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# AMONG A PEOPLE OF UNCLEAN LIPS: ELIZA AND JOHN TAYLOR JONES IN SIAM (1833–1851)

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## *Abstract*

John Taylor Jones (1802–1851) and his first wife, Eliza Grew Jones (1803–1838), were the first American Baptist missionaries working in Siam during the reign of King Rama III. They arrived in Bangkok in 1833, started preaching the Gospel in the Siamese capital and in subsequent years prepared a translation of the New Testament as well as other religious tracts in Thai explaining the basic elements of the Christian faith. The couple's arduous proselytizing work in Siam did not lead to a significant number of converts, however, but by offering religion in tandem with science and technology their teachings posed a challenge to traditional Thai world views. This paper examines the social, religious and literary sources that shaped the life writings of the Joneses and seeks to grasp the nature of conflict which informed cross-cultural debates between Buddhists and Christians at that time.

## 1. Introduction

Christian missionaries in Asia were go-betweens by profession. Crossing cultural frontiers and preaching the gospel to “infidels” in distant lands was a missionary's principal vocation. Narratives of foreign missionaries' lives have therefore been plotted in an explicitly geographical way. Traveling abroad was an integral part of a biographical model which championed the mobile world of the itinerant preacher. The evangelists' journeys crisscrossed the established life paths of those who stayed at home and were often carefully recorded for posterity. Their life stories cherished the exemplary few who had voluntarily abandoned the polite and comfortable world of the “civilized” and the settled. The history of Christianity itself has often been charted as a long gallery of missionary heroes, ranging from the Apostles in Biblical time to the miraculous stories of later saints and martyrs who had devoted their lives to fulfilling the apostolic mandate.<sup>1</sup>

1 On the spatial dimension of biography see DANIELS / NASH, 2004: 449–458.

Eliza and John Taylor Jones were among the first Protestant missionaries to live and preach in nineteenth-century Siam. They arrived in Bangkok on 25 March 1833 from Burma, where they had been working at stations of the *American Baptist Board* in Moulmein and Rangoon for a year-and-a-half. Eliza was born in Providence, Rhode Island, on March 30th, 1803, and in 1830 married John Taylor Jones, who was shortly afterwards appointed by the *Baptist Board of Foreign Missions* as missionary to Burma. The couple belongs to the earliest generation of American missionaries sent by the *American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions* (ABCFM) to work in Asia. The Joneses played a pioneering role as authors and translators of Christian texts in Siam and prepared the first version of the New Testament in Thai. At the same time Taylor Jones was an active preacher in Siam, restlessly traveling with his wife in Bangkok and other parts of the kingdom to talk to the people and to distribute their religious tracts. Living conditions in the tropics were harsh and unhealthy for Westerners in Siam, however, and the death rate among foreigners was high. Two of their four children passed away at an early age. Eliza herself died of cholera on 28 March 1838, only five years after her arrival in Siam. But John was to stay on in Siam for the coming thirteen years; he died of dysentery in Bangkok on 13 September 1851, after eighteen years of preaching, writing and translating in Siam.<sup>2</sup>

First-hand information from the two missionaries can be found in printed Baptist literature and in Taylor Jones's handwritten journals and letters addressed to the American Baptist Board. Some of his notes were published in the *Baptist Missionary Magazine*, mostly in summarized form; others remain in the archive of the American Baptist Missionary Society in Boston.<sup>3</sup> A great part of his work is written in the Thai language and still little known in Western countries. In 1842 the *Baptist Publication and Sunday School Society* published the *Memoir of Eliza Grew Jones*, arranged chronologically in a series of private letters and selected journal entries from her own pen. She also authored a short description of a Burmese village in Siam published some years after her death by the *American Baptist Publication Society*.<sup>4</sup>

The couple's fame as pioneering missionaries in Southeast Asia is rather modest and largely confined to missionary circles, but their writings provide

2 GAMMELL, 1854: 187–208; SMITH, 1883: 173–182; MCFARLAND, 1999: 27–31.

3 Citations from Jones's unpublished writings from the years 1832–1851 refer to the holdings of the *American Baptist Missionary Society* as *ABMS 1800–1900*. FM 110, 5–11 (microfilm copy).

4 JONES, 1842; JONES, 1853.



ample evidence of cross-cultural encounters and early intellectual exchanges between Christians and Buddhists not available elsewhere; they do also shed some light on the various transgressions, as well as insurmountable barriers, which shaped these transcultural lives. The letters and journals of the Joneses furthermore tend to follow a pre-existing script of biographical self-representation, plotting personal progress and setbacks on the path to salvation according to a plan. Their lives were construed as stories of self-reflection, self-improvement and self-sacrifice, in which personal suffering and an untimely death were integral parts of the narrative.

In what follows I will explore the ways in which the life stories of Mr. and Mrs. Jones shaped, and were being shaped by, a Protestant ideal of a missionary biography that evolved in the nineteenth-century. This may help to better understand some of the religious extremes expressed in their deeds and writings which rendered their missionary activities in Siam largely ineffective. In the Baptist version of Christianity religious purity was most important. Therefore the missionaries rejected all other religions as essentially false and barbaric. Such a universal truth claim, combined with a preference for social segregation, was incompatible with the cultural eclecticism practiced by the majority of the Siamese people who in everyday life borrowed from many different sources. As far as spreading the gospel was concerned the Joneses had only minimal effect; yet the public controversies they had provoked and the body of writings they had created can add to our understanding of the tensions between modernity and religion, or between knowledge of the material and the spiritual world, that shaped their interreligious debates. In fact these contradictions cut across cultures and helped the Siamese to deal more effectively with the challenges posed by Western knowledge and civilisation.

## 2. The Politics of Missionary Biographies

The European expansion in Asia from 1498 onward greatly enlarged the field of evangelization geographically and inspired as well as committed many Catholic orders to spread their faith beyond the borders of the Christian world. In subsequent centuries Catholic missionaries operated both under the shield and outside of the emerging colonial states in the East, experiencing remarkable successes in China and Tonkin as well as serious setbacks in seventeenth-



century Siam and Japan.<sup>5</sup> The suppression of the Jesuit order in 1773 and the outbreak of the Napoleonic Wars seriously weakened the Catholic foreign mission during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. First Protestant missionaries from the Netherlands arrived in Southeast Asia late in the sixteenth century, paid by and clearly subordinated to the authorities of the Dutch East India Company. The Dutch *predikanten* had some fleeting successes in Formosa, Amboina and Ceylon in the seventeenth century, but were neither numerous nor knowledgeable enough to leave a lasting impression on the people.<sup>6</sup> The British have long been reluctant to tolerate missionary activities in their Asian territories until they ultimately gave in to evangelical revivalists who after 1800 began to dominate the religious climate in the imperial centers.<sup>7</sup>

