strong pastoral program.

American Baptist mission policy has been to promote national leadership. In Chinese work, the assignment of missionaries has been decided between the mission and the Executive Committee of the 12<sup>th</sup> Pahk. Maitrichit Church has developed a strong mission outreach ministry, establishing many chapels and churches in northern Thailand among hilltribes groups. In 1980 Maitrichit Church commissioned the first full time missionaries to this work. In 1984 they sent their first foreign missionary couple to work in Hong Kong.

Baptists in Thailand have been active participants in Baptist World Alliance activities. Representatives were sent to the Baptist World Alliance meeting in Tokyo, July 11-18, 1970. From that, in 1970, the Southeast Asia Swatow Baptist organization was established, including

Baptist groups in Hong Kong, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Cambodia, and South Vietnam, promoting joint action in evangelism and exchange of leadership.

In December 1971 to January 1972, the Asian Baptist Youth Conference was held at the Baptist Encampment at Banglamung on the seashore, with 360 delegates from 19 countries in Asia. Mr. Othelo de Leon from the Philippines was the ABYF President at the time. The majority of those attending were ages 18 to 26. For the first time, delegates were able to leave India to attend, a total of 30. The largest group was 84 from Hong Kong. The most obvious result was our oneness in Christ. From that event, youth from the 12<sup>th</sup> Pakh and the Southern Baptist related churches began work together in projects, their vision broadened.

In 1973 the Asian Baptist Women's Union meeting was held in Bangkok, completely planned by Asian Baptist women. There were 150 delegates from 10 to 12 Asian churches. In 1984 the Baptist Council on World Mission was organized by the American Baptist Board of International Ministries in coordination with Baptist church leaders from countries where American Baptists had established mission outreach. In 1984 they arranged a ten day Conference on Stewardship held in Thailand at the Sannuk Christian Academy near the seashore. Leaders from 6 Asian countries, Northeast India, Burma, Philippines, Japan, Okinawa, and Thailand discussed ways for churches to emphasize stewardship in order to promote self support among all churches.

In August 1990, delegates from Thailand attended the Baptist World Alliance meeting in Seoul, Korea. Pastors from Thailand, including myself, participated in the baptisms of 10,000 Korean new believers. The BWA has spawned new cooperative organizations, and this meeting in Seoul was followed by the Baptist Council on World Mission.

From a report from a Southern Baptist missionary, he made the observation of a problem in their churches in Thailand. He wrote, "In order to grow bigger, some Baptist churches have evolved policies that have risks. For example, the church leader has taken too much power, through personal power persuading members to follow his policies leading to finally using authority in a wrong way. There appears to be no accountability and no standards, resulting in harm to the Baptist churches."

This is a very astute observation and one reflected in similar problems we have in our churches.

In 1959 the Church of Christ in Thailand invited Maitrichit Church and one other small country church to establish the 12<sup>th</sup> Pahk along Baptist beliefs and traditions. Earlier Maitrichit Church had joined the Presbyterian based 7<sup>th</sup> Pahk, but because the ruling elders of the 7<sup>th</sup> Pahk started requiring compliance on certain actions from Maitrichit Church, the Maitrichit Church pulled out of the 7<sup>th</sup> Pahk, mainly on the basis of the autonomy of the local church. The General Secretary of the Church of Christ in Thailand was magnanimous and invited Maitrichit Church to establish the 12<sup>th</sup> Pahk along Baptist principles.

The constitution of the Church of Christ in Thailand itself makes room for differences. One article states that the purpose of the C.C.T. is to bring together all Christians in Thailand for fellowship, spreading the Gospel, and to serve God. Then Article 3 states that any church that enters the Church of Christ in Thailand that desires to retain its basic beliefs, traditions and ceremonies may do so, so long as they do not oppose the basic beliefs stated in the C.C.T. constitution. Those basic beliefs are stated as theological beliefs stated in the Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed. So Baptist churches are able to fully cooperate in the Church of Christ in

Thailand and retain our basic Baptist beliefs and traditions. Church denominations differ mostly over the question of authority. In Baptist churches one of our distinctive beliefs is the autonomy of the local church. Each local Baptist church is not under the authority or control of any higher church body.

