

## **HeRD #363 - A Pentecostal Perspective on John Song**

One of the "sermons" HeRD preaches is that how we look at the past matters. The Rev. Robert (Bobby) Nishimoto provides a case in point in his recently published (in Thai) history of the Pentecostal Movement in Thailand. Nishimoto comes to church history generally and Thai church history in particular with a definite perspective, one that I feel substantially misinterprets the latter, if not the former. He begins his work with a brief sketch of general church history that seeks to demonstrate that Pentecostalism is the true heir to the Christian faith. When he begins his study of Thai church history, however, he ignores the whole history of the church before the Song Revivals of 1938 and 1939. To read Nishimoto, nothing happened before 1938. Dr. John Song was a Chinese revivalist, and his exciting, eccentric preaching style and his straightforward, blunt messages enthused thousands of Thai Christians. He brought a period of meaningful renewal to Thai Protestant churches and left a lingering impact on the lives of many individuals. Nishimoto gives him so much attention because he sees in Song a proto-Pentecostal who facilitated the introduction of Pentecostalism into Thailand. He, thus, claims Song for Pentecostalism and marks in him the beginning of the Pentecostal movement in Thailand.

It's no small matter that Nishimoto's holy history begins with Song rather than the longer history of Thai Protestantism. It creates the impression that all previous work in Thailand was inconsequential to the Pentecostal experience here. Song, in fact, was the culmination of a longer period of revivals that began in Thai Protestant churches in the mid-1920s. That revivalistic movement, in turn, grew out of the longer historical experience of those churches. Pentecostal churches, furthermore, have relied heavily on "converts" from the older churches to build up their own churches. Former CCT leaders played key roles in the early stages of Pentecostal work. The point in all of this is that Thai Pentecostalism is itself an expression of the longer and larger Thai Protestant experience. It's part of the larger tapestry. I would hazard the guess that one reason Pentecostalism has been disruptive rather than healing is because both Pentecostals and their opponents have assumed that Pentecostalism was something new in Thailand. In this case the Preacher was right when he said there IS nothing new under the Sun. The successes and failures of the Pentecostals are as much an expression of 19th and earlier 20th century Protestant history as are the successes and failures of the Church of Christ in Thailand also expressions of that history.

## **HeRD #364 - Thailand's First Pentecostal Church**

The Finnish Free Foreign Mission (FFFM) founded the very first Pentecostal church in Thailand in 1949. It was located in the village of Ban Huey Swing, Petchabun Province. The Rev. Verner Raassina was the missionary in charge of the Petchabun work, located at Ban Lom Sak, some 20 kms away from Huey Swing. As the story goes, Raassina heard that there was a Christian at Huey Swing, and on 1 July 1949 visited the village. There he found Pho Thao Plaw, an elderly man who had received a Scripture portion 30 years earlier and long waited for someone to explain its meaning to him. After 3 days, some 22 men declared conversion, and on a second visit in August another 20 men and women converted. For some years the church founded at Huey Swing prospered. The FFFM provided it with a lay "pastor," and by 1956 the church had over 100 members. It experienced a particular "outpouring of the Spirit" in May 1956 during the dedication of its new church building.

According to Jouko Ruohomäki in his MA thesis, "The Finnish Free Foreign Mission in Thailand in 1946-1985: A Descriptive History," the situation at the Huey Swing Church then deteriorated rapidly. He gives no dates, but apparently what happened is that the members of the church experienced drought and poor crops. They had to migrate elsewhere, doing so in three different contingents. The main group moved to Ban Huey Yai. There its leader and several members first joined a Churches of Christ mission group and then eventually became Catholics. Ruohomäki argues that the reason they left was because these mission groups offered a better income to the lay "pastor" of the group than could the FFFM. Ruohomäki doesn't tell us what happened to the two other groups, but the result was that the once promising Huey Swing Church died.

Source: Ruohomäki, Jouko. "The Finnish Free Foreign Mission in Thailand in 1946-1985: A Descriptive History." Master's Thesis, Grand Rapids Baptist Seminary, 1988.

### **HeRD #376 - Pentecostal Beginnings in the North**

Pentecostalism first came to northern Thailand in 1956 when Samaan Vannakiat and Chaiyong Watanachantin arrived in Chiang Rai Province. These two young men were profoundly touched by the Osborn Pentecostal revival meetings held in Bangkok in that year, and in their newly won enthusiasm toured the province visiting churches and sharing that experience with others. Within a short period of time, five Pentecostal groups were formed, largely out of members of CCT churches. At some point shortly thereafter, the Finnish Free Foreign Mission began to take an interest in these northern Thai Pentecostal groups and sent a missionary to visit them. By 1958 the FFFM was sending regular teaching missions, and three of the groups (Chiang Rai City, Pa Daen, and Ban Ring) were reported to have over 100 members each. In that same year, 1958, the Tynkkynen family moved to Chiang Rai to become the first FFFM missionaries assigned to the North. Even before their arrival, the Chiang Rai Pentecostal churches were spreading into regions where there were no CCT churches. In 1959 the Pa Pong Church dedicated of what seems to have been the first Pentecostal church building in the North.