INTRODUCTION:
GEORGE LESLIE MACKAY IN BRIEF

CLYDE R. FORSBERG JR.
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH & TAIWAN
MACKAY RESEARCH GROUP, Aletheia University,
TAMSUI, TAIWAN

Mackay Monument, Tamsui (Danshui), Taiwan
This collection of essays on the life and legacy of Presbyterian missionary to Northern Taiwan, George Leslie Mackay, poses a number of questions and from a variety of disciplinary vantage points. The bulk of the essays themselves are a consequence of two trans-Pacific crossings, the first in 2009 when Taiwanese scholars from Aletheia University (formerly Oxford College and founded by Mackay) made the long trip to Queen’s University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada in 2009 for a George Leslie Mackay workshop organized by myself—a Queen’s University alumnus, class of ’94, and scholar of 19th-century American and Canadian religious history—and colleagues. The Canadian meeting was also sponsored by the Queen’s School of Religion, formerly Queen’s Theological College. Among the Canadian treasures that my Taiwanese colleagues and I brought back with us to Oxford College was the dedication that Principal George M. Grant read into the record on that auspicious occasion. In 2010, a select group of Western scholars from Canada and the United States came to Aletheia University to discuss in greater depth the issue of Mackay as Taiwanese cultural icon and mystery to the West respectively—Canada’s best kept secret in some respects and despite the best efforts of the Presbyterian Church in Canada and Canadian Mackay Committee to get the word out.\(^1\)

Among the volume’s strengths is an interdisciplinary approach and constituency of scholars from such academic disciplines as History and Missiology, Comparative Literature, Dramaturgy, Historiography and Cultural Studies, and Religious Studies. The other important organizational point to make is yet another division between analytical and reflective, descriptive and prognostic, the object in mind, to lay the foundation for a more nuanced discussion of Mackay that might be said to avoid two extremes: missionary as saint versus missionary as foreign devil. Reminiscent in some respects of C.S. Lewis’ enigmatic depiction of heaven and hell in *The Screwtape Letters* (hell a peevish attempt to feed oneself despite the cutlery, heaven a cooperative effort), the end result might be described as a heavenly act of sharing, but a feast in the Chinese tradition. Around this particular table, moreover, all agree that Mackay matters.

---

\(^1\) Case in point, the petition by the CMC for a stamp in honor of Oxford College (10 August 2010), accessed 1 Sept. 2011, [http://www.presbyterian.ca/pcconnect/daily/5357](http://www.presbyterian.ca/pcconnect/daily/5357)
Mackay’s Unique Place in Religious History and Post-Colonial Studies

Mackay can be seen as a remarkable specimen of Late Victorian, North American religious outreach. Arguably among the more unique expressions of Canadian Presbyterianism abroad, coming to Formosa (Taiwan) in 1872 and preaching specifically with aborigines in mind, he died prematurely from throat cancer June 2, 1901. It is difficult to imagine what he might have done had he lived longer—another thirty years in effect. Born March 21, 1844 to pious Scottish Presbyterians from Upper Canada (Zorra Township, Oxford County, Southern Ontario), he embraced the faith at a tender age, foreign missionary work his calling. His post-secondary education was Presbyterian through and through, studying at Knox College (Toronto), Princeton Seminary, and New College (Edinburgh) and where a life-long devotion to “natural theology” was born. Queen’s Theological College (Kingston) honored him with a Doctorate of Divinity in 1880. Mackay also went on to become the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Canada in 1894 albeit in absentia. He built sixty churches, Taiwan’s oldest Western-style university, Oxford College, now Aletheia University, a school for girls, now Tamkang Middle School, and even a medical clinic (1882), all of this in just thirty years. In fact, he is revered by Buddhist and Christian alike for his medical outreach and amateur dentistry, pulling some 20,000 teeth before all was said and done. Two of Taiwan’s most prestigious hospitals bear his name.

A very private man, Mackay wrote comparatively little, his diaries notwithstanding. It is doubtful that he wrote his autobiography, From Far Formosa, his editor, the Rev. J.A. MacDonald, claiming full credit. As Mackay scholar James R. Rohrer rightly notes, Mackay’s “correspondence and even his diaries reveal relatively little about his inner life, leaving us in many cases to read between the lines and to conjecture.”

---


more soldier than scholar who, according to critics, spent his time “rushing around the country like a madman.” Alvyn Austin’s seminal *Saving China: Canadian Missionaries in the Middle Kingdom* may not be wide of the mark either in its characterization of Mackay as “the strangest character nineteenth-century Canada ever produced.”  

