

Thai Christian Books (or the lack thereof)

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For English speakers, there is a massive amount of Christian books and resources available but for many other languages in the world, it is simply not the case. Two recent experiences really drove this truth home, as it relates to Thailand.

I had the chance to visit Bangkok Bible Seminary (BBS), take a tour, and talk to some teachers and students. When we went up to their small library to look around, I was surprised to see that only about one-fourth of the library was Thai Christian books and the rest were in English. The students all know some English but the majority really don't know enough to make use of these English books at any significant level. So, about 75% of their seminary library is functionally unusable for the majority of the BBS student body. If the English level of the majority of students is insufficient to make good use of the resources in the library, why not add more Thai books? Because they just don't exist.

There are some Christian books available in Thai, but not many. The seminary wants the teachers to write more books but they are all very pressed for time. So, the students use the Thai resources that exist and struggle to get whatever they can from the English books. I could be mistaken, but I imagine that for many students the thought of trudging through theological English is so intimidating that they just skip it all together. My Thai reading ability is probably better than the the English reading ability of many of the students, and I still find it difficult to work my way through Thai books. I find it nearly impossible to skim for information in Thai but must slow down to read everything if I want to get anything out of it. That makes it tough to find things in a big book, never mind doing any significant research on anything. I imagine that it is not that different for many of these Bible college and seminary students when it comes to English books. I have great respect for anyone who successfully does university or graduate level research in a second language.

Following my visit to Bangkok Bible Seminary, I visited Kanok Bannasan (OMF Publishers Thailand). One of the few Christian publishers in Thailand, Kanok puts out about 10 new books per year, most of them translated from English. With nine people on staff, they are perhaps the biggest Christian publisher in Thailand. Christian Education and Development (CED), another Thai Christian publisher, has put out a number of helpful books but is currently running on a skeleton crew of two people. I have also been impressed by some of the good books put out by Tyrannus Center, another Christian publisher here in Thailand. They continue to sell books from their warehouse, but I have heard that they are not currently publishing anything new. Other Thai Christian publishing houses have come and gone, finding it difficult to stay in business. And then there are various churches, missions, and Bible schools putting out their own resources, but many of these resources don't get much distribution beyond the group that published them.

Within the past couple of years, a website called Thai Christian Resources has been developed, featuring a large free online collection of Thai Christian books and articles. All the resources may alternatively be purchased on a thumb drive for 800 baht or so, for Thai pastors and church leaders with access to a computer but limited Internet access. There are many Internet cafes in Thailand but personal computers at home are still not very common in Thailand.

Since there is so little Christian publishing in the Thai language, the few publishers that exist bear a great responsibility. The missionary who showed us around Kanok Bannasan said, "If we don't publish it, then the Thai churches don't know about it." Think about that for a second. There are so many publishers of Christian books in the English language that if one publishing house doesn't print something, somebody else will. And the odds are that even if nobody publishes a particular book, there are at least twenty other books on the same topic available elsewhere (although admittedly, perhaps not with quite the same perspective). Not so in Thailand. A Thai Christian man whom I know had been talking with some Thai Muslims and had all sorts of questions about the differences between Islam and Christianity. I did what I could to answer but it has been awhile since I have studied Islam, and I am not well versed on Muslim apologetics since I work primarily among Buddhists. I went to find a Christian book in Thai that compared Islam and Christianity but I couldn't find anything. It just doesn't exist.

Thai people are, in many ways, oral learners and getting more books is only one part of the evangelism and discipleship equation. However, it is not an insignificant part. Research has shown that one in six Thai Christians say that literature of some sort has played a role in their coming to faith in Christ. And I have met Thai people that I wouldn't have guessed enjoyed reading, but they do (see my previous post on "Maybe Thai People Do Like to Read!"). And I know Thai Christians who have enjoyed and benefitted from Thai Christian books

Please pray for more Thai Christian books that Thai Christians and missionaries alike will be better resourced for evangelism and discipleship. More specifically:

- 1) Pray that the LORD would provide the resources and the personnel to get more quality appropriate Biblically sound Christian books translated into Thai.
- 2) Pray that the LORD would raise up more mature Thai Christians with both something Biblical to say and the ability, time, and desire to express it clearly in writing. Translated books are good to an extent but it is really Thai Christian writers that are more desperately needed - men and women who understand the Bible, understand the worldview of Thai Buddhists, and understand the pressing issues of the day facing Thai Christians and Thai churches.