The modern Baptist foreign mission movement was spurred on by the British shoemaker William Carey and his manifesto *An Enquiry Into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen*, published in 1792. In this treatise he argued that the Great Commission was as obligating for modern Christians as it had been for the Apostles. He did not believe, like moderate Protestants in his time, that a new revelation was needed for the church to pursue the apostolic mission in all countries on earth. In his *Enquiry* he wrote:

It has been said that we ought not to force our way, but to wait for the openings, and leadings of Providence; but it might with equal propriety be answered in this case, neither ought we to neglect embracing those openings in providence which daily present themselves to us. What openings of providence do we wait for? We can neither expect to be transported into the heathen world without ordinary means, nor to be endowed with the gift of tongues, &c. when we arrive there. These would not be providential interpositions, but miraculous ones. Where a command exists nothing can be necessary to render it binding but a removal of those obstacles which render obedience impossible, and these are removed already.<sup>8</sup>

Carey soon put his mission theory into practice and in the same year founded with Andrew Fuller, John Ryand Jr. and others the *Baptist Missionary Society*. He embarked for India in June 1793, where he spent the rest of his life translating the Scriptures, preaching the gospel, teaching at the university, and

5 The literature on the Jesuits in East Asia is vast; see for example ROSS, 1994. On early modern biographies of saints and martyrs in Japan see STEINER, 2012: 135–156. See for an overview on Christianity in South and Southeast Asia BORGES, 2006: 433–450.

6 BOXER, 1965: 165.

7 STANLEY, 2005: 443–457.

8 CAREY, 1792: 10–11.

establishing new churches.<sup>9</sup> Nineteenth-century Protestant missions were connected by networks of information and personnel. Carey's missionary fervor therefore quickly resonated in the United States, particularly in New England, where Protestant awakening movements had created a favorable climate for evangelical work.<sup>10</sup> In India Carey met the American missionary Adoniram Judson, who with his wife Ann Hasseltine was the first American missionary ever to work in Southeast Asia.<sup>11</sup> They were en route to Burma, where they had been sent to in 1812 by the *American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions* to build up a missionary station. After long conversations with Carey in Calcutta the Judsons converted and were baptized, by immersion, by William Ward. The Baptists diverged from other denominations in their insistence in adult baptism, holding that this ritual signified the enlightenment of the believer's conscience, as well as the dying of the old life and the rising in newness of life. Baptist biographies therefore almost ever contained a recounting of a conversion experience out of a worldly background. In light of the importance that the apostolic form of baptism had for the Baptists, Judson declared after his conversion that it was no longer possible for him to follow the instructions of the Board with regard to this issue. He left the Board and continued his work with the newly formed Baptist *General Missionary Convention*.<sup>12</sup>

The lives of William Carey and the Judsons were told and retold in missionary journals and numerous religious biographies written in the nineteenth century. The purpose of a majority of these publications was clearly to stimulate endorsement of the Baptist foreign mission financially and to overcome its notorious lack of personnel. In a book on the life of Carey the Baptist writer John Brown Myer explained in the introduction that he could “conceive nothing more likely to promote missionary enterprise than acquaintance with the labours and spirit of the men, who, in the high places of the Field, have been ‘the messengers of the Churches and the glory of Christ’”.<sup>13</sup> Biographical works on Ann Hasseltine and Adoniram Judson began to appear in print shortly after their deaths in 1826 and 1850 respectively. In 1853 Francis Wayland edited a *Memoir of Adoniram's Life and Labors* in two volumes “to serve the course to which Dr

9 Carey's life is described in some detail by SMITH, 1887.

10 BUTLER, 1990; see also the contributions in SHENK, 2004.

11 For recent research on Adoniram Judson see the collection edited by DUESING, 2012.

12 NETTLES, 2008: 95.

13 MYERS, 1887: iii.



Judson's life was devoted", as he noted in the preface.<sup>14</sup> In turn Ann's life in Burma set a standard for a *woman* missionary's life path. Her life embraced both heroic and tragic elements. She had spent twelve years in Moulmein and Rangoon, where she worked quite successfully with her husband among the Karen and frequently published articles in religious journals on her experiences as a missionary wife. She earned some reputation as an author of Christian tracts and as a translator of parts of the Scripture in Burmese and Siamese, but became particularly famous in evangelical circles for her startling public support for Adoniram, who had been arrested in Burma during the first Anglo-Burmese War (1824–1826). She was traveling across the country whenever he was moved from one jail to another, and several times applied to the local authorities for his release. She even moved into a shed located in front of the prison gate, publicly agitating against her husband's arrest, but without success. When Mr. Judson finally regained his freedom, Ann reportedly was exhausted to such an extent that she died shortly thereafter in October 1826. Three years later a compilation of her private letters was published by James D. Knowles, who added to this "autobiography" a history of the Baptist mission in Burma that was annexed to Ann's narrative.<sup>15</sup>

Harriet Atwood Newell, born in 1793 in Haverill, Massachusetts, is another example of a life course that served as a model for a woman missionary. She was a close friend of Ann Hasseltine, who in 1812 convinced her to join her on the voyage to Burma. Harriet married Samuel Newell, a fellow missionary with the Judsons, and took the journey to Asia soon thereafter. Yet her life as a woman missionary was extraordinarily short. The group traveled to Burma via Calcutta, which they were ordered to leave at short notice due to growing hostilities between the US and Britain at that time. Three days before her nineteenth birthday Harriet gave birth to a girl while on board of a ship bound for the Isle de France (Mauritius). The child died during this most perilous journey, and so did Harriet a few days later. She had no chance to really starting a missionary career and never set foot on Burmese soil, but she left a body of personal letters and a diary that contained a detailed journal of her voyage. The piety with which she submitted to God's will even under extreme conditions was presented as a model for others to follow in the footsteps of Christ. Harriet Newell's *Memoir* was published in 1817 and contained portions of her writings

14 WAYLAND, 1853, 1: 6.

15 KNOWLES, 1829. Another collection of her letters is published in JUDSON, 1828. There are two other Ms Judsons whom are dealt with in WILLSON, 1856.



arrayed in chronological order. These materials had been made public, according to the editor, because of the extraordinary “closing scenes of her life, and the Missionary zeal which has recently been kindled in this country”. The *Memoir* should thus enable the reader “to observe the progress of her mind, the development of her moral worth, and some of the most important events of her life.”<sup>16</sup>

