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Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism in the US and Beyond

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by Karl Dahlfred

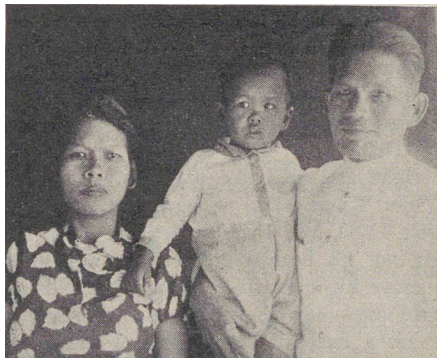
The Indelible Mark of Boon Mark Gittisarn on Twentieth-Century Christianity in Thailand: A Brief Biography

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Abstract: Over the course of nine decades in the twentieth century, Thai pastor and evangelist Boon Mark Gittisarn tirelessly preached the Gospel throughout Thailand, asserted Thai leadership when missionaries were slow to yield control, and helped launch Thailand's Pentecostal movement. His spiritual journey began with American Presbyterians and shifted to fundamentalism, then Pentecostalism, and ended with Seventh Day Adventism. During this time, he linked himself to diverse evangelical, fundamentalist, and Pentecostal figures including John Sung, Carl McIntire, and T. L. Osborn. Bold and charismatic, Boon Mark fought against missionary paternalism, decried theological liberalism, and provided leadership that united and divided Thai Christians and missionaries, leaving an indelible and transformative mark upon the churches of Thailand.

Keywords: evangelicalism, Pentecostalism, fundamentalism, Thailand



Introduction

In the predawn hours of December 8, 1941, the Japanese military launched an invasion of Thailand, quickly securing the surrender of the Thai government who

1. Image used with permission from the Presbyterian Historical Society. Allen Bassett, "Buddhism Often Paves Way for Christ," *Women and Missions* 15, no. 8 (November 1938): 265.

concluded that it would be suicidal to resist.² As the Japanese began their occupation with the cooperation of Thai forces, American Presbyterian missionaries in the far north fled over the mountains into British-controlled Burma and those further south were initially put under house arrest before being interned at the Thammasat University campus in Bangkok. Thai church buildings, as well as mission schools and hospitals, were commandeered by the Japanese as needed to be used as troop barracks and administrative posts among other purposes. In the years leading up to the war, the nationalist campaigns of Thailand's Prime Minister Plaek Pibulsongkram pressured Thai Christians to "return to Buddhism" and government employees were often required to pay homage to a Buddha image as proof of loyalty to the Thai nation. With the commencement of Japanese wartime occupation, Christian public worship was prohibited. Christians sought to lay low and avoid attention with many intentionally distancing themselves from the Christian faith entirely. Given these circumstances, Japanese troops were probably caught off guard when one day they entered a certain church in Bangkok and encountered Thai pastor and evangelist Boon Mark Gittisarn (บุญมาก กิตติสาร).

"Get away from this place! This is God's church!"³

Though he could have been arrested or shot, Boon Mark was not going to allow Japanese soldiers to take the church. Surprisingly, Boon Mark's rebuke was enough to get the soldiers to leave with no further consequences.

With the missionaries out of action and many Christians afraid to show themselves, Boon Mark and a handful of Thai Christian leaders took the initiative to travel throughout Thailand, visiting Thai believers and encouraging them to stay faithful in the midst of wartime scarcity and social pressure to abandon the faith. And Boon Mark did not forget about the missionaries either, disguising himself as a bicycle rickshaw driver in order to sneak supplies into Thammasat University where the missionaries and other expatriates were interned until they were repatriated in 1942.⁴

In the decades leading up to the Second World War and in the decades afterwards, Boon Mark Gittisarn was a powerful force in Thai Christianity, alternatively uniting and dividing both Thai believers and missionaries. Though Boon Mark shifted denominational and theological allegiances multiple times, joining forces with figures as diverse as John Sung, Carl McIntire, and T. L. Osborn, Boon Mark's

2. David K. Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 245-47.

3. These may not have been his exact words, but this is the essence of what Boon Mark told the Japanese according to his youngest son. Sornsark Gittisarn, Interview by Karl Dahlfred, telephone call, March 1, 2023.

4. Karl Dahlfred, "History of Christianity in Thailand," in *Missions in Southeast Asia: Diversity and Unity in God's Design*, ed. Kiem-Kiok Kwa and Samuel K. Law (Carlisle, UK: Langham Publishing, 2022), 130-31; Interview with Sornsark Gittisarn, March 1, 2023.

driving purpose in life remained constant. He worked tirelessly to bring Thai people to faith in Jesus Christ and to enjoy greater depths of spiritual experience in God. Though his ministry spanned twentieth century evangelicalism, fundamentalism, and Pentecostalism, Boon Mark always easily fit within David Bebbington's oft-cited definition of an evangelical as one who is committed to conversionism, activism, biblicism, and crucicentrism.⁵ Like many Western evangelicals, he fought against modernism. Yet in the mission context of Thailand, his battle against modernism was closely linked to his struggle to be free from missionary paternalism. Boon Mark benefitted from and aided the ministries of foreign evangelists and missionaries in Thailand, but he did not allow himself to be limited or controlled by them. He felt at liberty to shift loyalties from one person or group to another when the new one seemed to better align with Boon Mark's core convictions, namely advancing evangelism, providing deeper Christian experience, or more closely adhering to the Bible. He was neither antimissionary nor anticolonial but he aggressively criticized fellow Christians, foreign or domestic, whom he thought were harming Thai churches or impeding evangelism through paternalistic control or bad theology. As we will see in the following biographical sketch of his life and ministry, Boon Mark Gittisarn was his own man. His shifting loyalties and inveterate cross-denominational networking were driven by his evangelical commitments, even while his charismatic and divisive manner provoked strong reactions from fellow Christians whom he dismissed as opponents of the truth. Sadly, in his later life, advocacy for rebaptism in the name of Jesus only and a moral failure left a permanent stain on Boon Mark's record in the eyes of many.

Boon Mark is not well known today and is largely only remembered by older Thai Christians and missionaries, and the small handful of people who study Thai church history. Yet, his constant promotion of evangelism and revival as well as his advocacy for Pentecostal experience have had a formative impact on churches in Thailand up to the present day. His legacy, mixed though it may be, has left an indelible mark on Christianity in Thailand and deserves to be known today for the lessons, both positive and negative, that current and future generations may draw from it.

American Presbyterian Beginnings

Although he did not always see eye to eye with them, Boon Mark's spiritual journey began with the missionaries of the American Presbyterian mission (APM) in Thailand who invested substantial time, energy, and finances into his personal, spiritual, and educational development. Born on September 1, 1898, into a Buddhist family in Ratburi province, Boon Mark entered Padoongrasdra School in the city

5. David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1989), 1-20.

of Pitsanuloke after his father was transferred to the city.⁶ Padoongrasdra was a Christian school for boys run by the American Presbyterian mission and is likely the first place that Boon Mark was exposed to Christianity. However, his first impression of the faith was apparently not positive. He reportedly hated Christianity and even spat on the Bible.⁷

But something changed in Boon Mark. Missionary John L. Eakin reported that “after a hard struggle with himself, he accepted Christ.” In 1915, he was baptized at Christkunanukul Church in Pitsanuloke.⁸ Boon Mark was given an educational scholarship from the Presbyterian mission station in Pitsanuloke to continue his studies at Bangkok Christian College, a mission-run boys high school in Bangkok.⁹ Paul Eakin, brother of John and executive secretary for the American Presbyterian mission in Thailand, reported that at Bangkok Christian College, Boon Mark “always took a strong Christian stand, and was always ready to take leadership in Temperance and Street evangelistic meetings.”¹⁰ Paul Eakin, whom Boon Mark would eventually come to regard as an opponent, also noted retrospectively that “even at this time [during Boon Mark’s studies at Bangkok Christian College], he showed that he was erratic and loved to be sensational.”¹¹ This criticism may be an overstatement, though further developments in Boon Mark’s life lend some credibility to Eakin’s assertion. Eakin wrote prolifically about the American Presbyterian Mission’s work in Thailand and was a generally reliable recorder of events, even if his commentary on those events reflected his personal biases. Boon Mark was growing into a bold and fearless evangelist who did not hesitate to speak his mind. His trajectory did not mesh well with Eakin’s emphasis on avoiding offending Thai cultural sensibilities and witnessing to Christ through Christian living in mission schools more than direct verbal proclamation of the Gospel.¹²

6. John L. Eakin recorded in 1938 that Boon Mark’s father was a lieutenant in the Thai army and that Boon Mark grew up in a military barrack. However, John’s brother Paul Eakin reported that Boon Mark was the son of a police officer. Sornsark Gittisarn also recalled that Boon Mark’s father was a police officer. John L. Eakin, “Siam’s Delegation to the Madras Conference,” *Siam Outlook* 9, no. 4 (October 1938): 149-51; Paul A. Eakin, “Influence of Foreign Evangelists in Thailand”, 1956, RG017/80, Box 1, Folder 14, Eakin Papers, Payap University Archives (PUA), Chiang Mai, Thailand; Interview with Sornsark Gittisarn, March 1, 2023.

7. Interview with Sornsark Gittisarn, March 1, 2023.

8. Eakin, “Siam’s Delegation”; Jaakko Mäkelä, *Khrischak Issara: The Independent Churches in the Bangkok Metropolitan Area, Thailand, their Historical Background, Contextual Setting, and Theological Thinking* (Åbo: Åbo Akademi University Press, 2000), 68.