Dominic McDevitt-Parks contends that Mackay was an “Orientalist” and thus a pawn of Western imperialism. Mark Eric Munsterhjelm attempts to pin a charge of “cultural genocide” on Mackay’s lapel for his role in the destruction of Chinese idols and ancestor tablets. On that count, it is important to point out that Mackay was surely guilty of preserving native culture, too, his private collection of Formosan native artifacts considered to be among the best and most complete in the world and housed at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto—although it is high time this Taiwanese treasure trove be returned to its ancestral home. Moreover, as Rohrer argues, Mackay was a charismatic figure and founder of a new Taiwanese religion. Rightly or wrongly, Mackay is considered by many to be Taiwan’s most famous Western defender of native culture and pioneer of Taiwanese independence.

Western missionaries of Mackay’s generation and breeding were proponents of what has been called the “second era of the British Empire,” Christianization and civilization going hand in hand, and the mission abroad an extension of the mission at home—Freemasons, Catholics, and Mormons the targets of virulent evangelical attacks and what David Bryon Davis characterized long ago as a type of “counter-subversion.” Canadian Presbyterians took on the job of creating a modern, democratic society in

---

5 McDevitt-Parks, Dominic. “19th-century Anglo-American representations of Formosan peoples” (Freeman Summer Grant, 2007).
8 See in this connection, the premier defender of this interpretation, Michael Stainton, “The Politics of Taiwan Aboriginal Origins,” in *Taiwan: A New History*, ed. Murray A. Rubinstein (Armonk NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1999), 27-44.
the wilderness “shaped by the spirit of Christ.” Presbyterian uplift, Brian Fraser explains,

strove for an ethical Christian community characterized by those vital virtues they felt necessary for the regeneration of the world—a strong work ethic, sobriety, probity, thrift, charity, and duty informed by a democratic Christian conscience. They united evangelical zeal with moderated reason in their attempt to establish a universal consensus on individual morality and social responsibility. Taken together, these qualities of character would reform, in an ascending pattern, the family, the city, the province, the nation and ultimately the world.¹⁰

Race figured prominently in the creation of a “responsible Christian citizenry in Canada guided by the best that Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture had to offer.”¹¹ A Canadian melting pot was the end in sight. W.D. Reid’s mission to Western Canada is instructive, Native Indians (Blackfeet), Irish Catholics, French and Russian Doukhabours, German/Austrian Anabaptists (Mennonites and Hutterites), Eastern European Russian Orthodox and Ashkenazi Jews, Chinese Buddhists, and even polygamous Mormons tilling the same Prairie soil and simply waiting to be civilized in the precious blood of Jesus Christ. “Woven into the texture of the life of this great nation,” Reid also believed,

shall be the impulse of the Celt, the endurance of the German, the patience of the Slav, the daring of the Northman, the romance of Italy, the suavity of France, the buoyancy of Ireland, the shrewdness of Scotland, and the enterprise and leadership of England. What a nation it should be.¹²

Whether this was Mackay’s understanding and mission proves somewhat illusive.

In the same vein, historian of Western Canada Howard Palmer argued long ago now that Canadians were “reluctant hosts” at best. “There has been a long history of racism and discrimination against ethnic minorities in English-speaking Canada,” Palmer writes, “along with strong pressures

¹¹ Ibid, 94.
for conformity to Anglo-Canadian ways.”¹³ For British Columbians, the Chinese, Japanese, and East Indians were particularly worrisome amid fears of “Asian hordes” threatening to wash away Anglo-Saxon self-government. “The introduction in Canada of a head tax on Chinese immigrants,” Palmer continues, “was based in considerable part on the assumptions of Anglo-conformity—immigrants who were culturally or racially inferior and incapable of being assimilated either culturally or biologically, would have to be excluded.”¹⁴

Suffice it to say that Mackay’s life in brief does not square very well with the above, or for that matter the customary, post-colonial critique of foreign missions as inextricably connected to nineteenth-century notions of inferior races, constituting an imperial project that “sought to transform indigenous communities into imperial archetypes of civility and modernity by remodeling the individual, the community, and the state through western, Christian philosophies.”¹⁵ As Nicholas Thomas has masterfully shown, colonial relations were more complex and fractured, foreign missionary work a contradiction in terms and with examples of both accommodation and resistance to the imperial powers that be.¹⁶ Although Mackay was certainly proud of his Celtic-Anglo-Saxon heritage, a loyal Canadian with unbreakable ties to the Scottish Highlands and, of course, Britannia, he also raged against social injustice and the infamous head tax in particular. The bulk of his reading took issue with British abuses and religious bigotry in Asia, calling for greater cultural sensitivity and respect for China as a high culture and great civilization. Criticism is reserved for the superstitious and misogynistic—ancestor worship, fung shui, footbinding, and polygamy. Rev. John L. Nevius, *China and the Chinese . . . Its Present Condition and Prospects*¹⁷ and the Rev. George Smith, *A Narrative of an Exploratory Visit to Each of the Consular Cities of China, and to the Islands of Hong Kong and Chusan, in Behalf of the*

---


¹⁴ Ibid, 188.