The life stories of heroic woman missionaries were instrumental for recruiting new personnel and naturally were addressed to a pious female audience. Eliza referred in her own *Memoir* to both Newell and Ann Judson. Recalling her personal moment of “awakening”, she noted in a letter to a friend dated New Year’s Day 1823: “The conversation of my father, the closing of the year, the recurrence of my birth-day, and especially the perusal of Mrs. Newell’s writings, have all been sources of awakening to my conscience.”<sup>17</sup> On another occasion Eliza invoked the example of Ann Judson to express her inner doubts and fears: “Last evening I took up some lines written on the death of Mrs. Judson; and as I read the affecting description of her death, the trials incident to the life of a missionary, were so vividly brought before my mind, that my heart almost sunk within me.”<sup>18</sup>

Eliza had learned from her readings that a missionary’s life path was full of perils and setbacks, but it was also a religious journey, leading from ignorance to enlightenment and ultimately from this world to the next. Conversion did not mean spiritual contentment but was a constant struggle for spiritual progress to be documented in a personal journal or other forms of self-narrative.<sup>19</sup> Her book contains numerous passages of painful self-inspection and lengthy theological reflections that testify to Eliza’s indefatigable quest for religious awareness, transforming her life course as a missionary into a pathway to religious self-improvement. Her autobiography was arranged as a physical voyage as well as a mental exercise, unfolded in a sequence of biographical stations which a missionary wife had to pass, from a worldly and indulgent youth to religious awakening, and from conversion to self-sacrifice for the promotion of Christ’s

16 NEWELL, 1817: iv.

17 JONES, 1842: 4–5.

18 JONES, 1842: 21.

19 According to her husband Eliza was using Philip Doddridge’s *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul* (1745) “for daily devotional reading” (JONES, 1838). Doddridge’s work was intended to show the way to salvation, laying out the stages of the process with constant reference to the Bible. See WEBB, 1996: 12–41, here 31.

kingdom.<sup>20</sup> Moments of tragedy and heroic virtue abound in her biography, while the language of submission is ubiquitous. When she had to face the death of her son Henry Grew in October 1833 after months of illness, Eliza remarked: “when I am disposed to murmur, and to ask ‘why has God thus dealt with me?’ every unsubmitive thought is silenced by a reflection on the perfect wisdom and goodness of God”.<sup>21</sup> Faithfulness dominated even on her deathbed. The American writer Lydia H. Sigourney was one of Eliza’s teachers in Providence. She authored a short portrait of her former pupil and reported from Eliza’s last minutes:

To the pupils whom she had long taught, and the servants whom she summoned to her bedside, she said, – ‘I am about to die. – But I fear not death. – Never forget what I have taught you. – Follow it. – Repent. – Trust in Christ. Shall we meet in heaven.’<sup>22</sup>

Eliza Jones was like her husband a native of New England, the home par excellence of the Great Awakening in the United States. A striking feature of the second Great Awakening in the early nineteenth century (the first one dating back to the 1740s) was the predominance of female converts, most of them young, who outnumbered male converts by approximately thirty percent. Female piety was stimulated by the industrial revolution, which in the decades following American Independence transformed New England’s agriculture-based household economy into a market economy. Young unmarried women were more directly affected by these developments than other groups of society, because they largely depended on general household work conducted in the family. Professional specialization, wage-earning and an increase in cash-based purchase of household goods decreased the importance of domestic manufacture and brought young women uncertainty rather than opportunity. Evangelical societies could offer safety and comfort to young women who were “unsettled” and disoriented. Conversion also opened up an avenue to circumvent the authority of men over women because it established a direct relation to God’s authority. At the same time regular church service and additional small group meetings put effective pressure on participants to either convert, or to devote their life exclusively to religion *after* conversion.<sup>23</sup>

20 See ROBERT, 1996: 39–80.

21 JONES, 1842: 85.

22 SIGOURNEY, 1851: 298.

23 COTT, 1975: 15–29.



The religious activism of evangelical movements created frustration among their female members and often instilled the desire to do more. Becoming a missionary wife was one possible role-model in Baptist circles to operate successfully within the social system and for gaining recognition in the peer group. In Baptist mission theory the biblical mandate to “go and make disciples of all nations” was incumbent on women as well as the men of church.<sup>24</sup> The theologian Leonard Woods delivered a memorial sermon on the occasion of Harriet’s lamented death and argued that the self-denial of a missionary wife who left behind her home and family was even “more remarkable” than that of her husband, because women were “more sensible to the tenderness of natural relations, and to the delights of domestic life”.<sup>25</sup> Throughout the nineteenth century women served as itinerant evangelists, deacons, or delegates, but it took many years before they could be officially ordained because public ministry remained long restricted to men.<sup>26</sup> In public women were expected to exhibit self-renunciation rather than self-assertion, assisting their husbands rather than pursuing evangelical work in their own right. But for Baptist propaganda female life stories were no less important than those of men. Numerous biographies and collections of women missionary biographies published after 1820 attested to a growing readership of such works.<sup>27</sup>

Eliza Jones’s biography was construed as an ostensibly authentic self-narrative which conformed to these examples and at the same time would appeal to the public taste. In the West she is probably better known for her posthumously published *Memoir* than is John for his arduous work as a disseminator of Christianity in Siam. Taylor Jones translated the New Testament from Greek into Thai, a task that took him ten years to complete. But in the year of its first publication (1843), and also of its republication (1850), there probably was not a single person in Europe or the U.S. who could assess the merits of this work with any scholarly authority. It was easier for a Western readership to appreciate achievements of this kind when the direction of the languages translated was reversed. Taylor Jones’s namesake Sir William Jones, for instance, is now famous for his English (and French) rendering of Persian and Sanskrit literature, while Siamese Jones, who wrote his major works in Thai, is almost forgotten today. His life as a preacher and translator has not become a

24 ROBERT, 1996: 3.

25 NEWELL, 1817: 201.

26 HOLMES / O’BRIEN, 2005: 84–102.

27 See for example FORESTER 1848; EDDY, n.d., and EDDY, 1855.



prominent topic in Baptist or other writings, and there is still no reliable bibliography of his work available in any language. An obituary authored by Reverend S. F. Smith appeared in the *Missionary Magazine* in 1853. It was only seven pages long and had little to say about Taylor Jones's published work.<sup>28</sup>

### 3. Conversions and Encounters

In a letter written shortly after her arrival in Bangkok in 1833 Eliza Jones described her first impressions of Siam and the Siamese in the following manner:

We feel that we are exiles from our native land, our beloved friends, the religious privileges we once enjoyed, and even from civilized life [...] When we look around on those among whom we dwell, and feel what it is to live in the midst of 'a people of unclean lips,' we are ready to cry with Israel's psalmist, 'My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord.' I am now reading the Psalms in course, and find them sweeter and more appropriate than ever before. I was not sensible of the frequency and fervour of David's complaints of wicked men and the misery of living with them. What a holy indignation does he manifest against sin, and how pathetically does he lament his lot in witnessing it! And if David, though a sinner himself, was distressed by the conversation of the wicked: if even my heart, polluted as it is, can be pained by witnessing the moral depravity of my neighbours and fellow citizens, and feel it to be a calamity to dwell among them, what must our holy and blessed Saviour have endured while sojourning with publicans and sinners, an exile from all the glories of heaven!<sup>29</sup>