9. Though Herb Swanson and Sornsark Gittisarn place Boon Mark’s conversion at Bangkok Christian College, both John Eakin and Paul Eakin indicate that he came to faith at Padoongrasdra School in Pitsanuloke. Herbert R. Swanson, “Boon Mark Gittisarn,” in *Dictionary of Asian Christianity*, ed. Scott Sunquist (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 89-90.; Interview with Sornsark Gittisarn, March 1, 2023; Eakin, “Siam’s Delegation”; Eakin, “Influence of Foreign Evangelists.”

10. Eakin, “Influence of Foreign Evangelists.”

11. Eakin, “Influence of Foreign Evangelists.”

12. For more on Eakin’s theology and philosophy of ministry, see Karl Dahlfred, “Conservative

An Outspoken, Young Evangelist

Following his graduation from Bangkok Christian College in 1921, Boon Mark was offered a job by an American firm but instead chose to become a station evangelist for the American Presbyterian Mission in Pitsanuloke.¹³ Over the next ten years or so, Boon Mark traveled far and wide, both in the Pitsanuloke area and other parts of Thailand, proclaiming the Gospel along with missionary and Thai coworkers. Writing in 1938, John L. Eakin affirmed that “[f]rom the beginning he was interested in the evangelistic work and proved himself an able and faithful helper in this field.”¹⁴

In late 1924, Boon Mark got a taste of cross-cultural evangelism when he and some coworkers took the train from Pitsanuloke to Sawankaloke district of nearby Sukhothai province to visit Karen tribal villages to share the Gospel. Writing about his experience in *Siam Outlook*, the American Presbyterian Mission in Thailand’s quarterly magazine, Boon Mark said that he hoped to get a Karen preacher from northern Thailand to accompany them on their next trip because the Karen villagers would understand him much better than they did Boon Mark and his coworkers when they presented the Gospel in Thai. “The Siamese language to Siamese about spiritual things is very hard to understand,” reported Boon Mark, “but to talk to those of a different language is much more difficult.”¹⁵

Boon Mark’s evangelistic journeys also brought him to Petchaburi province, southwest of Bangkok, where he assisted John A. Eakin, father of Paul and John L., with evangelistic outreaches.¹⁶ It was in Petchaburi that he met his future wife, Muan Suphaban (ม้วน สุภาพันธ์). Some time after meeting Muan, Boon Mark paid a visit to Paul Eakin to tell him that he was going to get married. Eakin, however, cautioned him that the “ascetic life did not jibe [sic] with his present intentions [to marry].”¹⁷ The reason he said this was because, in the early 1920s, Boon Mark had developed an interest in Sundar Singh, a controversial Indian Christian mystic, ascetic, and itinerant preacher who became well known for both his stories and parables, as well as his claims of miraculous experiences and visions.¹⁸ Boon Mark translated an account of Singh’s life into Thai and, according to Paul Eakin, “boasted that he was going to be another Sundar Singh for Thailand.” Eakin expressed concern that Boon

in Theology, Liberal in Spirit: Modernism and the American Presbyterian Mission in Thailand, 1891-1941,” (PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2020), 112-15, 132-35, 215-18.

13. Eakin, “Siam’s Delegation”; Interview with Sornsark Gittisarn, March 1, 2023.

14. Eakin, “Siam’s Delegation,” 149.

15. “Thai” and “Siamese” are used interchangeably in this article. Boon Mark Gittisarn, “The Karen People, North of Sawankaloke” *Siam Outlook* 4, no. 4 (April 1925): 141-43.

16. John A. Eakin to Paul Eakin, February 26, 1924, RG017/80, Box 5, Folder 2, Eakin Papers, PUA.

17. Eakin, “Influence of Foreign Evangelists.”

18. Mark A. Noll and Carolyn Nystrom, *Clouds of Witnesses: Christian Voices from Africa and Asia* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2011), 157-66.

Mark could not hope for happiness in family life if he still held to the superiority of the ascetic life. Boon Mark told Eakin that he had changed his mind.¹⁹ Boon Mark and Muan married in 1923 and eventually had six children together.²⁰

In Pitsanuloke, missionaries Herbert Stewart and Alvin Cooper taught a three-year Bible course to Boon Mark and other Thai church workers. However, according to Boon Mark, no single mission station could provide all the training needs of the church, so a larger, more formal Bible school was needed. “The work of God is growing and our churches need more men and women to advance the work,” wrote Boon Mark. “We must be well educated and have a great knowledge of the Bible and know how to deliver the Truth.”²¹ In light of this widely recognized need, in 1927, an advanced post-high school level class was opened at McGilvary Theological Seminary in Chiang Mai. Founded in 1912, the seminary was already offering training for church elders and lay people, but the American Presbyterian mission wanted to start an upper-level class in order to train men for ordained pastoral ministry. Boon Mark was one of six men in the school’s first advanced class. Students spent six months of the year in Chiang Mai for their studies and the other six months in their respective stations, preaching and touring. But even while in Chiang Mai, evangelism was a regular part of student life. Boon Mark reported,

We also do evangelistic work while we are here in school. We go out in groups many Sundays to preach the Gospel in villages near and far. Some of the men of the lower classes go out for three days at the end of the weeks. The Laos people accept teaching more easily than the Siamese of the South. But we must work for all and we must learn to be patient. Every night and morning we meet for prayer. Sometimes we visit a Buddhist Temple in the city. The priests, and the men and women listen to us when we talk about religious matters. Some are quite interested and some very far away from understanding. But by the Grace of God, we hope to reap from the seed that is being sown.”²²

During his studies in Chiang Mai, Boon Mark reportedly got into trouble with local Buddhists, and the matter was relayed to Prince Damrong (สมเด็จพระยาบรมราชานุภาพ), a senior member of the Thai royal family who paid close attention to mission affairs. The content of Boon Mark’s criticisms is unknown, though Paul Eakin characterized them as “unjust.” Due to Boon Mark’s connection with the American Presbyterian Mission, Damrong contacted Paul Eakin to rein in Boon Mark for the

19. Eakin, “Influence of Foreign Evangelists.”

20. Interview with Sornsark Gittisarn, March 1, 2023; Swanson, “Boon Mark Gittisarn,” 89; “Former Official of the Church of Christ in Thailand Passes Away,” *Church News ข่าวคริสตจักร* (April 1987): 47

21. Boon Mark Gittisarn, “McGilvary Theological Seminary, Chiangmai,” *Siam Outlook* 6, no. 2 (October 1926): 34.

22. Gittisarn, “McGilvary Theological Seminary,” 34.

sake of maintaining good relations between the mission and the government. Eakin claimed that he did his best to “reason with the boy, but did not get far. He continued his tactics, saying that he must ‘obey God rather than man.’”²³ There is no record of Boon Mark’s perspective in this situation, but it is probable that he thought that Eakin should have stood behind him as a Christian evangelist instead of taking the side of the Buddhist government. Also, it is odd that Eakin referred to Boon Mark as a “boy” given the fact that Eakin was only eight years older than Boon Mark, who was around thirty years old at the time of the incident. However, referring to him in this way may be a reflection of the difference in power and authority between the two and Eakin’s judgment that Boon Mark lacked tact and discernment in how he spoke about Buddhists and Buddhism. This conversation with Eakin was likely just one of many incidents that contributed to the eventual rift between the two men, as well as Boon Mark’s later criticism that the American Presbyterian mission was compromised by modernism and paternalism.

This incident was not the last time that Boon Mark’s forthrightness caused mission leaders to question the cultural appropriateness of his communications. Following graduation from McGilvary Theological Seminary in 1930, Boon Mark continued at Pitsanuloke for a time before transferring to the Bangkok station in 1931 to work with Paul Fuller, an American Presbyterian missionary with fundamentalist leanings. Fuller had supported Boon Mark’s studies in Chiang Mai and was glad to have Boon Mark as a full-time member of his evangelistic team. Fuller praised Boon Mark as “a tower of strength ... [who] has had much varied and valuable experience.”²⁴ Boon Mark’s love for direct proclamation of the Gospel meshed well with Fuller’s evangelistic drive. Yet not all in the American Presbyterian mission in the 1930s shared those convictions for speaking the truth plainly. In a letter to Paul Eakin, missionary educator Kenneth Wells flagged up a section from a Sunday school lesson written by Boon Mark that Wells felt had the potential to unnecessarily anger Buddhists. The section that had Wells concerned urged readers to

Dispose of idols and come and seek the living God... Buddhist statues don’t have life but Christ is alive. In the body of a statue, there is nothing but in the will of Christ there is love. Those who bow to statues will in a little while become like those statues they worship, namely they will have no life or soul; they will have no love or mercy. Therefore, dispose of idols and come to Jesus Christ. You will have more and more life, love, and mercy just like Him
(author’s translation).²⁵

23. Eakin, “Influence of Foreign Evangelists.”

24. Paul Fuller to Cleland McAfee, September 1931, RG84, Box 10, Folder 14, UPCUSA COEMAR Secretaries Files: Thailand Mission, Presbyterian Historical Society (PHS), Philadelphia, Penn.

