

HeRD #267 - Musical Indigenization

Indigenization is the process of transforming that which is foreign to an environment into something that is native or native-like to that environment. On the whole, the "old time" missionaries weren't very good at indigenization. At the end of the 19th century, however, Presbyterian missionaries were making some attempts at indigenizing church music. An article in the May 1895 issue of *WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN* describes such efforts. In the North, the Rev. Jonathan Wilson was writing new hymns in northern Thai. An unnamed person had turned "Old 100th" into a chant, and the Rev. Robert Irwin had also turned the Gloria Patri into a chant. In Bangkok, Miss [Larissa] Cooper had re-written a number of hymns to conform to Siamese prosody. The article stated, "It is believed the Christian religion will gain by using the native melodies...especially those sacred and venerable chants which are associated with religion in Siam." This is the earliest instance that I'm aware of in which the Presbyterians in Thailand consciously sought to adapt church music to Thai culture. It gives us further evidence that in the 1890s changes were taking place in missionary thinking about the relationship of Christianity to Thai culture.

Source: [no author], "The Service of Song in Siamese and Lao Worship," *WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMAN* 10, 5(May 1895): 122-23.