Eliza invoked Isaiah 6:5 and Psalm 84:2 to express her inner feelings as a stranger living in a land where the number of Christian inhabitants was extremely small. The "Courts of the Lord" were far away. Eliza would never feel at home in Siam; even after three years of residence in Bangkok she still felt like living "in the heart of the enemy's country", constantly battling against an ignorant and often hostile environment.<sup>30</sup> In a curious memorandum entitled "Resolutions for 1838 to read over every night and morning" she had noted down in pious language a list of seven dos and don'ts to hold steadfast to her course. The memorandum, not included in the *Memoir*, is a document of self-control, admonishing her not to be "impatient when dealing with inferiors" or to

28 SMITH, 1853: 1–7.

29 JONES, 1842: 79–80.

30 JONES, 1842: 129.

“put down wandering thoughts”; but she also reminded herself to “avoid unprofitable conversation”, adding Matthew 12:36 for explanation, which seems to hint at resignation that had befallen her towards the end of her life, and her gradual withdrawal from the outside world.<sup>31</sup>

When the Joneses came to Bangkok in 1833, Siamese contacts with Western cultures were still limited. With only a handful of Catholics residing in a separate camp in Bangkok, Christian influence in the country was insignificant.<sup>32</sup> Missionary activities virtually ceased in the aftermath of the so called Revolution of 1688. In the second half of the seventeenth century king Louis XIV with the newly-founded French Foreign Mission (*Société des Missions Étrangères*) and a delegation of fifteen Jesuit priests had made a first serious attempt to spread the Catholic faith in Siam and tried to convert the Siamese king Narai to Christianity. But when these plans were revealed in 1688, they immediately stirred outrage among the Siamese people and ultimately led to an interruption of Christian missionary activities in the country for the next 140 years.<sup>33</sup> Christian missionaries were not to try seriously to convert the Siamese again until the early nineteenth century, after the Thai capital had been moved from Ayutthaya to Bangkok and a new dynasty was reigning in the kingdom. The first Protestant missionaries in Siam were Karl Gützlaff and Jacob Tomlin, who arrived in Bangkok in 1828 to explore the field. Three years later they were joined by David Abeel, an American missionary ordained in the Dutch Reformed Church. They stayed on until 1832, commuting between Bangkok and other Protestant missionary stations in Asia during these years.<sup>34</sup>

Although in the year of their arrival the American envoy Edmund Roberts was concluding with King Rama III a treaty which granted full protection to the new missionaries to Siam<sup>35</sup>, the Joneses had to face a number of difficulties. It was less easy than expected to find a piece of land for the establishment of a missionary station. The Siamese authorities were occupied with preparations for

31 The “Resolutions” are annexed to JONES, 1838. Matthew 12:36 runs (in the King James Version): “But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.”

32 VELLA, 1957: 35–39.

33 See for the historical context of these early missionary endeavors VAN DER CRUYSSSE, 1991, and for French sources LAUNAY, 1920.

34 Their journals on Siam have partly been re-edited in FARRINGTON, 2001. Tomlin has left two accounts on Siam: TOMLIN, 1831; TOMLIN, 1844.

35 See ROBERTS, 1837. Part of his description of Siam is republished in SMITHIES, 2002: 20–124.



war against Annam in late 1833 and could not fulfill their promise to assisting the missionaries in erecting a house for the mission. Moreover, the few Catholic Christians residing in Bangkok were mostly hostile towards the newcomers, thwarting every attempt of the missionaries to find a place for permanent location in their quarter. In a journal written for the Baptist Board in December 1833 Taylor Jones described the Catholics as “part Portuguese, part Peguan, part Cambodian, part Siamese [...] They are the greatest thieves and drunkards in the country and yet they are proud and always careful to inform strangers, that they are not natives, they are Christians!”<sup>36</sup>

The Joneses finally established a missionary station “of very crude construction” on a piece of land close to the Portuguese Consulate, and in subsequent years invested most of their effort in learning Siamese and propagating their faith in the vernacular.<sup>37</sup> Since a large proportion of Bangkok’s inhabitants were Chinese, the Baptist Missionary Society decided in 1834 to appoint William Dean to serve the Chinese, an American dentist and preacher who spoke the Teochew dialect.<sup>38</sup> Preaching places were being established in Bangkok and adjacent locales and in two small boarding schools the women cared for a few children. Eliza worked as instructor for the Siamese section and assisted her husband in preparing Christian literature in the Siamese language. The distribution of tracts and scripture portions became one of the main forms of missionary activity. These texts were often carried far inland by waterways or on Chinese junks. Bangkok also became a Christian training school for China. Taylor Jones and his brethren trained several missionaries who later moved forward to China when the Qing Empire was forced open to Christian work.<sup>39</sup>

The Joneses had to deal with many discouragements during their stay in Bangkok. The tropical climate proved detrimental to people’s health and there were many untimely deaths among children and adults alike. Taylor Jones lost altogether two wives and three children during his eighteen years in Siam. What is more, a fire in 1851 burnt down the entire Baptist mission, “including dwellings, chapel, printing-press, type-foundry, book-bindery, libraries, schools and personal property.”<sup>40</sup> For a time the school work was given up by the

36 JONES, 1833: 8 (emphasis in the original manuscript).

37 MCFARLAND, 1999: 29.

38 Dean and Taylor Jones became close friends some time earlier in Singapore, when Dean fished him out of the Singapore harbor where Malay pirates had tossed him. See WELLS, 1958: 16.