25. Kenneth Wells to Paul Eakin, March 4, 1935, RG001/78, Box 14, Folder 2, APM, PUA.

“Is there no way of censoring S.S. stuff like the enclosed?” Wells asked Paul Eakin. “Every once in a while some wild statement which weakens the cause creeps in. In this respect Kru Mark and Paul Fuller are a bad combination. Surely it is not necessary to anger those whom we would win.”²⁶ It is unlikely that any action was taken on Wells’s suggestion to censor Boon Mark’s Sunday school lessons because several months later, Wells felt compelled to write to Eakin again about one of Boon Mark’s Sunday school lessons. This time, he objected to “another long tirade against the Seventh Day Adventists, in which they are spoken of in a very derogatory manner.” Though Wells admitted that he had no love for the Seventh Day Adventists, he hated to see them spoken about “on such a low plane” because it reflected poorly on the dignity of the Presbyterian church.²⁷ Eakin spoke with Boon Mark about the matter and reported back to Wells that Boon Mark had “good reason for some strong statements he makes.” The Adventists had falsely claimed that Boon Mark had come over to their side, and they were very aggressive in many places. Boon Mark was getting letters about them from other places around Thailand. Though Eakin and Boon Mark had their differences, Eakin felt that Boon Mark had some justification in this instance.²⁸

Though there are no further details about the events that gave rise to Boon Mark’s criticism of the Adventists, their claim that he had come to their side may indicate that Boon Mark had significant contact with Adventists and had become interested in their teachings. He may have criticized them, but he was also curious. Given Boon Mark’s long-term trajectory of moving from group to group and maintaining a broad network among diverse Protestant and Pentecostal figures, churches, and organizations, it is highly likely that Boon Mark had at least occasional interactions with Seventh Day Adventists through the years. Although he would not significantly expand his connections with non-Presbyterian groups until after the war, Boon Mark was already demonstrating that he was open to exploring other Christian traditions that meshed with his essential evangelical commitments. Boon Mark’s relationship with Seventh Day Adventism will receive further consideration later in this article when Boon Mark becomes formally associated with the Adventists near the end of his life.

Boon Mark’s Rising Star in the Thai National Church

Despite the concerns of some missionaries about Boon Mark’s approach and style, his star continued to rise in mission and church circles through the 1930s. Even as he

26. *Kru* is a Thai word meaning teacher. Kenneth Wells to Paul Eakin, March 4, 1935, RG001/78, Box 14, Folder 2, APM, PUA.

27. Kenneth Wells to Paul Eakin, September 26, 1935, RG001/78, Box 2, Folder 12, APM, PUA.

28. Paul Eakin to Kenneth Wells, October 1, 1935, RG001/78, Box 2, Folder 12, APM, PUA.

continued to work with Paul Fuller in doing evangelism, Boon Mark accepted a call as pastor of Second Church in Bangkok, a position that he held from 1933 to 1948. In the early 1930s, the first Thai Protestant church denomination was being organized. The idea of a national church denomination had been in discussion for many years, and Boon Mark wrote publicly about the need for it as early as 1926. “Some of the laws and rules of the United States are hard to follow,” asserted Boon Mark, “and correspondence takes so long between Siam and America....We Siamese must wake up and meet the need.”²⁹ When the Church of Christ in Siam (later Thailand) was formally established in 1934, it was largely made up of churches associated with the American Presbyterian Mission, with a smaller number having been founded by American Baptists. Thai pastor Pluang Sudikham (เปลื้อง สุทธิคำ) was elected as the first moderator, former American Presbyterian missionary Bertha McFarland was chosen as general secretary, and Boon Mark was chosen as assistant general secretary. As a former missionary highly regarded by both Thai and foreigners, McFarland, in her role as general secretary, served as a liaison between the Presbyterian mission and the new Thai denomination, being fully part of neither but trusted by both. The American Presbyterians hoped to help the Thai establish administrative and ecclesiastical structures and procedures similar to their home denomination in the United States, and for the first four years of the denomination’s formal existence, McFarland coached Boon Mark and other Thai leaders in how to run their church. In 1938, she stepped back from this position after Boon Mark was elected as general secretary of the Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT). In this role, he chaired the CCT’s executive committee, which met more frequently than the triennial General Assembly and, therefore, had greater practical executive power for everyday ministry decisions than did the assembly.³⁰

Promoting Revival and Arguing with Missionaries

As pastor of Second Church and as a top leader of the newly formed Church of Christ in Thailand, Boon Mark used his influence to emphasize evangelism and facilitated the visits of multiple itinerant evangelists from China. In 1935, Boon Mark traveled the country with Rev. Paul Lyn, a US-educated Cantonese evangelist who emphasized repentance from sin, prayer, and the blessing and power of the Holy Spirit. Lyn left a strong impression on both Boon Mark and others. Lyn was followed by another Chinese evangelist, a certain Mr. Linn, and then a China-based American missionary revivalist. Boon Mark assisted each of these visitors, but Paul Eakin reports that this

29. Gittisarn, “McGilvary Theological Seminary,” 35.

30. Bertha Blount McFarland, *McFarland of Siam* (New York: Vantage Press, 1958), 233-39; Prasit Pongudom, *History of the Church of Christ in Thailand [ประวัติศาสตร์คริสตจักรในประเทศไทย]* (Chiang Mai: Archives Unit, Church of Christ in Thailand, 1984), 173.

series of visiting evangelists left Thai believers confused and divided.³¹ Yet none of the foreign evangelists who visited Thailand in the prewar period were as significant as John Sung (Song Shangjie), who left a lasting impact on the Thai church.

Boon Mark reported that leaders in the Church of Christ in Thailand had wanted a revival preacher, and Dr. Sung was the most important one that they had heard of. Therefore, it was suggested that he be invited to conduct meetings in Thailand. However, some of the missionaries, including Paul Eakin and Graham Fuller, opposed inviting Sung. Fuller had gotten word from China that Sung's preaching was divisive, and Eakin wrote to Henry Sloane Coffin of Union Seminary in New York City, who confirmed that Sung had been committed to a mental institution while studying at the seminary.³² Eakin spoke in the CCT's Assembly Council against inviting him while Boon Mark spoke until tears rolled down his face because he really wanted Sung to come put on a revival. The council voted thirteen to one against inviting Sung, with one abstention. Boon Mark was the sole dissenting vote and subsequently took the prerogative to invite Sung anyhow, despite the council's vote.³³ The risk of division apparently did not bother Boon Mark as long as there was the opportunity for revival and spiritual renewal.

John Sung visited Thailand for a month from September to October 1938 and again from May to August 1939.³⁴ Boon Mark traveled with Sung and served as translator, though on some occasions, Boon Mark's friend and former seminary classmate Sook Pongsanoi (สุข พงศ์น้อย) translated. Boon Mark said that Sung spoke broken English, but he thought that they did a good job translating for him. Sung at first spoke at churches in Bangkok, Nakhon Pathom, and Trang. Although some Thai were initially opposed to Sung, his preaching made such a positive impression that CCT leadership formally invited him to return for several months in 1939, during which time he made a tour of northern Thailand. Bold, direct, and dramatic, Sung emphasized themes of sin, repentance, salvation in Jesus Christ, personal sanctification, and the need for evangelism. It was reported that many backslidden Christians repented, and people were deeply convicted of their sins. He prayed for healing and for people to receive the Holy Spirit. Even Thai and missionaries who had opposed inviting Sung could not deny that Sung's ministry had brought spiritual renewal and a fresh commitment to evangelism among Thai believers. Sung made a lifelong impression

31. Boon Mark Gittisarn, "A Chinese Evangelist," *Siam Outlook* 12, no. 3 (July 1936): 128-29; Eakin, "Influence of Foreign Evangelists."

32. For an examination of conflicting accounts of Sung's time at Union Seminary and conversion, see Daryl R. Ireland, "John Sung's malleable conversion narrative," *Fides et Historia* 45, no. 1 (2013): 48-75.

33. Boon Mark Gittisarn, interview by Chayan Hirapan, December 28, 1978, transcript, Code OHT 73/79, PUA, 3-4; Eakin, "Influence of Foreign Evangelists."

34. The most comprehensive examination of Sung's ministry in Thailand is Seung Ho Son, "Christian Revival in the Presbyterian Church of Thailand between 1900 and 1941: An Ecclesiological Analysis and Evaluation" (ThD diss., University of Stellenbosch, 2004)

on Boon Mark and Sook. Even though Boon Mark judged that receiving the Holy Spirit at Sung's meetings didn't have as much effect as postwar Finnish Pentecostal meetings because no one spoke in tongues during Sung's meetings, Boon Mark was still more impressed with Sung. In a 1978 interview, Boon Mark stated, "I am almost 82 years old, and I have never seen anything like Sung's meetings."³⁵ After Sung left Thailand, Boon Mark convinced CCT leaders to retroactively reverse their decision to not invite Sung and to write a thank you note to him for coming since they had seen the fruit of his ministry.³⁶