Church Missionary Society in the Years 1844, 1845, 1846 are two cases in point and high atop Mackay’s reading list. As the Rev. R.P. Mackay and author of The Life of George Leslie Mackay of Formosa, explains: “While sometimes the missionary led the way, ordinarily the Church waited until the way was opened by national and commercial considerations.” Mackay’s marriage to Chhang-miâ is cited as incontrovertible proof that “he did not advocate . . . colonization.” So fierce and uncompromising was his love for Taiwan that he chose to be buried there.

Mackay, Protestant Manhood, Interracial Marriage, and Female Missionaries

Mackay can be seen as a contradiction in terms, his mission to Formosa having a Roman Catholic quality. William C. Barnhart argues in “Evangelicalism, Masculinity, and the Making of Imperial Missionaries in Late Georgian Britain, 1795–1820,” for example, that manhood and empire were inextricably connected, boys in essence embarking on a mission to save the empire and return home as men—their manhood and the empire intact. However, Catholics and Protestants disagreed on what constituted true manhood in the Christian mission field per se. As Yvonne Maria Werner has shown, the Catholic foreign mission in Nordic countries at least was very much a test of manhood and even a contest of Catholic and Protestant notions of masculinity. Whether celibacy and the monastic life were superior to marriage, Catholic masculinity superior to that of Protestantism and its feminized clergy was reason for some concern. In fact, Mackay’s heroic exploits are reminiscent in some respects of the Russian Catholic convert and rogue Jesuit, Count Stephan Djunkowsky, whose “masculinized missionary rhetoric . . . audacity,

---

19 (Toronto: Board of Foreign Missions, 1913), 15.
20 Ibid, 33.
courage, and endurance . . . raising money . . . [and] extensive missionary travels” gave him a “great degree of freedom of action.”

Mackay came to Formosa in 1872 as a single man, resisting the temptation to marry at first, living a near monastic existence before and even after his marriage to Chhang-miâ, their relationship ostensibly a somewhat pragmatic if not cold affair on paper at least. He also had little interest in or use for Canadian female missionaries, married or single, which he considered to be an affront to Chinese culture and impediment to the spread of the gospel. It would not be too off beam to say that he despised the Presbyterian Women’s Auxiliary to the bitter end, his marriage to Chhang-miâ meant to silence female critics (and suitors) back in Canada.

Indeed, to marry a local woman of color in essence, ostensibly for the good of the mission, was an audacious departure from the colonial norm. Suffice it to say that Mackay’s was a missionary underground. One may consider the reaction to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s no less scandalous proposal in Adventure of the Yellow Face, published in 1894 but set in the 1880s. In short, Holmes solves the mystery of a white woman in this case, her secret marriage to an African-American man, and most important of all, the child of mixed race that she bore him, and whether polite society should accept one and all, arguing in the affirmative. Anti-miscegenation reached a fever pitch in the years that followed the mutiny of Sepals of the British East India Company in Meerut, escalating into the Indian Rebellion of 1857-58. Defenders of empire and white womanhood exaggerated incidents of war-time rape to justify reprisals, giving impetus to the stereotype of the “Indian dark-skinned rapist.” England did not enact anti-miscegenation laws as such, but an unwritten rule militated against marriage to an Indian national, which for military and diplomatic men was tantamount to professional suicide.

Of course, native women played an important role in the spread and consolidation of imperial rule, but as colonial Malaysia illustrates all too well, as so-called “sleeping dictionaries” with whom a true English gentleman knew better than to become romantically entangled. Whether Chhang-miâ was more than a “sleeping dictionary” to Mackay is difficult to gage, at least from his published works. His private correspondence reveals a tender and warm side. Chhang-miâ is barely mentioned in his

---

26 See in this connection, the 2003 film, The Sleeping Dictionary, by Guy Jenkin, filmed in Sarawak, formerly a British Protectorate, and set during the 1930s.
diaries, but this can be attributed to his strict Anglo-Canadian culture, a true gentleman not one to kiss and tell, failing to disclose the facts of one’s private life also typical of missionary “life writing” of the period.

## Mackay’s Remarkable Mastery of Chinese and Wide-Ranging Nocturnal Reading

The quality of Mackay’s mind cannot be doubted. The speed with which he mastered Chinese is a case in point. First, he overcomes the “tones,” and after a single day with a minimum of review, and all the grammar a mere four days later. As for the difficult business of the fifty-thousand or so Chinese characters, he commits to memory one hundred new characters every four days on average and thus a total of 1,200 in just three months. The 214 Radicals take him no more than two months all

---

27 “Began some Chinese at 6 A.M. learned the tones. . . . This day O Lord I need to consecrate myself to thee. This language between me and the people—I’ll die or remove it, so help me God” (9 Jan. 1872). “Went out to the sea-side and aloud repeated all I learned ‘Tones’ etc——” (23 Jan. 1872).
28 “At work again, no declensions! No conjugations! That’s good at any rate. . . . I like the ‘odd fellows.’ ‘Tones’ are very nice things if nobody else hears!” (13 Jan 1872).
He is teaching Hokkien to native speakers in the Roman colloquial by the end of his fourth month. He gives his first sermon in Chinese on April 4, 1872. About the same time, he is going toe to toe with Buddhist, Taoist, and Confucian literati, debating them in Chinese and winning.