39 MCFARLAND, 1999: 29–30.

40 MACFARLAND, 1999: 31.



women of the mission who had no strength to carry on teaching. The number of converts remained disappointingly low in subsequent years. Western observers found many reasons to explain the drawbacks which the Christian missions had to face in Siam: the enduring practice of polygamy; the education of the youth in Buddhist temples; the Siamese fear of foreign domination; but also notorious competition among the different missionary orders.<sup>41</sup> Frederick Arthur Neale, a British visitor in Siam in 1840, conveyed that there were notorious hostilities even between the Protestant denominations regarding certain points of Church doctrine. Hostilities regularly broke out on their monthly meetings and “generally ended in a flood of tears and a hugging match all round.”<sup>42</sup> Yet the missionaries had to compete, above all, with local religious leaders whose authority was deeply entangled in tradition. The converts to Protestantism were thus mainly people from the margins of society such as poor Chinese immigrants, who made up the majority of local members of the Baptist church in Siam.<sup>43</sup>

These obstacles were complemented, one must say, by an internal tension between seclusion and expansion dominating among the missionaries. Like many other Christian groups, the Baptists have developed a strong sense of social cohesion. They saw themselves as an exclusive congregation of believers, firmly tied together by a common faith achieved through personal religious enlightenment.<sup>44</sup> Although cooperation with other Protestant orders in Siam was obligatory on a professional level, both men and women were expected to marry, and remarry, within the Baptist camp. After Eliza’s death in 1838 Taylor Jones remarried twice. His second wife was Judith Leavitt from Meredith Village, New Hampshire, whom he met during a visit to the United States in 1840. She soon fell ill in Bangkok, never to recover, and died in 1846.<sup>45</sup> One year later John made another trip to the United States and returned to Siam with his third and last wife, Sarah Sleeper, born 1812 in Gilford, New Hampshire. She

41 The Catholic Church was re-established in Siam in 1830 and eight years later the Vatican installed Jean-Baptiste Pallegoix as Vicar Apostolic of Siam and titular bishop of Mallus. Pallegoix authored a valuable account of the kingdom (PALLEGOIX, 1854). He also published in the same year a four language dictionary in Thai, Latin, French and English (PALLEGOIX, 1854a).

42 NEALE, 1852: 34.

43 See KEYES, 1993: 259–284; for similar developments elsewhere in Southeast Asia KEYES, 1996: 280–292.

44 On the roots of Baptism in the seventeenth century see DUNAN-PAGE, 2006.

45 THE BAPTIST MISSIONARY MAGAZINE, 1846: 132.

outlived her husband by 38 years and was in 1853 remarried to Samuel Jones Smith, an adopted son of John and Eliza, then ca. 23 years old.<sup>46</sup> In 1851 Sarah and two other American women missionaries received a request from King Mongkut to teach the women in the palace, but the missionaries were later dismissed for their attempts to convert their students to Christianity during the lessons.<sup>47</sup> The Baptist idea of religious purity did apply to family politics as well as every kind of social intercourse, so barriers were high for outsiders to join the group, while in turn it was unthinkable for the Baptists to assimilate to the world of the “people of unclean lips”. Jones believed that the willingness with which many Western foreigners sexually engaged with local women was one of the main obstacles for successful proselytizing in Siam.<sup>48</sup> It was in fact the fundamental condition as well as the duty of a foreign missionary to be, and remain, an *alien* in the land of the others.

At the same time the language of the foreign mission was marked by expansionism. In appreciation of Jones’s work as a missionary, S. F. Smith wrote in his obituary that Jones had sacrificed his life for “the conquests of the gospel” in order “to plant in another kingdom the standard of the Redeemer”.<sup>49</sup> The missionaries scarcely spoke openly about *territorial* conquest in Southeast Asia<sup>50</sup>, however, but there was from the outset a moment of religious fanaticism inherent in the missionaries’ preaching which at times rendered their endeavors strange and bizarre. On Karl Gützlaff’s missionary methods Edmund Roberts wrote:

These worthy men did much good when they were here, by administering medicines to the sick, and in many instances, no doubt, in distributing useful and religious tracts in the Siamese and Chinese languages; but the injudicious though well-meant zeal of Mr. Gutzlaff

46 Samuel J. Smith was an orphan of Indo-British descent whom the Joneses had adopted during their stay in Burma. See WELLS, 1958: 17.

47 TERWIEL, 2005: 157.

48 JONES, 1833: 7.

49 SMITH, 1853: 2.

50 Although Taylor Jones remarked in his handwritten journal (JONES, 1833: 2) on the people of Terengganu “They are proverbially kind to Europeans [...] and the Rajah expresses a wish to Mr Hunter that the English [...] take his country under their protection. He is now obliged annually to pay the tribute of a golden tree to the Siamese, whom the Malays all cordially hate [...] The country seems to be fertile and capable of yielding a handsome revenue in pepper, coffee, tin and gold dust”. After the conclusion of the Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1909 power over Terengganu (now in Malaysia) was indeed transferred from Siam to Britain.



in the very outset, within the first two days of his arrival, gave great cause of offence to the government; for he immediately threw many thousands of tracts into every floating house, boat and junk, as well as into cottages. An order was issued for his immediate expulsion from the country, and that his tracts should be collected and burnt. And had it not been for the friendly interference and good management of Mr. Hunter<sup>51</sup>, who was a favourite with the praklang<sup>52</sup>, the order would have been executed.<sup>53</sup>

Sometimes Taylor Jones was no less extreme in this regard. In a journal written in February 1836 he gave a detailed account of his life as an itinerant preacher in Siam, arranged as a series of cross-cultural encounters. When he was not writing and translating, Taylor Jones traveled through Bangkok from temple to temple. Following the example of the Judsons in Burma, he occupied on these occasions a pavilion on the temple ground, waiting with his tracts in hand for people to come by. He physically conquered, as it were, the sacral space of the pagans and once a decent crowd was assembled, he started preaching.<sup>54</sup> Siamese Buddhists unfamiliar with these habits were usually calm and curious enough to tolerate such a transgression, if only to hear a foreigner speaking to them fluently in their native language. But Jones often insulted the images of the Buddha as pagan idols in his sermons, scorning indigenous beliefs and rituals as superstitious and primitive. When he was invited on one occasion to attend the opening of a new temple, Jones used the opportunity to publicly preach against Buddhism:

After passing through another canal, about two miles in length, and crowded with people, where I had never been before, I was invited into another temple just finished, where I denounced the folly of idolatry, and urged the claims of Christianity till I was hoarse, Oh, that my 'prophesying' to these 'dry bones' might, through the breathing of the Spirit, impart to them some spiritual life.<sup>55</sup>

One almost inevitable consequence of this behavior was alienation, if not hostility, on the side of the Siamese; Jones freely admitted that he was often ridiculed by or received harsh and unfriendly responses from his audience, while he was more successful when weak health tempered his religious fervor:

51 The British agent Robert Hunter.

52 I.e. *Phrakhlang*, or minister of Treasury and Foreign Affairs (in Roberts's time this position was held by Dit Bunnak).