In the wake of Sung's visits, Thai Christians formed traveling evangelistic teams, or witness bands, along the lines that Sung had instructed. Sung had also held a twelve-day Bible school in Bangkok, a model that Thai Christians wanted to emulate. A group of Thai believers, along with a handful of missionaries, petitioned the American Presbyterian mission in Thailand to approve the opening of a lay Bible institute using the facilities of McGilvary Theological Seminary in Chiang Mai. They requested that fundamentalist-leaning missionary Loren Hanna be their instructor.³⁷ Though the seminary already had both lower and advanced classes, those inspired by Sung's ministry wanted their own school. The seminary's director, Carl Elder, had strongly opposed John Sung and had bristled at Sung's deprecation of an educated ministry over against the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Elder was also sympathetic to theological modernism, which caused Sung, Boon Mark, and others to not trust him. Elder's seminary colleagues Banchop Bansiddhi (บรรจบ บันสิทธิ) and Prasert Intaphantu (ประเสริฐ อินทะพันธ์) reported that Sung and Boon Mark said that the seminary was "no use and it was useless to study there." They also claimed that Boon Mark had used Sung and his words to "advertise and get popularity for himself."³⁸ While Paul Eakin and other mission leaders wanted to encourage Bible study among Thai Christians and to conserve the enthusiasm generated by Sung's visits, they ultimately rejected the request for the new lay Bible institute. Thai church historian Prasit Pongudom (ประสิทธิ์ พงศ์อุดม) believed that refusing the lay Bible institute request was a way to bring peace to a divided church, which required resisting the rising power of Boon Mark.³⁹

Through Sung's revivals, Boon Mark had gained followers and allies in advocating for Sung-style fundamentalist-oriented evangelism and Bible teaching in Thailand. Personal loyalty to Boon Mark was also growing. In his position as general secretary, Boon Mark was increasingly able and willing to assert Thai

35. Boon Mark Gittisarn, interview, December 28, 1978, transcript, 5-6, 8.

36. Boon Mark Gittisarn, interview, December 28, 1978, transcript, 7.

37. Attendees of Bangkok Bible Conference to Executive Committee of Siam Mission, RG001/78, Box 11, Folder 15, APM, PUA.

38. Banchop Bansiddhi and Prasert Intaphantu to Paul Eakin, October 25, 1939, RG001/78, Box 11, Folder 15, APM, PUA.

39. Pongudom, *History of CCT*, 88.

leadership in decision-making in the Church of Christ in Thailand, even when the missionaries disagreed. Boon Mark often argued with the missionaries in church leadership meetings. When interviewed many years later, Boon Mark recalled that when he was general secretary of the CCT, the missionaries regarded themselves as advisors or guardians of the church and had lots of issues. There was always a representative of theirs in the big CCT meetings. They wanted to take pictures and take photos together. “It wasn’t good,” remembered Boon Mark. “I didn’t like it.” Though there is a high value in Thai culture on smooth personal relationships and maintaining harmony, Boon Mark recalled that he argued with the missionaries until he was red in the face. Boon Mark and the missionaries argued so much that Mrs. Tardt Pradipasena (ตาด ประทีปเสนา), a long-time Thai language teacher for the mission, would not look him in the face.⁴⁰

When conflicts arose at the Pitsanuloke station, which the mission had provisionally turned over to CCT control in 1934, Boon Mark and the CCT executive committee refused to accept the American Presbyterian mission’s proposed solutions.⁴¹ Mission executive secretary Paul Eakin judged the CCT executive committee’s demands as unworkable, but fellow missionary Herbert Seigle had an alternative perspective. In his judgment, because the CCT executive committee of Lek Taiyong (เล็ก ไทยง), Boon Mark, and Mark Mojadara (มาร์ค โมจาดารา) would not do things the way the Thailand mission leadership wanted them to, the mission decided to take back the station and put in charge some Thai “yes men” who would conform to the mission’s wishes. Boon Mark and his Thai colleagues were determined not to be just “yes men.”⁴² Eakin, however, claimed it was “Boon Mark’s group” that was responsible for breaking up the Pitsanuloke nationalization project.⁴³ Prior to the Second World War, Boon Mark was beginning to bristle underneath the paternalism that he sensed from the American Presbyterian mission but there were few other Protestant groups in Thailand with whom he might work. But that was about to change.

Postwar Tensions and Resignation from Second Church

With the onset of World War Two, there was a temporary suspension of hostilities between Boon Mark and the missionaries as Thai Christians faced the bigger task

40. Boon Mark Gittisarn, interview, December 28, 1978, transcript, 144-45.

41. Karl Dahlfred, “A Bumpy Road to Indigenization: The American Presbyterian Mission and the Church of Christ in Thailand,” *Journal of Presbyterian History* 99, no. 1 (Spring / Summer 2021): 40-42.

42. Paul Eakin, “Brief Review of Recent History of Pitsanuloke Project”, February 17, 1940, RG001/78, Box 10, Folder 14, APM, PUA; Albert and Jeanette Seigle to Margaret and Ken Landon, August 21, 1940, SC-38, Box 94, Folder 3, Landon Papers, Wheaton College Special Collections, Wheaton, Illinois.

43. Eakin, “Influence of Foreign Evangelists.”

of surviving and staying faithful to Christ during the Japanese occupation and accompanying religious suppression. Thai believers were on their own for five years and had become accustomed to managing their church's affairs entirely by themselves. At the first postwar CCT general assembly, the majority voted to invite the American Presbyterian missionaries to return, but Prasoke Chairatana (ประสอค์ชัยรัตน์), the moderator of the assembly, resigned in protest, believing that although they should come back eventually, that moment was not the right time. Starting in 1946, American Presbyterian missionaries started to trickle back into Thailand, bringing with them postwar relief supplies and helping Thai Christians reclaim church properties that had been seized during the war. They also reinstituted the same mission structures that they had used before the war. However, the Thai church had matured during the long absence of the missionaries and was no longer happy in the role of "little brother."⁴⁴ Though the Presbyterian Church USA was starting to seriously re-evaluate the relationship between their missions and the so-called "younger churches," change could not come fast enough for Boon Mark.

Boon Mark had been pastor of Second Church in Bangkok since 1933, but he had a growing sense that it was not really his church. The people in the church did not want him to leave but Boon Mark felt like the church belonged to "them," meaning most likely the American Presbyterian mission. In Boon Mark's mind, "they" built it. "They" started it. "I helped Second Church for a long time until I decided it was time for me to leave because I needed to go start my own church that would be mine, that would be my own nest. They saw me as a mother hen who just came and sat on someone else's eggs in someone else's nest."⁴⁵ One point of tension with the American Presbyterian mission was the appropriate use of church property. During the war, some students stayed at the church when they could not return to their home provinces. In 1946, Boon Mark wanted to use the church property to open a student hostel for girls, but missionary John Eakin opposed this, and the two men got into an argument. It was the understanding of missionary Margaret McCord, a friend of Boon Mark, that this argument led to Boon Mark's resignation from Second Church.⁴⁶ Though this incident was likely a contributing factor, Boon Mark made no mention of it when discussing his reasons for leaving Second Church when interviewed three decades later. He was clear, however, about his dissatisfaction with some elders and church members who were resistant to Boon Mark's leadership. Some did not follow Boon Mark's lead in going out to do evangelism, a fact which he resented. "Someday when I am in a coffin, they will follow me," grumbled Boon Mark. "But they won't

44. Karl Dahlfred, "A Bumpy Road to Indigenization: The American Presbyterian Mission and the Church of Christ in Thailand," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 99, no. 1 (Spring / Summer 2021): 40-42.

45. Boon Mark Gittisarn, interview, December 28, 1978, transcript, 9-10.

46. Margaret McCord to Margaret Landon, July 6, 1946, Series 2, Box 93, Folder 8, Landon Papers, Wheaton College Special Collections, Wheaton, Illinois.

follow me to evangelize.”⁴⁷ Against the will of the Second Church session (board of elders), Boon Mark dug a hole in the ground next to the church to be used as a baptistry, having become convinced that baptism must be done by immersion. On at least one occasion, Boon Mark urged the church’s elders to climb onto the church’s roof to join him in prayer. Though Boon Mark had numerous supporters and followers at the church, as evidenced by the fact that many followed him when he left, there were still many people at Second Church who displeased Boon Mark. A committee of the CCT Bangkok district council, which included mission executive secretary Paul Eakin, tried to convince Boon Mark to stay at Second Church. Boon Mark was unpersuaded. On Sunday, April 6, 1947, Boon Mark preached his last sermon at Second Church and set off strings of Chinese firecrackers as a testimony against the church members.⁴⁸ Together with some of the elders and a substantial portion of the members, Boon Mark shortly thereafter started his New Smyrna Church (later Bangkok Church) in the backroom of the American Bible Society, a property that he had taken care of during the war.⁴⁹ His original intention was for this new church to be part of the Church of Christ in Thailand, but events took Boon Mark and the church in a different direction.⁵⁰

Withdrawal from the Church of Christ in Thailand

The American Presbyterian mission in Thailand had given Boon Mark his start and had provided him with many opportunities for personal development and ministry. All his schooling had been at mission schools. He had worked as a station evangelist in Pitsanuloke and Bangkok. He had pastored a Presbyterian church in Bangkok and been chosen as general secretary of the national church. In 1938, Boon Mark and a handful of other Thai leaders traveled to India for a meeting of the International Missionary Council.⁵¹ In his own way, Boon Mark had also shown commitment to the CCT churches and was intending to bring his new church plant into the CCT. But his time with the American Presbyterian mission was coming to an end.

In February 1947, the mission’s executive committee decided to send Boon Mark to Biblical Seminary in New York with a view to getting him in as a representative

47. Boon Mark Gittisarn, interview, December 28, 1978, transcript, 10.

48. Paul Eakin reported that Boon Mark “cursed the Second Church saying it would die, and then burned incense and set off fire-crackers in the Church to give himself an auspicious start in his new Smyrna Church.” In Boon Mark’s 1978 interview, however, he made no mention of incense, cursing the church, saying it would die, or trying to achieve an auspicious new start. Eakin, “Influence of Foreign Evangelists.”

