

## BOYHOOD MEMORIES OF TAIWAN, 1920 - 1930

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### Introduction

My years as a boy in Taiwan are amongst the happiest of my life. My father was a doctor who started the Changhua Christian Hospital in 1896; he married my mother in 1912; I was born in Changhua in 1914; we returned to England in 1916 where my sister was born; we returned to Taiwan in 1919.

Taiwan was a quiet, unsophisticated, beautiful country, almost entirely agricultural. Life was idyllic; it seemed to me that food and life's needs were met for everybody. The population was 3 - 5,000,000. Our house was built of red brick, in western style, with deep verandahs on its south side. There was a garden and tennis court beside the house and the whole was surrounded by tall, gracefully waving bamboos. The bamboos squeaked and "sighed" as their trunks rubbed against each other in the breeze and at night gently wafted me to sleep. On some evenings a flock of pure white egrets (白翎鷺) would fly over our house to settle on the bamboos for the night and fly off early next morning. Nights were quiet; my father would sometimes remark at breakfast, "I heard the night express passing last night". There were two express trains each day, one south-bound, one north-bound between Taipei and Kaohsiung, and similarly two at night. Our address was 彰化市南門口. We lived outside the south gate of the old city wall, already demolished. I remember seeing the disintegrating east and west gates. Outside the city there were fields everywhere, mostly rice but also sweet potatoes, various vegetables and sugar cane. On looking east one could see foothills and on a clear day a noble range of high mountains - the central ridge which runs north to south in Taiwan. Sometimes water for the rice fields had to be raised from a pond or reservoir at a level lower than the fields. A treadmill mechanism (水車) was used to dredge the water to the higher level. I was fascinated by this and when older I would ask for a place beside a friendly farmer and tread the axle with him for periods of time.

My sister and I were the only western children in Central Taiwan. We made friends with Taiwanese children, playing games with them, wrestling, fishing and visiting them in their homes. It was an ideal time to learn the native language. Occasionally we travelled to Taipei to play with the Canadian children there, the children of the Rev. George Mackay Jr. and of Rev. Duncan McLeod. About the year 1921 the Crown Prince of Japan visited Taiwan. We foreign children in Taipei excitedly lined up with (it seemed) thousands of Taiwanese school children at the side of the 'Maruyama Road' (now Chung Shan North Road) to see him drive past. About this time my father was summoned to Taichung together with a number of Taiwanese public servants, each to receive an award from the Crown Prince - a silver bowl imprinted with the Japanese Imperial Chrysanthemum.

Taiwan being a tropical island, the weather was extremely hot for most of the year. My parents built a stone cottage near the top of Mt. Ta-Tun (大屯山) above Pei-Tou (北投), and we moved there in July and August each year. It was cooler and the view from the mountain was breath-takingly beautiful. There was no smog; Taipei city and the surrounding hills were in the distance, the river flowed down to Tamsui and Mt. Kuan Yin (觀音山) was opposite. Amidst this beauty lurked a hidden danger - poisonous snakes. I learnt to recognise and retreat from the green bamboo snake (青竹系), the krait (兩傘節) and the cobra (飯匙倩).

At the age of 6 my mother began teaching me with books sent out from England. Every morning, with a blackboard, she inculcated me with the basic subjects. She was a good teacher and when we returned to England 2 years later I was able to hold my place at school. She insisted that I learn the Romanised Taiwan writing and reading. This was often called "白話字". I am grateful to her because in later years when I went to Chuan-Chow (泉州) on the mainland and when I finally returned to Taiwan, this system was of inestimable value.

In 1923 my father was in poor health; we returned to England, and returned to Taiwan in 1925. From then onwards I spent less time in Taiwan. My sister and I were sent to a

British school in Yen-Tai ( 煙台 ) on the North China coast. Every year in December and January we came home to Taiwan for winter vacation. Coming from the cold winters of North China we revelled in the warmth and sunshine of Taiwan, the food, the plentiful fruit, the games of tennis and the opportunity of seeing our friends and using our beloved Taiwan language again. My parents organised trips into the heart of Taiwan; to Sun-Moon Lake (approached on foot - there were no roads), to Pu-Li and Wu-She (before the rebellion in Wu-She) and to Alishan by the logging railway.

I became conscious of what my father was doing. He left home each morning by rickshaw to go to the hospital, where he did his rounds and then went on to see out-patients or to the operating room, where he and his assistants would operate on a list of surgical patients. He had a group of young men, his "students", whom he trained to be "doctors". They each stayed 5 or more years, after which he gave them certificates stating the training they had received (I liked these men because I could play tennis with them!). The Japanese government recognised these certificates and gave the bearers "limited registration" allowing them to practise in the country but not in the towns. In general these "graduates" did well in their practices, making their mark serving the community. Some of them crossed the sea to practise

in the Amoy area on the mainland. *When graduates from the Taipei Medical College joined the staff the "student" system lapsed.*

I gained the impression that my father was always patient and kind. A large number of ill people came to the hospital, some from long distances. When I was 14 years of age I was allowed to watch my father operate. In those days anaesthesia was given with chloroform and a gauze-coated mask. The operators did not wear gloves. Hands and forearms were scrubbed up to the elbow, then soaked in anti-septic fluid. Septic (pyogenic) diseases were very common (it was long before the age of anti-biotics). My father told me how in the early years of their occupation of Taiwan the Japanese put down any rebellious elements very severely. On one occasion a patient was brought into the hospital with a large infected and necrotic area over his back and buttocks - he had been severely beaten by the Japanese. Unfortunately he developed septicaemia and died. My father wrote on the death certificate

“Beaten to Death”. The Japanese asked him to change the words but he would not. (Was this a foretaste of the Japanese treatment of 2nd World War prisoners?).

Infectious diseases were very common. Tuberculosis carried off people from every walk of life, including the flowering of manhood and womanhood, people of ability and promise. One of my Taiwanese friends studied in the Taipei Medical College, while I studied medicine in London University. He began practise in Changhua, but relentless tuberculosis ended his life.

As I grew older I appreciated the law and order and hygienic measures of the Japanese colonial government in Taiwan, the roads, railways, schools and other developments. I respected their efficient organisation despite its imperialistic nature (perhaps my ideas were coloured by my own national background at that time - the existence of the British Empire!). I remember my surprise in 1923 and 1925 sailing between Hong Kong and England, at every port-of-call the British flag was flying. It seems incredible now!

Society in Taiwan was a mixture of Chinese and Japanese cultures. The population lived, spoke and behaved largely in the Chinese tradition; dress, food, family life, buildings and the arts were very strongly Chinese. There were still elderly women walking with dainty bound feet, or feet which had been unbound but were still noticeable. But the influence of Japanese ethos was increasing all the time, pressed home through a universal education system which was entirely Japanese. The national language ( 國語 ) was Japanese. The influence went up through high school and college to the centres of society and government. Well-to-do Taiwanese families were beginning to send their children to Japan for their education. Some Taiwanese would, on occasion, adopt Japanese ceremonial dress.

My mother was very musical; she played the organ and had a beautiful solo voice. She trained a number of young people in the ~~Shanghai~~ <sup>Changhua</sup> church in 4-part singing and a good choir was formed. Choral music started to become popular. She was also invited to sing at concerts arranged in schools and colleges. She was remembered by many of her trainees.

## PostScript

I left Taiwan in January 1931, aged 16, not to return for 20 years. My good fortune of birth in Taiwan is a strong bond and is enriched by my memories. During the last 50 years many men and women of Taiwan have worked hard for the advancement of the country and for understanding between America and Taiwan. The Taiwanese-American Foundation has very generously encouraged this effort.