53 ROBERTS, 1837: 268.

54 JONES, 1836: 235.

55 JONES, 1836: 236.



Being rather unwell, I concluded to visit a *wat*<sup>56</sup> near my house. I found they were repairing the *zayat*<sup>57</sup>, and consequently took my seat under a little shelter erected over a landing place. Seeing me sitting alone, curiosity prompted one after another to come and see me. The place was soon filled by a dozen or more, to whom I stated many important truths. They had so much of a disposition to dispute, that I had but little hopes of doing them good. The one who stayed the longest was, however, quite intelligent and gentlemanly, and begged so earnestly for the only copy of Matthew I had with me, that I gave it to him. Just after dinner, he called at my house, with nearly a dozen of his associates all begging for books [...].<sup>58</sup>

The Siamese, in general, responded in a friendly way to foreign religions, although the great majority of them preferred Buddhism. However, while religious tolerance was a precondition for the Christian mission, it did not necessarily facilitate conversions. Religious tolerance, or indifference, even turned out to be a major impediment to successful proselytizing. Early during his stay in Siam Jones reported on a conversation with a Buddhist monk from Burma which he found discouraging even though the discussant was, in the words of Jones, “pleasant and not so stupid as most of the priests are”. But the monk “endeavoured to avoid giving Christianity that serious attention it demands, by maintaining that that and Boodhism were all the same in substance, that a great many Gods had appeared in succession; Gaudama was one, Jesus another. How painful to hear Him ‘by whom all things were made and are made’ thus put on a level with such a being!”<sup>59</sup> Another way of responding to the Christian message was complete incomprehension. There is a telling episode in this regard from one of Eliza’s letters of the same year (1836):

At the entrance to one of the temples, I met with an old gray-headed man, who was employed to assist in repairing it, and said to him, ‘you are an old man.’ He assented. ‘You will soon die,’ I continued, ‘and then what will become of your spirit?’ At first, he replied, he did not know; but the next moment his eye brightened, and he looked upward, pointing toward the sky, and said, ‘I shall go to heaven for working at this temple.’ ‘No,’ said I, ‘that will not take you there.’ ‘Where shall I go then?’ ‘I do not know; if you worship the true God, and believe in his Son, he will take you to heaven; if not, you cannot be saved.’ ‘Who is the Son of God?’ I gave him, in answer to this last question, a brief account of Christ’s mission to earth, and his death on the cross for the salvation of all men, and left him. How did my heart sink within me as I walked down the steps, to see him look up in my face with an expression of wonder, and say, ‘she can speak Siamese!’ And this, thought I, is all the

56 Thai for “temple”.

57 Jones used the Burmese word *zayat* for a pavilion in Buddhist temples (in Thai: *sala* ศาลา).

58 JONES, 1836: 235.

59 JONES, 1833: 5.

interest the poor old man takes in the glorious tidings which have just reached his ears; and such, my dear sister, is the impression which such conversation makes, apparently on nearly all with whom we labor.<sup>60</sup>

#### 4. Translating Christianity: Dialogues and Controversies

The missionaries had to learn that public preaching alone had not the desired effect and additional qualifications would be needed for successful missionary work. Taylor Jones recommended, for instance, that all missionaries to Siam should have some medical knowledge that could serve “as a means of access to the people which can be gained in no other way.”<sup>61</sup> His wish was fulfilled when in 1834 the *American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions* (ABCFM) appointed the physician Dr Dan Beach Bradley to work as a missionary in Siam. He arrived in Bangkok in July 1835, where he was to stay, with an interruption of three years, until his death in 1873. Bradley is well remembered in Thai history for his pioneering work in medicine and for his later occupations as court physician and tutor to King Mongkut. Bradley also worked as a printer and publisher in Siam. He used a press brought over from Burma in 1835, with Siamese types cast in Bengal. He edited the *Bangkok Recorder*, Siam’s first newspaper concurrently printed in English and Thai between 1859 and 1873, and the *Bangkok Calendar*, an almanac published in English.<sup>62</sup> It was new for the Siamese at that time to argue with Western missionaries on the basis of Christian texts written in the vernacular, printed by newly established printing houses in Bangkok and distributed in substantial number by boat or overland in the capital as well as in some adjacent provinces. The Siamese court soon adopted these printing techniques which brought a new element into Siamese religious discourse more generally, stimulating public debates on religious and political issues in the country.<sup>63</sup> The German traveler and ethnologist Adolf Bastian who had visited Siam in 1863 spoke of a growing literary activity in Bangkok during the Fourth Reign due to the scholarly interests of King Rama IV

60 JONES, 1842: 123–124.

61 JONES, 1832.

62 On Bradley as a publisher see LORD, 1969: 93–102.

63 Taylor Jones related in a letter in 1844 that Prince Mongkut had ordered typing fonts to be cast by the missionaries (JONES, 1844a).



and his court, who published a yearly almanac, a court periodical and numerous royal proclamations on various issues of public concern.<sup>64</sup>

Bradley also assisted Jones in printing and circulating his religious texts. The Baptists had established an own press in 1836 (with Thai types purchased in Singapore), but were also permitted to use the facilities of the ABCFM when necessary. As legatees of the Reformation, Protestant missionaries from all denominations saw their spiritual authority as rooted ultimately not in personal charisma but in sacred texts. They believed that through the study of the Scriptures they had gained an exclusive understanding of God's will that would prove superior to the teachings of any other religion. According to this self-understanding it was vital to propagate Christianity in Siam by way of printed books and tracts in the vernacular. Earlier endeavours in this regard were either lost or useless; Jones mentioned in the preface to his *New Testament* that Jesuit priests in the seventeenth century had purportedly prepared earlier versions of the Bible in Thai but these manuscripts had not survived to his day. On a more recent attempt made by Karl Gützlaff Jones remarked:

It will sufficiently characterize his translation to say that it embraced the whole of the Old and New Testaments executed with two other translations of the same extent in three years, without any previous knowledge of either of the three languages – Siamese, Kambojan and Laos – and executed too while the translator was preaching in Chinese, making Siamese and Cochinchinese vocabularies, and practicing medicine and surgery.<sup>65</sup>

Taylor Jones published his own translation in several separate portions as each was completed, and then again in full in 1843 and 1850. It does not appear from either the title page or the preface to the work that Jones had any assistance in preparing it, apart from previous manuscripts accessible to him which he had examined but found overwhelmingly insufficient. However, it is most likely that some of his Siamese language teachers assisted him in his task. Eliza's contribution to her husband's work was probably also more substantial than he acknowledged, since she mentioned in her letters that she had translated into Siamese two books of the Old Testament, and prepared a dictionary of several thousand words of that language.<sup>66</sup> According to her former instructor Sigourney, Eliza also learned Greek as a school girl without the assistance of a

64 BASTIAN, 1867: 87–88. For a selection of Mongkut's official proclamations and other writings in English see PRAMOJ/PRAMOJ, 1987.