49. Boon Mark Gittisarn, interview, December 28, 1978, transcript, 10; Eakin, “Influence of Foreign Evangelists.”

50. Mäkelä, *Khrishak Issara*, 69.

51. Eakin, “Siam’s Delegation.”

at the International Missionary Council meetings in Montreal, Canada, in July 1948. Eakin reported that Boon Mark found out about this decision and started boasting about this special favor he was being given, even before the Board of Foreign Missions in the U.S. had approved it. He also claimed that he would raise money in the USA for building his new church and would tell the truth about the Mission and Church to the church in America. Thai leaders were furious. When their opinion got to the Board, they decided against sending him to the US.⁵²

In the postwar period, Boon Mark continued his criticisms of the Presbyterian mission while simultaneously branching out and making new contacts. Previous to World War Two, there were a limited number of Protestant mission groups working in Thailand. The American Presbyterians were by far the largest and most dominant. In postwar Thailand, a vast number of evangelical and Pentecostal church and parachurch groups entered the country.⁵³ On November 17, 1946, two of the first Pentecostal missionaries, Verner and Hanna Raassina of the Finnish Free Foreign Mission (FFFM), arrived in Bangkok. Due to a change in government policy in Finland, their home church was forced to cut off all funds to them, and the couple was left nearly broke.⁵⁴ Boon Mark heard of their plight and invited them to stay at Kittikhun Wittaya School, which belonged to Boon Mark's wife, Muan. This was the beginning of a long friendship with the Raassinas and was the launching point of Boon Mark's connection with Pentecostalism in Thailand.⁵⁵

In 1948, a definitive break came between Boon Mark, the American Presbyterians, and the Church of Christ in Thailand. In that year, the Church of Christ in Thailand joined the World Council of Churches (WCC), and Boon Mark formally withdrew from the CCT in protest. In Boon Mark's mind, membership in the WCC represented a compromise with theological liberalism and constituted a further move away from evangelism and gospel fidelity. Boon Mark's friend Sook Pongsanoi and a handful of other Thai leaders also left the CCT around this time. Boon Mark wrote that the World Council of Churches wanted to unite all denominations regardless of belief, but Boon Mark believed that it was necessary to agree on belief and practice in order to unite together. How then, reasoned Boon Mark, could he have a heart to unite with Christians who smoke, drink beer, dance, watch movies, and are not interested in proclaiming the Gospel? "We separate from Catholics," wrote Boon Mark, "because they added human opinions to the faith." The WCC was similar because they "do not

52. Eakin, "Influence of Foreign Evangelists."

53. Alex G. Smith, *Siamese Gold, a History of Church Growth in Thailand: An Interpretive Analysis 1816–1982* (Bangkok: Kanok Bannasan [OMF Publishers], 1982), 221-23.

54. Ervin E. Shaffer, *Under the Shade of the Coconut Palms: Missions—Thailand* (Bangkok: Thai Gospel Press, 1974): 10-12.

55. James Hosack and Alan R. Johnson, "Pentecostalism in Thailand," in *Global Renewal Christianity: Spirit-Empowered Movements Past, Present, and Future, Volume 1 Asia and Oceania*, eds. Vinson Synan and Amos Yong (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2016), 198-99.

have the Bible as a foundation, and selectively take the beliefs they like. They take anybody, but they block those who want to preach the Gospel.”⁵⁶

Joining Forces with American Fundamentalist Carl McIntire

Having severed formal connections with the American Presbyterians and the CCT, Boon Mark continued to pursue his own ministry priorities and form new associations and connections. His new church was growing quickly, and he traveled the country with his church’s evangelistic team, selling gospel portions and tracts, preaching the Gospel, and visiting and encouraging other churches. One day in late 1949, after returning from an evangelistic trip to northern Thailand, he found a short note from Rev. John Young of the International Council of Christian Churches (ICCC), who wanted to see him. Boon Mark had never heard of Young or the ICCC, but the following day, the two men met up. Boon Mark reported that they had a “wonderfully ... long conversation about the churches and the problems of the East.” The ICCC, a fundamentalist organization founded by American preacher Carl McIntire as an alternative to the more ecumenically-minded WCC, was having a meeting in Bangkok and invited Boon Mark to be a delegate to their meeting, an invitation which he happily accepted.⁵⁷ McIntire, Young, and other members of the ICCC had come to Bangkok to attend some of the sessions of the East Asia Christian Conference, an interdenominational organization of churches associated with the World Council of Churches and the International Missionary Council. McIntire and his associates were denied entrance to the meetings that were held from December 4 to 11, 1949, at Wattana Wittaya Academy, a Presbyterian mission school in Bangkok. In response to being barred from the WCC meetings, the ICCC held their own conference and formed a regional fundamentalist group of churches called the Council of Christian Churches in Asia (CCCA) to counter the “apostate ecumenical movement,” as McIntire termed the World Council of Churches. Boon Mark was honored with being made a vice president of this new organization.⁵⁸

McIntire charged that the World Council of Churches and their representatives in Bangkok were both modernists and communists. The charge of communism was repeated in an editorial article in the *Bangkok Post*, a leading English-language newspaper in Thailand. McIntire and Boon Mark also brought the accusation of communism to the local authorities. As a result, Thai secret police followed WCC delegates around the city, both during the meetings and in the days following. The police eventually gave up on this, having become convinced that the charges were

56. Boon Mark Gittisarn, “Dr. McIntire” *Church News* [ข่าวคริสตจักร] (December 1952): 20-22.

57. Boon Mark Gittisarn, “An Appeal for Sound Missionaries for Siam,” *Christian Beacon* (Dec 29, 1949): 4.

58. Carl McIntire, *A Testimony in Europe: Travel Letters on Missions* (Collingswood, NJ: Christian Beacon Press, 1951), 38.

false.⁵⁹ Though Boon Mark surely considered his actions in this matter as standing for the truth, some Thai Christians were greatly upset by the conflict and public criticism caused by Boon Mark and the ICCC. Saranya Chairatana (สรินย์ ชัยรัตน์), who became general secretary of the CCT after Boon Mark's resignation, claimed that "if this often happened that one group of Christians set up a fight with another group of Christians in the same Oriental city, and especially in Thailand, it would be more like giving a dose of poison to the Christian moment than giving it a boost."⁶⁰ Several months after the WCC and ICCC meetings in Bangkok, Tardt Pradipasena shared with Paul Eakin her dismay with Boon Mark's behavior towards CCT churches and the Presbyterian mission:

Among ourselves we do not altogether understand each other. Look at Kru Boon Mark. He seems to have gone completely off. He seems to be really happy in opposing us and our Church. And he seems to honestly think he is doing God's will. I just saw him for the first time in three years as I got on the bus the other day. His first greeting was, "I am going to Switzerland, and perhaps on to America." And before he got down from the bus he said: "Kru Boon Mee (of Chiangmai) has also left the Church and gone off to start up on his own with me" and laughed. This was the first I had heard of this so had no answer ready. All I said was, "I hope you have a good journey to Switzerland; take good care of your health there." My oh my! How is it possible that he has gone off like this? I understand that he has already left on the same plane with Rai Chaiyo. It seems as if there is as much confusion in our religious circles as there is in politics.⁶¹

Though Boon Mark was happy in his new church, he was evidently still upset with the direction of CCT churches in Thailand and felt compelled to pressure those churches to turn from their wayward course. He also wanted to expose the American Presbyterian mission, which Boon Mark believed was harming Thai churches through suffocating paternalism and liberal theology. McIntire paid for Boon Mark to travel as a representative of the ICCC to Europe and the United States, where he raised funds and told audiences about the damage done to Thai churches by the American Presbyterian mission.

The publishing arm of McIntire's organization was also open to Boon Mark. In an open letter in McIntire's *Christian Beacon*, Boon Mark issued "An Appeal for Sound Missionaries for Siam."⁶² In this letter, he criticized the Presbyterian mission for contenting themselves with school and hospital work while neglecting to evangelize

59. Eakin, "Influence of Foreign Evangelists."

60. Eakin, "Influence of Foreign Evangelists."

61. Tardt Pradipasena to Paul Eakin, August 20, 1950, RG)017/80, Box 3, Folder 5, Eakin Papers, PUA.

62. Gittisarn, "Appeal for Sound Missionaries."

the masses, a theme often repeated among churches and organizations outside of the CCT.⁶³ In addition, most of the mission's Christian workers were "worldly and modernistic," and it was the mission's fault. "When the missionaries had lost the spirit of evangelizing and sacrificing, what are we going to expect of the native leaders?" asked Boon Mark. "There you are. One hundred and twenty years and we have only dying churches!" Boon Mark concluded his letter by asking American churches to send "many fundamental missionaries, like the early missionaries who came here, who will do the pioneer work and evangelize Siam." However, Boon Mark also conceded that there were some good missionaries in Thailand. He specifically cited the Christian and Missionary Alliance, the Pentecostals, and the World Wide Evangelistic Crusade. Their only weakness was a failure to "speak out against the modernist and social gospel." What Boon Mark really wanted was "missionaries who will not be silent but try their best to win the modernistic church back to the old faith." He also wanted help in starting a fundamental Bible school and publishing Christian literature.

