

## HeRD #63 - Persecution

The following anecdote will help us understand that being a northern Thai Christian in the 19th century was not easy. Wilson, in a July 1880 letter to the Board, told the story of an aged Christian's daughter who happened to be the slave of a princess. The daughter's owner had her whipped severely for no reason other than that she had been attending Christian worship services. The princess, according to Wilson, was a quick-tempered woman who was given to such beatings. The Christian mother lived out in the country, but she herself was a "client" of the princess, which meant that she was liable to be called for service at any time. Shortly after the daughter's beating she was, indeed, called into town. In fear, she went to the Wilsons and asked them for protection, but they decided that they couldn't do anything legally. It would be better for her to go to the princess. Having no choice, she did that taking along with her a little gift. Much to her relief, she was sent to work in the princess' gardens for a period of time and not bothered or oppressed in any way. Eventually she was allowed to return home.

One still hears the charge that the old-time missionaries "bought Christians" and that no one would have converted otherwise. The converts, so this line goes, were the victims of religious imperialism. Not true. Many of the earliest generation of northern Thai Christians experienced the uncertainties and fear of this woman. Whole groups were subjected to long-term petty persecution. Missionary assistance was of only limited value to them in many cases.

[JW to Lowrie, 23 July 1880, v. 4, BFM, #80]

## HeRD #77 - Student Papers: Kru Suk I

Kru ["Teacher"] Suk Khunasawat, pastor of Wiang Pa Pao Church, north of C'Mai, was one of the CCT's most capable pastors prior to World War II. Another student paper presents a brief biography of Kru Suk and devotes considerable attention to a central event in his life. At the beginning of Thailand's involvement in World War II, Kru Suk publicly declared himself a Buddhist. The author of the paper, a descendant of Kru Suk, is trying to make sense of that event.

Thailand entered the War as a reluctant ally of Japan, and government policy encouraged the persecution of Christians. In line with this policy, local government officials in April or May of 1942 ordered Kru Suk and other Christians to appear at the government offices. They didn't know why. The person responsible for their appearance was Kru Suk's own son-in-law, a policeman who was not a Christian. About 70 Christians, including women & children, appeared. They were seized, forced onto an army truck, and taken off to a local temple. There they were intimidated into making obeisance to a Buddha image and publicly declaring themselves Buddhists. They were threatened with death if they refused. Having done as ordered they were transported home. Relatives report that Kru Suk cried openly during that return trip and after his return he and his wife engaged in long private prayer. He later confessed his sense of failure on several occasions and for a time declined to continue in pastoral ministry. He was later severely criticized in some quarters for publicly renouncing his Christian faith.

In HeRD #78, we'll look at the analysis of this event.

## HeRD #78 - Student Papers: Kru Suk II

In HeRD #77, we looked at Kru Suk's public denial of his Christian faith. The paper explains that denial as follows: 1] Kru Suk was confronted with the situation suddenly and unexpectedly. He had no time to think it through. 2] There were Christian women and children involved and all were under a clear, immediate threat of danger. Kru Suk himself was a loving pastor, and these events put him in fear for his parishioners. 3] His policeman son-in-law threatened to desert his daughter if she remained a Christian. Kru Suk feared that if he refused to follow orders that day: first, his daughter might be subjected to immediate physical retribution; second, she would become husbandless; and, third, he would cause his son-in-law trouble and maybe even cause others to think the son-in-law was a party to a Christian rebellion. 4] Kru Suk was too fearful. Other Christians, faced with the same crisis, refused to give in, and came to no harm. The paper goes on to imply that Kru Suk didn't really deny his faith, in spite of this event. Throughout the

war years he continued to carry out evangelism, to lead worship, and to pastor his parishioners informally. His tears after the event prove that he repented of the act.

These events tell us a great deal about the ordeal Thai Christians faced during World War II, esp. in its early phase. There is no question but that Kru Suk was a committed Christian. He served his church faithfully and sacrificially for many years. There is also no question that at this one critical moment he denied all of that out of fear -- for the safety of those with him, for his daughter's safety, for his son-in-law, and probably for himself. Since its inception, the Church has had to deal with Christians who denied their faith under threat and then later sought re-admittance. There has long been divided opinion about how severe or lenient to be. Cases like Kru Suk's indicate that the issues involved are difficult.