100 more characters I will have you” (4 Mar. 1872). “Got up 100 more characters and went over all I learned until long after midnight” (9 Apr. 1872).

“Studied the delicious characters and colloquial. Nothing I believe like drilling, Repetition, and that aloud” (12 Feb. 1872). “Worked away at many more new characters, wrote them, took them to pieces. Drilled myself again on the Radicals 214. All right” (13 Feb. 1872). “Radicals again. Wrote them all from Memory, backwards as well. Went over their sounds, meaning and again drilled on them. . . .” (14 Feb. 1872). “Began at the first and Just kept at them Radicals and all including colloquial. Repetition! Repetition!” (2 Mar. 1872). “Pretty stiff those chaps; but I will Not Submit to them. Come on ‘Radicals’ 214 of you let me name and dissect you again” (5 Mar. 1872).

“Studied hard and began to teach Romanized colloquial. . . .” (15 Apr. 1872). “Practiced in Romanized colloquial—” (16 Sept. 1872). “We all got to work on the Gospel of Mark. First reading the Radicals, then the ‘book reading,’ then the way we would read for the people to understand. All then took the Colloquial Romanised. . . .” (30 Oct. 1872).

“Left to myself what I knew of Chinese soon came into practice on the way. . . .” (4 Apr. 1872). “Began to preach. I determined to put what I had learned into practice, so Spent nearly whole day trying to convey thoughts and ideas to the few around me. In the eve, I examined them on what I had said and was amazed at what they understood and answered. From that day I continued every morning and eve. Testing and examining. I prepared through the day. Intensely interesting!” (14 Apr. 1872). “Splendid progress made by my servants in the Romanized Col[loquial]. I found vocabulary so enlarging that I seldom hesitated for a word. Out again amongst the boys, who got in the habit of waiting for me. From them I picked? Words and phrases not to be found in any books I had; besides they were the very words of the people. In eve. Some outsiders came in to listen. By this time were able to have sweet worship. I read, then explained and asked questions, then sang and prayed. I found myself quite at home, had no difficulties in expressing my views. I owed that to practice, drilling and constant Repetition. I still kept up the ‘book Reading.’ Read Romanized Col[loquial] also every day and fixed characters in my mind” (18 Apr. 1872). “I slept none that night but prepared for battle with the Literati. . . .” (20 Apr. 1872). “I was ready and pushed [them] on their own ground and attacked their systems, their Religions. Tauism, Buddhism and Confucianism. They were ‘thunder struck,’ stayed only a Short time and left. I sat up all night preparing for further attacks—” (22 Apr. 1872). “Preached in English forenoon and afternoon in Chinese. . . .” (16 Jun. 1872). “Preached in English and Chinese. . . .” (14 Jul. 1872). “In the afternoon preached on Acts 10:43. Afternoon in Chinese and in the eve. Discussed God as law maker” (21 Jul. 1872). “Morning service in English and after that all Chinese. . . .” (18 Aug. 1872). “Read
The following month (May), he characterizes himself as a native speaker of Amoy. For Mackay, Chinese takes him five months, from start to finish.

His bedtime reading was no less impressive, the bulk of it in the sciences and budding social sciences. He does not seem to sleep, moreover. “Why am I here?” he writes in From Far Formosa. “Is it to study the geology, botany, or zoology of Formosa? Is it to examine into questions about the racial relations of the inhabitants? Is it to study the habits and customs of the people?” And yet, the answer is a resounding no. “No, not for that did I leave my native home,” he writes: “Whatever else may be done must have a real and positive hearing on the fulfillment of that commission. Whatever of history, geology, sociology, or of any other subject may engage the missionary’s attention must be regarded in its relation to the gospel.” And yet, from his diaries emerge a would-be scholar of remarkable linguistic talent and academic imagination, a proponent of creation science and thus Victorian example of faith seeking understanding.

In this case, the Orientalist label may well apply to Mackay, but as Robert Irwin has redefined it vis-à-vis the pioneering work of Edward Said. In fact, Mackay’s linguistic and scholarly temperament is comparable to that of Sir William Jones, but Sir Arthur Jeffery an even better fit. To be sure, he might be said to having virtually nothing in common with Orientalists like Sir Richard R. Burton and so crucial to Said’s critical reading of the colonial era.

And so, Mackay can be seen as one of a kind in so many ways, his missiology a multifaceted, interdisciplinary, and iconoclastic many splendored thing. A variety of approaches and degree of polyvalency is not only desirable in this case, but essential to a more balanced understanding of such an iconic figure in Canadian and Taiwanese social, cultural, and religious history, this collection of essays adding their voices to a growing chorus of neo-post-colonial scholarship and interpretation.


