

Preface

“Unborn generations will think it strange that the vastness, the completeness, the pervasive force of missionary enterprise, made so small an impression on the public mind [...] Like leaven, [the Christians] are hid among the people. They are the scattered lights of a country-side. In this village, where we stand, there is but one Christian. Yonder, half a mile to the north, live thirty worshippers; in a village two miles south, about a dozen; in that hamlet, half a mile to the east, are two Christian families.” (Campbell Moody, *The Saints of Formosa*, 1912)

These words were written by Campbell Moody, a missionary of the Presbyterian Church of England, who arrived in Taiwan on December 18, 1895. His arrival coincided with a moment of great change not only for the mission enterprise, which had been ongoing on the island since 1865, but also for the island of Taiwan and its peoples. Only two months prior to his arrival, the Japanese had formally declared the island pacified following its incorporation into the Japanese Empire.

That fleeting moment when Campbell Moody pondered the future of not only Presbyterianism but also Christianity among the Taiwanese can be read with a sense of dereliction; a belief that the mission had not quite done what it had set out do. Three years after the publication of *The Saints of Formosa*, Moody would lose his wife, Margaret (née Findlay) to ill health. This impactful loss would see him leave Taiwan. Yet, his connection to the mission, the island, and its people, would see his return a few years later and marriage to Peggie (née Arthur), a nurse working at the Changhua Mission Hospital. Moody, once referred to as the ‘most honest of missionary authors’ by one of his book’s reviewers, best captures his accounts of the frustrations and problems of evangelising. He wrote and published on why missionaries rarely got along. Yet within all his writings and assessments, he was unable to recognise his contribution and legacy. He and Peggie left Taiwan in 1924.

Following the expulsion of Western missionaries off the island by the Japanese colonial authorities in 1940, the Presbyterian mission transformed itself into a native ministry; an articulation of a shared identity: One that was faithful (to Christianity) while remaining close to a growing sense of Taiwanese selfhood that was solidifying during the colonial years. The notion of working *with*, rather than *over*, became a hallmark of many of the missionaries working on Taiwan in the years prior to their expulsion. This ‘transformation’ is perhaps best captured within the PCE archives in London (Alsford, 2017a). The richness of the material tells much of the successes and failures of the mission from its inception in 1865. Yet it is the darkness—the absence of material from 1940 to 1945—that speaks the loudest. That archival vacancy, rather than being blank, instead picks up with the same fervour, but instead among the collections held in Taiwan.

Following the Japanese surrender in 1945 and the return of a reduced foreign mission, Presbyterianism shifted from a ‘missionary enterprise’ into a ‘self-anointed conscience’ as the church reacted to a new political, cultural, and spiritual climate that was manifesting itself with the arrival of the Chinese Nationalists, especially after their loss of the Chinese mainland to the Communists in 1949. This important moment would coalesce in the decision by church elders and pastors to ‘bind themselves to the cause of Taiwanese selfhood,’ or to be more specific, to peoples’ ‘sense of ethnic and provincial identity’ (Rubinstein, 1991:88). This collective binding was perhaps first evident in the efforts to ‘rescue’ Peng Ming-min 彭明敏 (Amae, 2008: 176).

The history of the Presbyterian Church on Taiwan is closely tied to the history of exiled church leaders and their beacons of self-determination (Alsford, 2017b: 234). Known as Formosan Christians for Self Determination (FCSD) [*Taiwan renmin zijue yundong* 台灣人民自決運動], this band, which included Shoki Coe [黃彰輝, *Huang Zhanghui*], Dr Ng Bú-tong [黃武東, *Huang Wudong*], Lim Chông-gī, [林宗義, *Lin Zongyi*], and the Rev. Dr. Sòng Chôan Sēng [宋泉盛, *Song Quansheng*], petitioned the Taiwanese cause in an international setting. As such, notions of national identity in Taiwan and concepts of nation-branding on the island have an interconnected and entangled relationship with the history of Presbyterianism. 70 per cent of Taiwan indigenous people, for example, identify themselves as Christians. The most notable denomination is Presbyterianism and a sense of belonging to the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan.

Missionary activity continues to retain an important position in historical writings because of the nature of its enterprise. Through the efforts of individuals within the organised structures of mission societies, ‘missionaries generally sent back a mass of material—private letters, reports, photographs, drawings, objects—to the metropolitan centre’ (Arnold & Bickers, 1996:2). This form of communication has its use in historical methods on a wide range of specialised topics (Alsford, 2015:2). Despite the historical partiality which they display (bias is perhaps inherent in the very nature and vocation of missionary activity), missionary archives have provided important social perspectives, since missionaries were often the first source of sustained foreign contact with local peoples.

Mission sources and archives offer an alternative to other types of primary source material, yet it is important to bear in mind that such collections are frequently incomplete or, as in the case of Taiwan mission archives, distributed among many locations. Personal memoirs, for example, may be held in private collections, or, if they are not, they may have been deposited in a number of different libraries and institutions. It is also not uncommon to find that the material has been poorly catalogued or arranged in awkward ways. Yet such problems may be trivial when compared with the rich variety and fascinating detail of their content.

In tribute of the missionary contributions to Taiwan, the Changhua Christian Hospital Historical Museum, the Department of History at Tung Hai University, National Chung Shing University, and the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan, in 2020 collaborated with the Institute for the Study of the Asia Pacific (ISAP) at the University of Central Lancashire in the UK in hosting an International Conference on the History of Christian Protestant Missionaries. The organisation of the event was sponsored by Taiwan’s Ministry of Culture. A number of scholars, church attendees, and some with personal connections to the missionaries themselves, attended. Some did not present papers, yet they made significant contributions in the capacity of commentators, discussants, and inspiration. Taiwan’s success in managing the coronavirus pandemic had meant that although the event could take place in Taiwan, scholars such as myself and the Rev John McNeil Scott, invited as keynote speakers, had to attend remotely. The conference was genuinely a collaborative effort, and the following multidisciplinary compendium of papers honour the contribution of both foreign and local missionaries in recording the everyday life of the people of Taiwan.

**Professor Niki J.P. Alsford
Preston, Lancashire.**

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