65 JONES, 1850: iv (preface).

66 GAMMELL, 1854: 192.

teacher.<sup>67</sup> The missionaries produced a remarkable output of religious literature in Thai; between 1839 and 1842 the Baptists had printed 25 books and treatises, each title between 24 and 272 pages long. Among these publications were three editions of a *Summary of Christianity*, the gospels of Matthew, Luke and Mark, the Acts, the story of Daniel, literature of religious instruction and on language as well as a tract entitled *Golden Balance*.<sup>68</sup>

It is reported that later in his life Taylor Jones was more fluent in Siamese than in English, “to the astonishment of his friends who had heard him preach in both.”<sup>69</sup> Jones argued in a public address delivered at the *Newton Theological Institution* in 1840 that the prosecution of missionary work involved a thorough and fundamental knowledge of the local language as the medium of communication. Equally important to him was “a due regard to adaptation in the communication of truth”; the missionary should be “wise in adapting himself, and the truth he utters, to the condition and circumstances of those whom he would instruct.”<sup>70</sup> He did not explain in detail what *adaptation* would mean in practice, but what he did was to study the sacred texts of the Siamese in order to find terms that would be appropriate for translating the Bible. By borrowing terminology from Buddhist scriptures Jones gave his Thai Gospel a Buddhist flavour which reflected the distinctive language practices of non-Christian Siamese. In these rare moments of entanglement, however, Jones necessarily failed to discriminate the sacredness of Christ from that of the Buddha. This was immediately noticed by king Rama III who considered banishing their translations thereof, accusing the missionaries of using “sacred expressions” in their gospel translations.<sup>71</sup>

Jones frequently reported in his letters and journals on Siamese reactions to his proselytizing work in everyday life, mostly by recounting parts of his discussions with Buddhist priests. These records are valuable historical sources since only few other direct Siamese responses have been preserved elsewhere. Jones sought to instill a sense of doubt into his Siamese counterparts that should little by little undermine their belief in Buddhism. He presented religion and nature as intrinsically tied to each other and demonstrated, for instance, that traditional Siamese cosmology was inconsistent with the insights of modern science. In particular he referred to the *Traibhumikatha* (in Thai *Traiphum Phra*

67 SIGOURNEY, 1851: 294–295.

68 JONES, 1843: 257.

69 SMITH, 1853: 6.

70 JONES, 1841: 2.

71 TERWIEL, 2005: 128.



*Ruang*), a fourteenth-century cosmological text which by then had provided the basis of Siamese Buddhist understanding of nature and existence.<sup>72</sup> But to his surprise the Buddhist monks did easily agree to his critique by historicising their own scriptures. He reported that he and Prince Mongkut met in December 1835 to converse on astronomy and geography.<sup>73</sup> Jones noticed that the prince, who also learned English, seemed to understand well “the Copernican system of astronomy, and to believe in it”, and then argued that this must also “affect his religious belief.” The Siamese clerics contradicted him by claiming that their holy books were given for religious and not scientific purposes. They further contended, according to Jones, “that the books referred to were written by learned men of former times, and contained the best of their conjectures on the subjects to which they relate. Thus the defence of their religion is removed to different grounds by the knowledge they have already obtained.”<sup>74</sup> Some years later, when parts of the Bible were already published in Thai, Buddhist clerics attempted to grasp the teachings of Christianity by tracing them back to Hinduism, considering the “Hindu triad and the doctrines of the Trinity” as identical, or, if not similar, regarded the one as the origin of the other.<sup>75</sup>

These explanations must have sounded familiar to Western ears, and at the same time they undermined Jones’s argument. Discussions with Buddhist priests went on in subsequent years and sometimes almost took on the form of a public dispute. In 1843/44 Jones reported in his letters that a “new party” had been formed among the Buddhist *Sangha*, whose members he denominated as “liberal” because they had adopted Western views on geography and astronomy and were more willing than others to intellectually engage with Christianity.<sup>76</sup> This new religious party was the reformist group *Thammayut* (“those who adhere to the Dhamma”) founded by Prince Mongkut in the late 1820s. A chief characteristic of this elitist Buddhist movement was a serious concern for religious purity. Mongkut and his followers emphasized the importance of the original Pāli canon and rejected all sorts of religious eclecticism. They claimed

72 English edition: REYNOLDS / REYNOLDS, 1982.

73 Jones (1836: 233) refers to a “Chau fá yai, the eldest legitimate son of the late king”, which most probably was prince Mongkut, who in the two-and-a-half decades preceding his reign was in monkhood.

74 JONES, 1836: 233.

75 JONES, 1843: 256.

76 JONES, 1844: 274.

that most of the popular Buddhist literature available in Siam was post-canonical and therefore impure, including the cosmology of the *Traibhumikatha*.<sup>77</sup>

There was from the outset an inclination to (proto)scientific rationalization of nature prevalent among the Siamese reformers that already existed prior to the first establishment of contacts with American and French missionaries. The reformers fostered an inquiring, rationalist mode of thought which they regarded as a distinctive feature of *early* Buddhism, and that in some ways overlapped with Protestant discourses on nature. Members of the *Thammayut* movement furthermore shared with the missionaries an interest in scripture and canon that can be traced back, in the case of Siam, at least to the reign King Rama I (r. 1782–1809).<sup>78</sup> But despite a number of commonalities there was from early on an intellectual strategy of “bifurcation” emerging in Siam to deal with the challenges posed by Western knowledge; its core element was to strictly separate the material world from the spiritual, however tentative and imprecise such a distinction turned out to be in practice.<sup>79</sup> It was therefore hard for Western missionaries to convince the Siamese to accept Christian teachings that went beyond the material world:

The change to which I have adverted among the priests, is advancing. Very few days pass without some of them calling. Last week I had a three hours' discussion with about a dozen of them, – young men, – thinkers, – such as I have not before seen in a body during all my residence here. They feel that Buddhism, as a religious system having divine claims, is not tenable. Christianity is too humiliating. They fly to reason, – and would fain set it up as a guide. When pushed by the ever recurring question, how, either on grounds of reason or Buddhism, sins can be forgiven? they confess their ignorance; but some, like many in lands more enlightened, would fain suppose that repentance and resolutions of amendment are all that can be required of them.<sup>80</sup>

## 5. Afterlife

Taylor Jones argued that a central problem of the Christian mission was that the Siamese were apparently insensible to questions pertaining to heaven or afterlife. Moreover, the central yet all but self-explaining Christian idea of sin, or