34 “Paced the floor reading aloud for A-hoa to write and he listened to my Chinese until it sounded like from a native” (1 May 1872).

35 Mackay, From Far Formosa, 135.

The Essays in this Volume

Marguerite Van Die’s essay, “‘Growing Up Presbyterian in Victorian Canada’: Childhood Influences and Faith Formation,” documents Mackay’s childhood and formative religious experiences that led inexorably to a life of religious service and foreign missionary work. What soon becomes clear is the extent to which Mackay drew upon the Presbyterian culture of his youth for models of faith in Formosa and how these were clearly responsible for his overall success. Using such categories as family, education, and religion, Van Die sees Mackay’s missionary style to have been a “transmission” of the Scottish and Canadian Presbyterian culture of his youth, but adapted to a Formosan or colonial Taiwanese context. Frugality and austerity, a love of learning, a tendency to look for answers beyond the narrow confines of the classroom, the sanctity of the home and a mother’s instruction in matters of faith, the value of physical work, tenacity, and persistence above all defined the times in which Mackay lived and the community in which he was raised. As a consequence, Mackay had both spiritual and physical strength and the will to succeed regardless of the cost. A talent for sermonizing and love of the Shorter Catechism, scripture, hymnody, and science appeared to have come to him very naturally as the scion of Scottish Highland spirituality and evangelical Calvinism. However, he was no slave to Presbyterian convention, breaking with the patriarchal structures of the past by including women as active participants in his recasting of the “Long Communion,” the traditional and annual Presbyterian Eucharist, which he shortened and tailored to the specific needs of his Formosan, aboriginal converts. Van Die contends that in being a conduit of an earlier Scottish-Canadian spirituality and adapting it to the Taiwanese context, Mackay provided an opportunity for native Taiwanese to appropriate the Christian message and embrace the Presbyterian faith on their own terms.

James R. Rohrer’s essay, “Putting Taiwan’s People in the Center of the Story: Reflections on the History of Christian Mission in Taiwan,” contends that Mackay perhaps looms too large and to the exclusion of other missionaries and missions of equal if not greater importance in the region—those in central and southern Taiwan, for example. Rohrer questions the wisdom of publishing anything more on Mackay in essence that does not attempt at least to be more outward looking and inclusive in relation to the larger question of religion in Taiwan and Mackay’s Taiwanese converts in particular. At the same time, Rohrer laments the fact that critical scholarship on the history of Christianity in Asia is not only wanting but that Taiwan itself suffers from a kind of invisibility. In
keeping with recent trends in the history of religion and missiology, a
dialogue between scholars from varied disciplines and diverse cultural
settings is required. Among Rohrer’s many recommendations is a
missiology that does not fall prey to the colonial patterns of the past and
such quasi-Orientalist literary tropes as: proactive, Western missionary
meets passive, often nameless, aboriginal recruit. According to Rohrer,
Mackay created a kind of “biculure” in which missionary initiative and
aboriginal agency worked together to create something equally Western
(Canadian) and Eastern (Taiwanese). Mackay’s reading of Confucius for
types of Christ, his belief in creation science and eclectic medical practices
are said to illustrate this, native Taiwanese converts and missionaries
taking this homespun, Scottish-Canadian-Taiwanese curriculum and running
with it.

Michael Stainton’s essay and annotative bibliography, “More Treasures
Preserved Abroad: New Mackay Letters in the Presbyterian Archives,”
draws upon select letters written by Mackay and immediate family and
colleagues (recently discovered in the closet of Isabel Mackay of Toronto
in 2009) to paint a very different picture of Mackay than previously
imagined. The public and private Mackay were two very different people
it would seem, the latter an affectionate father and husband it turns out.
Stainton’s foray into the private life of the ‘great man’, using this cache of
never-before-seen letters, opens the door to a variety of new interpretative
and revisionist possibilities on the inner life of Mackay. However, this is
not all according to Stainton. Letters written by Mackay’s teenage
daughters, Bella and Mary, constitute the basis for a new view of Formosa
in the turbulent years of 1896 - 1901 and the Japanese occupation of
Taiwan that would last some fifty years. They also suggest that the
personal charisma and dogged determination of Mackay’s early ministry
gave way to a more routinized, bureaucratized, and even globalized
missiology, the “Prophet” as he was known to his Taiwanese disciples
going from peripatetic single hero to paterfamilias of a large family church.