In a booklet coauthored with McIntire, Boon Mark similarly struck out against the "modernist missionaries" who dominated Thai churches through funding and false doctrine, thereby preventing Thai churches from becoming self-governing, self-propagating, and self-supporting.⁶⁴ He asserted that CCT churches were not growing, and for all their claimed conversion numbers, their altar calls were merely bullying Buddhists into making professions of faith. Bundled up with his accusations of modernism were accusations of paternalism. From Boon Mark's perspective, both were wrapped up in one package, and he wanted neither:

This is our land and our country and we do not want the modernistic doctrine to be sown here, especially in the Church of Christ in Thailand. They are not American churches, they are Siamese churches; but our Siamese churches cannot become Siamese until the American people let them alone. I love the American people as a whole. It does not matter who they are, but I would love to see all the American missionaries let our churches alone. They are Siamese churches; they are my church. ... Please do not say that, if the missionaries leave us, the churches will fall. There is no truth to it.⁶⁵

In light of Boon Mark's frequent criticisms of missionaries and the American Presbyterian mission in particular, it is important to understand that he was neither antimissionary nor antiforeigner in general. He did not have an anticolonial chip on his shoulder. He did, however, oppose missionaries who put low value on the verbal proclamation of the gospel or stood in the way of Thai Christians asserting

63. Smith, *Siamese Gold*, 159-69.

64. Carl McIntire and Boon Mark Gittisarn, *Modernism Takes Its Toll of Mission* (Collingswood, N.J.: Christian Beacon Press, n.d.).

65. McIntire and Gittisarn, *Modernism Takes Its Toll*, 34.

leadership over Thai churches. If missionaries were happy to relate to him as an equal and shared his essential doctrinal convictions and evangelistic commitments, then he was happy to welcome them to Thailand as partners in the gospel. Yet, relationships between Westerners and Christians in the global church are complicated. Paul Eakin thought that McIntire was taking advantage of Boon Mark to pursue his own agenda, but Boon Mark clearly saw his newfound association with McIntire and the ICCC as an opportunity to further his evangelistic ministry and to make known abroad the problems of the churches in Thailand. Both Boon Mark and McIntire benefitted from their association with one another, but it is hard to say whether their relationship was symbiotic or parasitic. Who was using whom in order to further their own agenda? Or did the two men regard each other as equals and were content with the benefits gained and provided?

It should also be noted that Boon Mark's assertions were often very black-and-white with little nuance, which makes it important to consider his claims of paternalism and modernism against the views of others. Though there was most certainly missionary paternalism and tensions between missionaries and Thai leaders, most Thai leaders felt that the paternalism they experienced was not bad enough to compel them to withdraw from the CCT.⁶⁶ Boon Mark's accusation of "modernistic" or liberal theology, on the other hand, is more contested. In the prewar period, there was a quiet yet real segment of American Presbyterian mission personnel who favored modernistic theology and social gospel modes of Christian influence.⁶⁷ Korean Presbyterian missionary Samuel Kim, who worked in Thailand with the CCT from 1956 to 1978, reported that theological liberalism and ecumenism increased after the war, especially at McGilvary Seminary.⁶⁸ It was not until the 1970s, asserted Kim, that the CCT awoke from a postwar "dark period" of "domination of liberal policies and their emphases."⁶⁹ However, during this same period, there were also strong evangelical influences in the CCT. In the immediate postwar period and the early 1950s, CCT moderator Rev. Puang Akkapin (พวง อรรถสิญญ์) and pastor Tongkham Pantupongs (ทองคำ พันธพงศ์) conducted itinerant evangelistic and revival services after the style of John Sung.⁷⁰ In the 1950s and 1960s, evangelical missionaries with the Overseas Missionary Fellowship found like-minded Thai Christians and

66. For more on postwar tensions between Thai and mission leaders, see Dahlfred, "Bumpy Road to Indigenization," 42-44.

67. Dahlfred, "Conservative in Theology," 215-22.

68. Samuel I. Kim, *The Unfinished Mission in Thailand* (Seoul: East-West Center for Missions Research and Development, 1980), 145-48, 156-59.

69. Kim, *Unfinished Mission*, 232.

70. Herbert Swanson, *Pastoral Care and the Church of Christ in Thailand: A Report on the State of Pastoral Care in the CCT Today* (unpublished report, Office of History, Church of Christ in Thailand, 1994); Prasit Pongudom, "Puang Akkapin," trans. Herbert Swanson, in *Dictionary of Asian Christianity*, ed. Scott Sunquist (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 677-78.

CCT churches with whom they could fellowship and cooperate on a limited basis.⁷¹ In the assessment of Thai church historian Herbert Swanson, CCT churches have been far more exposed to conservative and evangelical Western theologies than to liberal ones.⁷² Though Boon Mark painted the American Presbyterian mission and the Church of Christ in Thailand as “modernistic” and he himself as biblical or fundamental, the theological reality of the postwar CCT was much more complex.

Yet in the face of theological diversity within the CCT, Boon Mark chose to throw in his hat with Carl McIntire, whose for-me-or-against-me fundamentalism meshed well with Boon Mark’s own dichotomous approach. Boon Mark continued his association with McIntire as a vice-president of the ICCC until at least 1958.⁷³ At some point, however, there was a parting of ways. Paul Eakin claimed that Boon Mark was dismissed by McIntire because he had not used the funds he had raised under the banner of ICCC to erect a church building but instead used the money for his wife’s school.⁷⁴ However, Boon Mark’s son Sornsark recalled that some of the offering money raised by Boon Mark in the United States for ministry in Thailand was never given to Boon Mark.⁷⁵ Aside from financial matters, Jaakko Mäkelä has suggested that the break with the ICCC happened because Boon Mark adopted a Pentecostal view on baptism in the Holy Spirit.⁷⁶ From the evidence available, it seems likely that both money and Boon Mark’s growing advocacy for Pentecostalism contributed to his departure from the ICCC and the end of his association with Carl McIntire.

T. L. Osborn Revival Campaigns and Advocacy for Pentecostalism

The Pentecostal faith had begun to grow slowly in Thailand through the ministry of the Raassinas and a small handful of other Pentecostal missionaries in the late 1940s and early 1950s. However, a big leap forward for Pentecostalism occurred when healing evangelist T. L. Osborn visited Bangkok in 1956. Invited by Boon Mark’s friend, Finnish missionary Verner Raassina, the young American went from one government office to another seeking permission to use a large public field for his campaign. After being denied, then granted, then denied, then granted, then denied permission, Osborn had few options left for choice of venue. A CCT church considered letting him use their facility but then decided against it. Boon

71. Neel Roberts, “Comity Agreements: The Not-so-simple Art of Cooperation,” *Mission Round Table* 10, no. 1 (2015): 32-37.

72. Herbert Swanson to Karl Dahlfred, personal email communication, March 28, 2023.

73. “The Testimony of the ICCC,” 1958, RG001, Box 466, PCA Historical Center, St. Louis, Missouri.

74. Eakin, “Influence of Foreign Evangelists.”

75. Interview with Sornsark Gittisarn, March 1, 2023.

76. Mäkelä, *Khrischak Issara*, 70.

Mark, however, offered the compound of his wife's Kittikhun Wittaya School. This venue was smaller than he had hoped for, but on Monday, March 5, 1956, Osborn welcomed a thousand people to the first night of his revival, preaching salvation in Jesus Christ and the power of God to perform healing miracles.⁷⁷ Osborn's first foray into preaching in Thailand a month earlier had suffered from the lack of a competent translator. But for Osborn's main campaign, Boon Mark recruited his friend Sook Pongsanoi to translate the meetings. Osborn wrote in his diary that Sook was "a saint, and God used him to communicate our messages to the people. His knowledge of English was thorough."⁷⁸ Osborn preached nightly for over a week, reporting hundreds of people committing their lives to Christ and numerous healing miracles. Following his Bangkok meetings, Osborn traveled to the far southern province of Trang, where his translator, Sook Pongsanoi, worked as a pastor. In Trang, Osborn held meetings in a public field for two weeks, with similar results to his Bangkok crusades.⁷⁹ After Osborn left Thailand, Boon Mark worked and traveled with Osborn's ministry associate, Don Price, advocating for the Pentecostal faith. It was through Boon Mark's continuing association with Osborn and Price that Boon Mark received funds to construct a building for his church that was erected on the compound of his wife's school.⁸⁰

Prior to the Osborn campaigns, the infant Pentecostal movement in Thailand had remained fairly isolated from the CCT and other Protestant groups. This type of situation was common for Pentecostals globally, in large part due to widespread Pentecostal belief that those who did not speak in tongues were not preaching the "full gospel" and were likely not saved. Though conservative Protestants and Pentecostals shared similar evangelical convictions, mutual suspicion and differing convictions on charismatic gifts kept them apart. But in Thailand, that status quo was about to change. Osborn's campaign in Bangkok left a deep impression on many Thai Christians, including those from CCT and other non-Pentecostal churches. Samaan Vannakiat (สมาน วรรณเกียรติ), a Presbyterian CCT pastor, and Chaiyong Watanachantin, a Baptist, were reportedly filled with the Holy Spirit and had dramatic healing experiences. Eager to share their experience with others, they made a tour of CCT churches in the far northern province of Chiang Rai, preaching the Pentecostal faith. Small groups of Pentecostal believers began to form amid CCT churches in the north, and tensions arose. Many of these believers either left their churches or were

77. T. L. Osborn, *Personal Diary Notes: 1956 Osborn Miracle Ministry in Bangkok Thailand*, (Tulsa, OK: Osborn Publishers, 2004).