77 ISHII, 1986: 154–160.

78 THIPHAKORAWONG, 1978: 153–164.

79 THONGCHAI, 2010: 135–53.

80 JONES, 1844: 274.



*Original Sin*, was thoroughly alien to the Siamese. Buddhist reformers did also not believe in supernatural phenomena or in explanations that could not be verified by empirical observation; therefore educated priests considered the missionaries' belief in a Creator-God as superstitious.<sup>81</sup> Direct responses to his writings and preaching are scant in Siamese literature but debates on the topics he invoked in his work continued after his death. A generation later the Siamese state minister and scholar Chaophraya Thiphakorawong made a short remark on Jones's views on Buddhism in which he dismissed them altogether as biased and inaccurate. Thiphakorawong's critique was embedded in a full-fledged rebuttal of Christianity, published in 1867 under the title *Nangsue Sadaeng Kitchanukit* (A Book on Various Things).<sup>82</sup> It reportedly was the first textbook on science in Thai and the first book printed by the Siamese without foreign assistance. Thiphakorawong not only sought to explain why the Western sciences were superior to those in his own country, but also intended to prove that a purified version of Buddhism was better fitted to withstand scientific scrutiny than Christianity. Thiphakorawong referred in his work to printed Christian texts and to verbal communication with missionaries from various churches and sects.<sup>83</sup>

The minister was actually not the only author of the *Kitchanukit*. A driving force behind it was Prince Mongkut, who had published a series of critical articles on Christianity in the *Bangkok Recorder* some time earlier. These writings provided a basis for Thiphakorawong's work who freely borrowed from them in his *Kitchanukit*.<sup>84</sup> Jones's translations enabled Siamese literates to examine Christianity based on a body of Christian tracts and canonical texts, but in Thiphakorawong's reading some of the stories of the Bible turned out as being as irrational and fabulous as those of the *Traibhumikatha*.<sup>85</sup> He did also not see how baptism could improve people's life. He knew that the majority of the Christian missionaries in Siam lived under most precarious conditions. Self-sacrifice for God might have been an ideal for foreign missionaries in Christian

81 JONES, 1843: 256.

82 "The American missionary, Dr Jones, wrote a book called the 'Golden Balance for weighing Buddhism and Christianity', but I think anyone who reads it will see that his balance is very one-sided; indeed, he who would weigh things ought to be able to look impartially at the scales". Transl. from ALABASTER, 1871: 18–19.

83 For a longer treatment of the *Kitchanukit* (with a focus on polygamy) see REYNOLDS, 2006: 185–213.

84 SOMJAI, 1983: 110–112.

85 THIPAKORAWONG, 1971: 121–128.

cultures, but Thiphakorawong found such a life humiliating and did not regard personal suffering as a virtue in itself.<sup>86</sup>

Thiphakorawong's knowledge of science was only cursory and in many cases inaccurate. Westerners in Bangkok thought he was too superficial in his discussion of religions, especially Christianity, and ridiculed most of his comments on modern scientific learning. His arguments were also not entirely new when the *Kitchanukit* appeared in print. We know from Jones's writings that the general Siamese strategy to isolate science from religion already evolved in the 1830s. Jones's translation of the New Testament, as well as his other religious publications in Thai, rather deepened the gap. He provided the Siamese reformers (who apparently were his predominant readers) with weapons against the universal claims of Western civilisation according to which Christianity, reason and human progress were integral parts of an unified whole.<sup>87</sup> The Bible however contained passages that ran counter to human reason, a problem that haunts Christianity since the European Enlightenment, and the lives of foreign missionaries did not seem exemplary or desirable to the Siamese. The missionaries could not quite acknowledge that and blamed the people for their ignorance, but they could never really dispel people's doubts.

## 6. Conclusion

The *Kitchanukit* was partly translated and published in English by the British official Henry Alabaster, who worked in Bangkok as a deputy Consul and in 1872 became a personal adviser to King Chulalongkorn. His short book was entitled *The Modern Buddhist*, indicating that Alabaster clearly felt the book represented a major shift in Thai worldviews and epistemology.<sup>88</sup> His translation did not pass unnoticed in Europe; it provided Western readers with first original views of a Thai Buddhist on comparative religion and was

86 THIPHAKORAWONG, 1971: 109 et seq.

87 This was the perception of the Thai historian Damrong Rajanubhab who distinguished in this respect the universalistic approach of the Protestants from that of the Catholics; see ISHII, 1986: 157.

88 ALABASTER, 1870; one year later Alabaster published a slightly enlarged translation: ALABASTER, 1871: 1–73.



particularly welcomed by Western critics of the Christian foreign mission.<sup>89</sup> Bad press for the Mission was certainly adverse to further evangelical efforts in Siam, but Alabaster's translation came too late anyway to affect the Baptist station in Bangkok. In 1860 the Siamese branch of the church counted 14 chart members only; in 1869 it was decided to suspend the Siamese Mission.<sup>90</sup> Many contemporary observers, clerical and otherwise, regarded the Baptist mission in Siam as a complete failure.<sup>91</sup> Taylor Jones's missionary methods came under critique a few years after his death in 1851. In his *History of the American Baptist Missions* William Gammell considered the Baptist's work in Siam as a waste of time and energy.<sup>92</sup> Reverend Jones felt "desolate in a heathen country" at the end of his life, suffering from bad health and coping with the consequences of a number of sudden deaths in the station as well as other unforeseen disasters.<sup>93</sup>

While central features of Christianity were considered in Siam as strange and unfamiliar by most people whom the Christian missionaries tried to convert, Buddhist reformers readily acknowledged Western advancement and superiority in science and technology. The Protestant missionaries were rather appreciated for what they did in the country apart from or instead of proselytizing. Many Siamese were eager to learn from Westerners and honestly admired the scientific expertise of the foreigners. Taylor Jones was esteemed in Siam as an interpreter for the English and American ambassadors at the Siamese court; other educated missionaries had been advisors and favorites of kings and nobles and were sought after as instructors to teach the Siamese medicine or the use of modern technology. People like D. B. Bradley, William Dean or Jesse Caswell gained reputation as language instructors or as "native informants" in conversations on Western religion and philosophy, but in all these cases the essence of the Christian message was left unheard.

The lives of Eliza and John Taylor Jones marked the limits of the Christian foreign mission in Siam and at the same time reveal some of its hidden motives and unexpected side-effects. As *life-narratives* the writings of the Joneses can

89 See e.g. LITTELL's *The Living Age*, 1870: 235–238. Some sections of the Modern Buddhist were published in German in MÜNCHNER ALLGEMEINE ZEITUNG, 1870: 1129–1130; 1151–1152.

90 SIAM REPOSITORY, 1869: 318

91 See for a profound contemporary critique in BOWRING, 1857, 1: 335–337.

92 GAMMELL, 1854: 194. A nuanced assessment of the Christian mission in Siam is provided by MACDONALD, 1871: 173–213.

93 JONES, 1851.

deepen our understanding of the social, religious and literary sources that informed their life-course, and may help to explain how the idea of a missionary biography shaped their live-narratives in Protestant missionary literature. The lives of the Joneses can also help historians to grasp the nature of conflict which informed cross-cultural conversations between Buddhists and Christians at that time – a conflict that would frame the ways in which the intrusion of colonial modernity and the enduring power of Thai culture and identity were negotiated in Siam throughout the nineteenth century.

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