Mary Goodwin’s essay, “Heroic Memoirs from a Hot Country: Taiwan
Missionary Life Writing,” discusses Mackay’s public face and Christian
heroism, both real and imagined, as a factor of the “missionary memoir”
and “life writing.” Importantly, Goodwin’s analysis of Mackay’s From
Far Formosa as “heroic memoir” casts a wider net still vis-à-vis the life
writing of American Presbyterian Lillian Dickson, wife of Dr. James
Dickson and founder of Taiwan Theological College in Tainan. Not unlike
Mackay, Dickson trudged the mountainsides of Formosa to make friends
and converts of Taiwan’s aboriginal peoples, free medical care her stock in
trade. Taken together, Mackay and Dickson constitute nearly a hundred
years of missionary life writing that can be seen as “part Christian witness, part adventure fiction, part historical survey, and part self-aggrandizing promotion.” Mackay’s *From Far Formosa* was typical of male heroic memoir of the period, Dickson’s *These My People: Serving Christ Among the Mountain People of Formosa* a twentieth-century, feminist appropriation of a decidedly nineteenth-century male genre. The differences are informative and a factor of gender differences. Ironically, Mackay defends women, whereas Dickson does not, accepting her own inherent female inferiority and that of her Taiwanese counterparts as a matter of course. Mackay’s interest in Taiwan’s physical landscapes (geographical and anthropological) also stands out, Dickson very much the tourist in comparison—albeit a better student of family relations and local government hierarchies than Mackay. Goodwin also points out that the militarism and self-righteousness endemic to Mackay’s writing is conspicuously absent in Dickson’s writing and which tends more toward self-deprecation, hitting upon the humor of the situation as seen in *Chuckles behind the Door: Lillian Dickson’s Personal Letters*. Their respective medical outreach to aboriginal peoples can be divided along gender lines as well, Dickson less judgmental of local practice and more caring, Mackay ever the stern father and professional, medical practitioner. The fact that neither Mackay nor Dickson reveal any particulars concerning their private or family lives, Goodwin argues, is largely a factor of their audience and agenda, writing for public consumption and in hopes of raising money. Exculpating family from the story was part and parcel of the heroic memoir genre, in short. For Goodwin then, the life writing of Mackay and Dickson, can be seen as two distinct types of Christian heroic memoir: one late-nineteenth century and male, the other early twentieth-century and female and which, taken together, speak to the larger issue of a nascent globalized sense of world mission and national identity.

Llyn Scott’s essay, “The Black Bearded Bible Man: Flagship Opera. Formosan Epic, Emblem, and Enigma,” explores the issue of Mackay’s public face from a decidedly fictive and Taiwanese point of view. In Scott’s view, Mackay is lost in the crowd. And although de-centering Mackay, as Rohrer argues, has much to offer the historical discussion of his place in Taiwanese society, this does not work well on stage. That said, the Mackay opera itself proves beyond any doubt that Canada’s first Presbyterian missionary to Taiwan, in the eyes of his Taiwanese followers, is not only a complex mixture of East and West, but the “character and soul” of modern Taiwan—a sky god and Taiwanese animistic deity of supernatural power and political influence *par excellent*. 
My own essay, “Pan Celtic Anglo-Saxonism, the Polar Eden, and Crossing Racial Divides: The Interesting Case of George Leslie Mackay,” is historiographical in the main and discusses Mackay’s preferred reading concerning Darwin’s theory of evolution. A little background is necessary in order to locate Mackay along a spectrum of competing scientific theories all jockeying for position at the time. Polygenesis, or the American School, espoused a theory of separate and distinct supernatural creations for the different races and thus permanent, biological inferiority of all dark-skinned peoples. Monogenesis, the racial theory going back to the Enlightenment, explained racial difference as a factor of one’s environment or sustained exposure to the elements. Non-whites were deemed unfit and relegated to the slave class. The Bible affirmed that all were children of God, but condemned the descendants of Canaan (the son of Ham) to be hewers of wood and drawers of water. As the Atlantic Slave Trade reached a fever pitch and Africans by the millions were deported to work sugar, tobacco, and cotton plantations in the New World, their Christian masters were quick to employ the Bible in the service of slavery, Africans becoming the cursed seed of Canaan after the fact.

Darwin’s theory of evolution promised to undo centuries of scientific racism and religious intolerance by leveling the playing field once and for all. Unashamedly racist but highly respected for much of the nineteenth century, Craniometry and Phrenology lost all credibility, too. Darwin’s revolutionary work on human biology also threatened to destroy the careers of such virulent, scientific racists as Louis Agassiz, Samuel Morton, and their bulldog and parson-baiter, Josiah Nott. And yet, Darwin’s theories, rightly or wrongly, would become synonymous with even greater evils, Social Darwinism and Eugenics, which would be used to justify the deportation and exclusion of the Chinese, sterilization, and even genocide.

As David Livingstone has shown, conservative divines were among Darwin’s strongest supporters in the beginning and at a time when science and faith marched in lockstep. Evolution was a unitary theory that agreed with the biblical account of creation, at least in principle. However, a perceptive few were not as quick to throw their support behind a scientific theory which, as Charles Hodge first observed, amounted to materialism. What followed was a remarkable feat of religious and scientific imagination: the North Pole as the original location of the famed Garden

---

of Eden. This pious alternative to Darwinism enjoyed a certain legitimacy in ivy-league circles for a time, as well as the provisional support of conservative, Bible-believing Christians.

