

Christian Evangelism and the Creation of a Thai Ethnology

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Thailand
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Research background:

My master's thesis examined the role that Christian missionaries, namely William Clifton Dodd of the Laos Mission in Northern Siam and William Marcus Young of the Shan Mission in Burma, played in creating local ethnologies in the late 19th century and early 20th century. My research argues that each missionary created ethnologies to justify his own church's expansion into areas contested by the other by claiming that the people living in that area were of the same ethnicity as the inhabitants of the area in which his church was based.

Research purpose and aim:

This research aims to examine the reasons behind the missionaries' definition of ethnic groups and race in Siam and Burma. Since ethnicity and race are social constructs, it will examine for whom and for what purpose these ethnic groups were created. The aim of my research is to link these early ethnographers and their purposes to the nationalism of the 1930s, as well as to compare them to current ethnographic trends in the region.

My research will rely on letters of correspondence William Marcus Young sent to his home church, the American Baptist Church in the US, and to members of the church contesting Kengtung, the Presbyterian Laos Mission, and letters of correspondence William Clifton Dodd sent to his home church, the US Presbyterian Church, and to members of the American Baptist Burma Mission.

Results and achievements of fieldwork:

I set out on this field trip to learn how the missionaries William Clifton Dodd and William Marcus Young justified their churches' expansion into areas that, according to church comity rules, were not theirs to expand into, by looking at the correspondence that they sent, including to their respective home churches in the US. I was able to collect the letters by Dodd during my fieldwork. I spent about two weeks visiting the Payap University Archives, where the William Clifton Dodd letters are kept.

Implications and impact on future research:

I will utilize this experience as a primary resource in future research for my doctoral dissertation, for articles I plan to submit to academic journals over the coming year, and for academic conferences I intend on attending.



Wat Chedi Luang, Chiang Mai



Wat Jed Yod, Chiang Mai



Chiang Mai National Museum, Chiang Mai