78. Osborn, *Diary Notes*, 6-9; Thammada Pongsanoi et al, *Beloved Barnabas [บารนาบาสที่รัก]* (Bangkok: Christian Bannasat Publishers [กองคริสเตียนบรรณศาสตร์], 1972), 33.

79. Osborn, *Diary Notes*, 19-22.

80. Edwin Zehner, "Church Growth and Culturally Appropriate Leadership: Three Examples from the Thai Church," School of World Mission (unpublished manuscript: Fuller Theological Seminary, 5 November, 1987), 58.

pushed out and formed independent Pentecostal groups. Having heard about what was happening up north, Finnish Pentecostal missionaries and Boon Mark Gittisarn toured Chiang Rai, visiting these new Pentecostal believers, teaching and encouraging them. As new Pentecostal churches formed, tensions ran high between them and CCT churches in the area. CCT leaders accused the Pentecostals of stealing their members, while the Pentecostals claimed that the CCT churches were spiritually dead and the believers who had left were kicked out.⁸¹ Alongside Finnish and other Scandinavian missionaries, Boon Mark was instrumental in promoting the Pentecostal movement in Thailand during these years, thereby paving the way for the widespread charismatic influence that may be seen in Thai churches today. Boon Mark's Bangkok Church became a center of Thailand's Pentecostal movement in the late 1950s, and a national Pentecostal conference was held at the church in 1958.⁸² In 1959, Boon Mark was invited to Finland and spoke at the National Summer Conference of the Pentecostal movement in Kouvola. According to Jaakko Mäkelä, the Thailand-based Finnish missionaries and Boon Mark gave the impression to conference attendees that Boon Mark was one of the Pentecostal leaders in Thailand.⁸³ Like McIntire, the Finnish Pentecostals provided Boon Mark with expanded opportunities and connections, and both sides benefitted. Yet the relationship was not exclusive, and Boon Mark had irons in other fires.

The *Sahapan* and Cross-Denominational Networking

Though Boon Mark had long ago severed his formal connection to the Church of Christ in Thailand, it would be a mistake to see him as jumping from one exclusive alliance to another. Boon Mark maintained and fostered connections with individual Christians and churches in the CCT at the same time as he was building new relationships with Finnish Pentecostals, American fundamentalists, and other believers, foreign and domestic, who aligned with his evangelical values and priorities. Boon Mark wanted to bring his overlapping circles of connections and followers with him as he went in new directions and preached the gospel as he saw best. In the 1950s, Boon Mark attempted to pull together his various connections in the *Sahapan Kristsachak Thai* (สหพันธคริสตจักรไทย), or Association of Free (Independent) Churches. This was not a new denominational entity but rather an unstructured association of churches that remained part of their existing denominations but thought of themselves as independent. In 1959, Boon Mark appointed his son-in-law Charan Ratanabutr

81. Herbert Swanson, "The Finnish Free Foreign Mission and the Origins of Pentecostalism in Thailand, 1946-1960," *Herb's Research Bulletin*, no. 6 (June 2003), https://www.herbswanson.com/_files/ugd/4cfa9b_54cf820a72a24ba4b161f32a916250a5.pdf, accessed March 27, 2023; Johnson and Hosack, "Pentecostalism," 200-201.

82. Mäkelä, *Khrischak Issara*, 71.

83. Mäkelä, *Khrischak Issara*, 72.

Karl Dahlfred: *The Indelible Mark of Boon Mark Gittisarn on Twentieth-Century Christianity in Thailand : A Brief Biography*

(เจริญ รัตนบุตร) as general secretary of his *Sahapan* association, though there was reportedly not much for Charan to do since Boon Mark did most of the organizational work himself through his network of personal contacts. As Boon Mark's Pentecostal emphasis grew stronger, some *Sahapan* churches pulled back and withdrew from the association. Other *Sahapan* churches became Pentecostal at the leadership level but remained in the Church of Christ in Thailand. Still others left their existing denominations and joined a Pentecostal denomination associated with the Finnish Free Foreign Mission or similar church.⁸⁴

United Pentecostal Church and “Jesus Only” Baptism

Boon Mark's charismatic personality, evangelistic drive, and ability to network and connect people all contributed to the significant personal following that he amassed. Yet his ability to attract loyal followers proved to be a double-edged sword that facilitated the first major split in the nascent Thai Pentecostal movement. Although the timing of his trip to the United States is unclear, sometime around 1960, Boon Mark was staying with Don Price in the USA when he encountered the United Pentecostal Church (UPC). The United Pentecostals are a oneness Pentecostal group, holding a Unitarian view of God and practicing baptism in the name of Jesus only. Boon Mark became convinced that this was the proper form of baptism and was duly rebaptized. Boon Mark invited William “Billy” Cole of the UPC to come to Thailand as a missionary.⁸⁵ Don Price, who had formerly been part of the UPC, warned Boon Mark against working with Cole. Always his own man, Boon Mark invited Cole anyway.⁸⁶

Upon his return to Bangkok, Boon Mark announced to his *Sahapan* association that he was disbanding it and forming a new association. This new group was denominational in nature and connected to the United Pentecostal Church. Boon Mark led about half of the membership of his Bangkok Church out of that church and into the UPC. After Boon Mark's departure, Boon Mark's son-in-law Charan Ratanbutr became the new pastor of Bangkok Church, which did not continue its association with the Pentecostal movement.⁸⁷ Working with Boon Mark, Billy Cole stayed in Thailand no longer than three years or so, though he returned later for shorter visits.⁸⁸ Cole's 2009 obituary reported that he established “53 churches in the nation of Thailand, where he baptized 289 Buddhist priests into the Lord Jesus

84. Zehner, “Church Growth,” 55-58.

85. Mäkelä, *Khrischak Issara*, 73.

86. Zehner, “Church Growth,” 59.

87. Mäkelä, *Khrischak Issara*, 73.

88. Mäkelä, *Khrischak Issara*, 73.

Christ.”⁸⁹ Though these numbers seem suspiciously high, the United Pentecostal Church initially experienced rapid growth as many Thai Pentecostals who trusted Boon Mark’s leadership followed him into the UPC and were rebaptized in the name of Jesus only. For many Thai Christians, however, rebaptism in the name of Jesus only was a bridge too far. In what Herbert Swanson calls “an almost bizarre replay” of the visits he made only a few years earlier, Boon Mark went around to the Pentecostal churches in Chiang Rai, preaching that baptism must be in the name of Jesus only. Numerous Thai believers who had followed him into Pentecostalism broke ties with Boon Mark over his latest teaching. Boon Mark’s long-time friend Sook Pongsanoi came out publicly against rebaptism.⁹⁰ The Finnish Pentecostal missionaries of the FFFM opposed Boon Mark and his “Jesus Only” baptismal teaching, trying to persuade Thai Pentecostals to stay in FFFM- associated churches when Boon Mark tried to lead them into the UPC. Boon Mark’s advocacy for “Jesus only” oneness Pentecostalism has been seen by many as a lowlight of his long ministry career and a sad turn of events that caused division and confusion in the Pentecostal movement in Thailand.⁹¹ For those who followed Boon Mark into the UPC, however, it was the FFFM missionaries who were causing division by opposing Boon Mark’s leadership.⁹² Boon Mark’s advocacy for the United Pentecostal Church continued for some years before he withdrew from leadership in the group. After Boon Mark’s departure, UPC membership numbers declined.

Divorce, Remarriage, and the Seventh Day Adventists

During Boon Mark’s many decades of ministry, he often traveled, preaching and visiting churches while his wife remained home, working full-time to support the family. This type of arrangement is not uncommon among Christian leaders in Thailand and has become a snare for some, including Boon Mark.⁹³ Though it has proven impossible to determine precise dates, when Boon Mark went out on evangelistic trips in his later years, there was a certain female assistant who accompanied him. She eventually became pregnant, and Boon Mark made the choice to divorce his wife Muan in order to remarry this new woman in order to take responsibility for their child.⁹⁴

89. Rev. William H. “Billy” Cole, *Find A Grave*, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/39946859/william-h-cole>, accessed March 27, 2023.

90. Mäkelä, *Khrischak Issara*, 76.

91. Interview with Sornsark Gittisarn, March 1, 2023; Allan Eubank, Interview by Karl Dahlfred, telephone call, March 1, 2023; Swanson, “FFFM.”

92. Mäkelä, *Khrischak Issara*, 82.

93. Interview with Sornsark Gittisarn, March 1, 2023.

94. Interview with Sornsark Gittisarn, March 1, 2023.

Though the timeline of events is unclear, having withdrawn from leadership in the UPC and having divorced and remarried, Boon Mark faded from public view in his later years and eventually became part of the Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) church in Thailand. Given his public criticism of the Adventists in the 1930s, it is ironic that Boon Mark made a seemingly abrupt change of direction to join them later in life. However, it is probable that Boon Mark maintained at least occasional contact with Seventh Day Adventists in Thailand over the years. In 1951, Adventist Siam Mission president W. A. Martin described encountering a group of former members of the Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT) who were very impressed with SDA teaching materials and had become convinced that Saturday was the true Sabbath. Martin wrote, “There is one Siamese preacher who would like to become the leader of this group and, while they have accepted some help from him, they really don’t want him for their leader because he is too radical.”⁹⁵ Although he is not named, there is a strong likelihood that the radical Siamese preacher was Boon Mark. Evidence is scant, but it would make sense that Boon Mark, an inveterate networker, would want to keep as many connections with as many people and churches as possible unless they showed themselves to be clearly opposed to him. If Boon Mark had loose relationships and connections with Adventists throughout his life, the fact that he joined them near the end of his life may not have been as completely out of the blue as it appears.