Mackay’s extensive reading of the best and worst of Victorian science included the wildly problematic theory of the Polar Eden. Although he does not say very much, Mackay most certainly approved. We cannot know his true mind on the subject of Nordic origins in any depth to be sure, but it is worth pointing out that his unbridled enthusiasm for a theory that looked backward and thus forward to a glorious reunion of some Oriental-Occidental kind, is consistent with Mackay’s blurring of racial lines and thus rejection of such binary opposites as East and West. Little wonder Mackay reacted so positively to the possibility at least that Chinese and Taiwanese were the scion of Northern Europe and, one supposes, how this might prove an effective weapon in his war against the head tax and other acts of racial narrow-mindedness that targeted Asians in Canada and the United States. One thing is clear. Mackay’s opposition to Darwinism may have kept him from committing such grave sins against science and humanity as Social Darwinism and Eugenics. He was, after all, a dentist not an abortionist. And although evidence of a benign strain of anti-African prejudice can be found in his diaries, taken in context, and as a

whole, this does not constitute proof of racism. As Van Die argues, Mackay was no mere agent of Presbyterian tradition with regard to gender. Importantly, his relationship and, indeed, debt to science was no less innovative when it came to the issue of race, as well.

Hugo A. Meynell, the distinguished Roman Catholic philosopher, Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, and a participant in the 2010 Mackay conference at Aletheia University is given the final word. As the premier defender of intelligent design in professional philosophical circles and Bernard Lonergan scholar of our day, but more than this, a moral philosopher of remarkable courage and honesty, he is uniquely equipped to comment on Mackay’s intellectual and moral virtues in the broad sense. In his essay, “Prolegomena to Missiology: Reflection on Religious and Political Differences,” he roams the highways and byways of Religious Studies, surveying a wide array of competing religious intellectual traditions, philosophical schools of thought, and antithetical political ideologies. Inspired by Mackay’s dedication to a rational faith and his essential goodness, Meynell goes on to formulate a mission statement and approach to religious and political difference for the twenty-first century that is inspired by Mackay’s life and legacy.


40 Also see, Graham Nanton, foreword by Joan Friedenberg, The Detenuring of an Eminent Professor: A Personal Story (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2008).
HISTORY AND MISSIOLOGY
“Growing Up Presbyterian in Victorian Canada”: Childhood Influences and Faith Formation

Marguerite Van Die
Professor Emerita, Department of History, Queen’s University, Kingston, Canada

Mackay Monument, Woodstock, Ontario, Canada
Surveying the growing body of literature on the British missionary enterprise, Andrew Porter, one of its foremost analysts, cogently observes that “the academic world is still heavily populated by those who would confine our attention either to their own domestic ecclesiastical history with little time for overseas missions, or to the missionaries in the field with no interest in the world that shaped those intruders and in part conditioned their impact.”

His writings and those of colleagues such as Andrew Walls, Lamin Sanneh, and Brian Stanley have done much to dispel previous perceptions of the missionary as “agent, scribe, and moral alibi” for the “colonizing project.” In the place of the postcolonial critique there now exists a more nuanced understanding of the complex cross-cultural process whereby the Christianity transmitted by the missionaries became translated into the religious languages and idioms of quite different societies.

This act of translation was conditioned not only by the colonial and indigenous context, but also, as Porter has noted, by the formative world of the missionary ‘intruders.’ Nineteenth-century Protestant missionaries, for example, did not bring to the mission field a generic evangelical Christianity, but rather a layered understanding and experience of the faith that for many stretched back to infancy. So too, when communicating to their home denomination, they took care to portray their efforts in a distant and unfamiliar country through an idiom accessible to an audience whose formative influences were similar to their own. Hence, as a first step in unearthing the complex process whereby missionaries transmitted and translated western Christian influences into new idioms, we do well to

---


heed Porter’s reminder to understand the cultural world that shaped these ‘intruders’ and in part conditioned their impact. With this in mind, this essay examines the Presbyterian cultural world of George Leslie Mackay, in his day one of one of Canada’s best-known foreign missionaries, who in 1872 with the support of his denomination entered the mission field in northern Formosa (now Taiwan), where he worked until his death in 1901.

Ever concerned to transmit his experiences within a providential framework, Mackay noted in his published memoir, *From Far Formosa*, that on 10 April, 1872, only a month after his arrival in Tamsui, he had gratefully recorded in his diary “Here I am in this house, having been led all the way from the old homestead in Zorra by Jesus, as direct as though my boxes were labeled, “Tamsui, Formosa, China.”

Though the wording and date in his manuscript diary are slightly different, they reflect a similar faith and confidence in a direct connection between his formative influences and his new mission field. His reflections on the subject did not go beyond such brief prayers of thanksgiving, yet few missionaries present a more intriguing case study of the continuities and discontinuities that marked the foreign missions project of Christianization. This will become evident as we examine in some detail, first the influences from the old homestead in Zorra which George Leslie Mackay took with him in those boxes labeled Formosa, and secondly, how these in turn affected both the form of Christian faith and worship which he transmitted to his converts in Formosa, and the enthusiastic support he received from his home denomination.