After 58 years, the 12<sup>th</sup> Pahk was taken over in an unethical way by a young chairman of the Executive Committee. He and two others rewrote the 12<sup>th</sup> Pahk constitution without consulting anyone else and at the annual Pahk meeting pushed it through without anyone else even reading it. Many delegates walked out of that meeting, including all from Maitrichit Church. As with any new constitution, it must be ratified. Maitrichit Church members voted around 600 to 24 not to accept the new constitution.

Here is what the new 12<sup>th</sup> Pahk constitution declared for all Baptist churches in the Pahk to follow: It gives absolute power to the chairman and the Executive Committee that in Baptist churches we have never had before. The new constitution states that the Executive Committee will punish any church that opposes the constitution. It states that the Board of Deacons has authority over the local church, and the Executive Committee has authority over all churches in the 12<sup>th</sup> Pahk. To be ordained in the 12<sup>th</sup> Pahk, the Executive Committee must give approval. All church property belongs to the 12<sup>th</sup> Pahk and all legal property documents must be turned over to the 12<sup>th</sup> Pahk Treasurer. If a church wants to start new work, it must first obtain permission from the 12<sup>th</sup> Pahk. Each church is required to send 10% of their offerings and any income to the Pahk every month. The 12<sup>th</sup> Pahk chairman has the responsibility to take care of all Christians in the local churches, and he oversees all administration of the 12<sup>th</sup> Pahk. Several articles in the constitution give too much power to the chairman of the 12<sup>th</sup> Pahk. There are many more articles in this new constitution that are opposed to Baptist beliefs and practices.

This current problem in the 12<sup>th</sup> Pahk is similar to that spoken by the Southern Baptist missionary in regard to someone taking authority over the local church congregation. There is now much anger between those in charge of the 12<sup>th</sup> Pahk and Maitrichit Church and other Baptist churches in the central area. Because Maitrichit Church voted not to accept the new constitution, the 12<sup>th</sup> Pahk chairman and the Executive Committee refuse to allow Maitrichit Church access to the Church of Christ in Thailand. There needs to be much prayer for understanding, mutual love, and reconciliation.

The leaders of Maitrichit Church feel it is God's grace to open the way for their continued fellowship in the Church of Christ in Thailand. Leaders of the 1<sup>st</sup> Pahk located in Chiang Mai, which was the very first Pahk organized in the CCT, extended a kind hand offering to accept Maitrichit Church and its other associated churches and chapels to be members of the 1<sup>st</sup> Pahk. They assured the Baptist churches that they can retain all of their beliefs and practices. And they state that this will pave the way for the Baptist churches in the 1<sup>st</sup> Pahk to apply to the Church of Christ in Thailand in the future to be their own Baptist Pahk again.

On Sunday, January 22, 2017 representatives from the 1<sup>st</sup> Pahk came to Maitrichit Church to share in a worship service and formally accept Maitrichit Church and associate churches and chapels into the 1<sup>st</sup> Pahk. There are 23 churches and 29 chapels associated with Maitrichit Chinese Baptist Church and the Sacred Light Baptist Church leaving the 12<sup>th</sup> Pahk and joining with the 1<sup>st</sup> Pahk. They have a total membership of 7,042 believers. There are 22 ordained pastors, with the total number of pastors and pastor assistants in these churches and chapels of 116.

The history of Baptist ministries in Thailand continues to be written.

Source books:

Called to Cathay, by Francis W. Goddard, 1948

Siamese Gold, The Church in Thailand, Alex G. Smith, 1981

Missionaries for all Seasons, The Capen Story, Mary Louise Munson, 1994

Serve Christ Always, Memoirs of Dick and Charlotte Worley, Dick Worley, 2005