Herbert Swanson has suggested that Seventh Day Adventism may have appealed to Boon Mark due to its Presbyterian-like ecclesiastical structure, its literalist interpretation of the Bible, and its noncumenical attitude towards other Christian groups.⁹⁶ Throughout his life, Boon Mark repeatedly demonstrated that he did not mind being part of a beleaguered minority, even within such a small world as Thai Christianity. His moves towards Carl McIntire’s fundamentalist association and then to the non-Trinitarian United Pentecostal Church both show that he did not mind being on the fringe. The fact that Adventists are often considered heterodox in relation to broader Protestantism would not have bothered Boon Mark. However, Boon Mark’s motivation for throwing in his lot with the Seventh Day Adventists may have been for personal rather than ministry reasons. His son Sornsark suggested that maybe the Adventists took care of him and visited him in the hospital as he got older, showing love for him at a time when many people had less respect for him than previously.⁹⁷

His advocacy for rebaptism in the name of Jesus only and his subsequent divorce changed the way that many Thai Christians viewed Boon Mark. Though

95. Frederick J. Schwartz, *Thailand and the Seventh-Day Adventist Medical and Missionary Work* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 1972), 57.

96. Herbert Swanson, email communication, June 1, 2023.

97. Interview with Sornsark Gittisarn, March 1, 2023.

he was formerly known and respected as a national-level leader of Protestant and Pentecostal churches in Thailand, Boon Mark became a tragic figure. Having faded from the limelight, Boon Mark Gittisarn passed away quietly on May 20, 1987, at nearly ninety years old.⁹⁸

Legacy of Boon Mark Gittisarn

During the nine decades of Boon Mark's life, Thailand experienced massive societal changes. The Thai church likewise experienced great transformation, developing from an American Presbyterian-dominated mission field of only a few thousand Thai Protestants to a multid denominational, multiorganizational, international mosaic of evangelical and Pentecostal growth. Boon Mark was both influenced by those changes and a driver of the changes that shaped Christianity in Thailand in the twentieth century. Boon Mark's core convictions put him on the broader map of global evangelicalism, yet his readiness to criticize other believers and his association with marginal groups caused division as he shifted from one group to another in search of better modes of evangelism, revival, and spiritual experience.

Although any evaluation of his legacy will depend on one's theological perspective, it is clear that the impact of his life and ministry was most profound in a few key areas.

First, Boon Mark's lifelong passion was telling people about Jesus Christ. He talked about evangelism, and he did evangelism. In true evangelical fashion, he aimed for conversions, and he took action. His preaching was powerful, and his personality was positive and effervescent. He proclaimed Jesus Christ as Lord and called people to make decisions for Christ.⁹⁹ He loved street preaching. His son Sornsark recalled his father going to the public grounds at Sanam Luang in Bangkok every Sunday to preach. He took people from his church with him, and he saw people become Christians.¹⁰⁰ Boon Mark loved visiting people and churches, and it was the tireless dedication of Boon Mark and a small band of other Thai Christian leaders who kept the Thai church together during the war and carried it into a changed postwar world. His example can surely serve as inspiration for Thai Christians today who want to see their fellow Thai put their faith in Christ.

Boon Mark not only loved preaching, but he loved bold, dramatic, and intense preaching that sought impressive, immediate results. This was seen in his prewar promotion of foreign revivalists, culminating in John Sung. In the postwar years, Boon Mark linked up with the Finnish Pentecostals and T. L. Osborn, who sought

98. "Former Official of CCT Passes Away," *Church News ข่าวคริสตจักร* (April 1987): 47; Swanson, "Boon Mark Gittisarn," 89-90.

99. Interview with Allan Eubank, March 1, 2023.

100. Interview with Sornsark Gittisarn, March 1, 2023.

conversions and experiences of power through the baptism of the Holy Spirit and healings. In his advocacy for these figures and movements, Boon Mark helped to popularize and strengthen a desire among Thai churches for large-scale, high-impact evangelistic events that left a lasting mark on Thai ideas about evangelism. However, it is debatable whether such events have done as much to strengthen and grow Christian churches in Thailand as some assume. In fact, it has been suggested that such activities are not as valuable, or at least no more valuable, for growing churches in Thailand than less spectacular everyday Christian practices, or “ordinary means of grace,” such as Sunday preaching, prayer, baptism, communion, small group ministries, home visitation, children’s Sunday school, personal communication about Christ, and loving others through practical service.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, the belief of Boon Mark and other Thai Christians that large-scale, revival-type events are helpful and necessary in church life mirrors the development of Western evangelicalism from the time of the Second Great Awakening onward. Early nineteenth-century evangelist Charles Finney believed that “novelty” and “new measures” were continually necessary to make the gospel attractive to the modern world and that sudden conversion rather than conversion through the slow process of everyday church practices was the normative and preferred way for people to come to faith.¹⁰² This emphasis on revival events and crisis conversion has continued in Western evangelicalism up to the present through the ministries D. L. Moody, Billy Sunday, Billy Graham, and others. This philosophy of ministry has also found homes in the non-Western world, as seen in the ministries of figures like John Sung and Boon Mark Gittisarn.

Second, in the years leading up to World War Two and immediately following the war, Boon Mark led the way in asserting Thai leadership at a time when the missionaries were slow to listen to the voices of Thai colleagues. His voice was not the only Thai voice to express different opinions than the missionaries, but his leadership paved a road that others could walk along. While it might be argued that the way he communicated his views was not always courteous or charitable, his personal charisma and dedication to proclaiming Christ inspired people to follow him, and he became an influential voice in mid-twentieth-century Thai churches. Bold and direct, Boon Mark knew what he wanted and sought to speak the truth convincingly, even if he might offend the sensibilities of Thai Buddhists or foreign missionaries. In his own words, Boon Mark said, “I myself am what people call someone who wants to do something and just does it. And when other people don’t

101. Swanson, *Pastoral Care and the CCT*; Dwight Martin and Marten Visser, “Sense and Nonsense of Large-Scale Evangelism,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 48, no. 2 (April 2012): 136–7.

102. Charles G. Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* (Virginia Beach, VA: CBN University Press, 1978), 4, 286; Karl Dahlfred, *Theology Drives Methodology: Conversion in the Theology of Charles Finney and John Nevin* (Scotts Valley, CA: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013), 108-17.

do it, I myself want to do it.”¹⁰³ Like Western evangelicals, Boon Mark had to contend with theological liberalism and social gospel modes of Christian influence that he thought were harming churches in his country. But unlike those in the West, Boon Mark’s protests against these forces were wrapped up in a struggle to be free from paternalistic missionaries and to negotiate mutually beneficial associations with like-minded foreigners.

Third, Boon Mark lent his influence, network, and resources to an infant Pentecostal movement, giving invaluable assistance to the Finnish Pentecostals, T. L. Osborn, and others looking to advance their “Spirit-filled” message among Thai Christians and Buddhists. However, even though Pentecostals were indebted to Boon Mark for his advocacy for their cause, he became a thorn in the side of Pentecostals in Thailand, both missionary and Thai, through his promotion of oneness teaching and baptism in the name of Jesus only, thereby sowing division and confusion.

Boon Mark’s leadership, charisma, and evangelistic commitment inspired great loyalty among many Thai Christians, even as he offended and alienated others whom he considered to be opponents of what he believed and valued. One wonders if Boon Mark might have had a similarly influential ministry without the division and vitriol had he taken inspiration from his friend Sook Pongsanoi. Sook was likewise committed to revival and widespread cross-denominational preaching. For Sook, this also extended to an influential radio ministry. Yet Sook chose not to seek a personal following and instead used his influence to promote increased cooperation between various Protestant and evangelical groups within Thailand. Shortly before his death in 1972, Sook helped establish the Evangelical Fellowship of Thailand, an umbrella group that facilitates communication and cooperation within Thailand’s diverse Protestant community.¹⁰⁴ Boon Mark, on the other hand, became more and more isolated as he sought to bring his followers and network contacts along with him as he changed from group to group. He was a dedicated and charismatic evangelist driven by key evangelical commitments, but he wanted unity on his terms.

Boon Mark contributed to the development of Christianity in Thailand in many ways that both Thai Christians and missionaries appreciated, and it might be said that his overall impact and contributions to churches in Thailand were positive ones. Yet Boon Mark had feet of clay and did not finish as well as he started. His infidelity and divisive Unitarianism left marks on his record that are difficult to ignore. Thus, his legacy is mixed. His faults should not be glossed over, just as the Bible does not gloss over the faults of Abraham, Moses, David, Peter, and others. Yet amid victories and failures, peace and conflict, faithfulness and infidelity, orthodoxy and heresy, the life of Boon Mark Gittisarn deserves to be known not only for the positive and negative lessons that may be gleaned from it but also for the indelible

103. Boon Mark Gittisarn, interview, December 28, 1978, transcript, 9.

104. Mäkelä, *Khrischak Issara*, 76-77.

Karl Dahlfred: *The Indelible Mark of Boon Mark Gittisarn on Twentieth-Century Christianity in Thailand : A Brief Biography*

mark that he has left upon Christianity in Thailand and, more broadly, the fabric of global evangelicalism.