There are a number of compelling reasons to select Mackay’s Presbyterian childhood and youth in Zorra as entry into understanding a complex missionary renowned in his day for his intense approach to ‘go it alone’ and to identify in dress, language and manners with his native converts. In the first place, while his context was Formosa, he was sent out by, and responsible to, the Canadian Presbyterian Church. Much of what we know about his life and work comes from his own hand for he

---

3 George Leslie Mackay, *From Far Formosa: The Island, its People and Missions*, ed. J.A. Macdonald (New York: Fleming H.Revell 1896), 38. In the actual diary the entry for that date is entirely different. Instead it would appear that this is how he afterwards rewrote for public reading the entry of 7 April 1872, which in the original Diary reads, “My field now fixed. What a tremendous burden off my soul!!! . . .Beautiful North Formosa, my soul is in ecstacies when I think of being led here and no one before me. So I can lay the foundation. God help me this day. This day I again swear allegiance to thee. Ready to live or die in my lovely chosen field ‘So help me God.’” Mackay’s Diaries, Original English Version, 1871-1901, transcribed and ed. by the Mackay’s Diaries Working Group, 22.
was, in the words of a recent study, “a born propagandist.” However, as that study has also noted, in his reports on the Formosan Mission to Canadian readers “Mackay might have told the truth and nothing but the truth, but not always the whole truth.”

He was not alone in this. Late nineteenth-century writers generally saw the purpose of their work to be one of edification, and therefore were selective in what they chose to feature. Few expressed this as succinctly as Mackay’s kinsman, W.A. Mackay, in a book published in 1900 entitled Zorra Boys At Home and Abroad or How to Succeed. It was a study of twenty-four men, including George Leslie Mackay, all of whom had been raised in Zorra, and who according to the author were only part of at least a hundred who by the end of the century had “made their mark in the world.” In describing these men, it was his expressed desire “to paint with the finger of charity . . . revealing only the beautiful, the true and the good.”

This desire to edify is also part of a wider discourse on Mackay, for contemporaries were no less eager to promote his cause and to see his personality in an inspirational light. One who knew him well, yet another Mackay and Zorra boy, Dr. R.P. Mackay, foreign missionary secretary for the Presbyterian Church in Canada from 1892 to 1926, commented that Mackay “Could scarcely be described as social. Reserved even among his friends, among strangers he was often silent.” His reserve, R.P. Mackay elaborated was at times a detriment to extending his influence at mission conferences, but it was only the surface man. “He had an affectionate nature,” it was emphasized. “He loved in after years to trace the record of the companions of his boyhood. . . . He had a tender, transparently sincere and lovable nature, and he was loved by those who knew him best.” Indeed, as is evident in his diary entries describing his continuous round of visits to congregations and church meetings when on furlough in Canada in 1880-1 and 1893-5, and in his unanimous election as Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Canada in 1894, Mackay successfully addressed and understood the mentality and religious interests of his fellow Presbyterians. At those times, there was no doubt that he was a Zorra boy,

---

5 W.A. Mackay, Zorra Boys At Home and Abroad or How to Succeed (Toronto: William Briggs 1900), 9.
who by any Canadian Presbyterian measurement was an example of success “at home and abroad.”

Using the headings of family, education, and religion, I will accordingly examine this Presbyterian culture in some detail, keeping in mind that much of what we know was crafted and propagated by writers during Mackay’s later years in quite changed circumstances from those of his youth. In my concluding observations I will suggest that this “Presbyterian culture,” part myth and part fact, was indeed a factor in Mackay’s success in Formosa and Canada, though in each case not without contradictions.

**Family**

Mackay and his cohort of “Zorra boys,” like many Canadian Presbyterians who would read his accounts and flock to hear him during his missionary furloughs, belonged to a third generation of immigrants in a settler society. They grew up with stories of the ideals and challenges of their ancestors; but they also witnessed the social changes of their own time. Living in a very different environment from that of grandparents and parents, they built careers, memorialized the past, and extolled current accomplishments. Although its earliest immigrants were United Empire Loyalists, by the 1830s Zorra had become a colony of transplanted Sutherland Highlanders. Opened to settlement in the early 1820s the area had attracted two brothers, William and Angus Mackay, who immigrated first to Nova Scotia and then, after working on the Erie Canal, to Zorra where they began the arduous land clearing and crop planting. In 1829, they visited their native Scotland, returning to Canada the following year with their mother and father, Isobel and George, both well into their 80s, along with 360 other natives of Sutherland. Though a number were propertied, most had been impoverished by the current economic depression that decimated the Scotland Highlands and by the wrenching dislocation resulting from clearing small holdings for large-scale sheep raising. An even larger influx followed in 1831. By 1833, Zorra had 110 Sutherland families; immigration, though in smaller numbers, and again with the financial encouragement of the Earl of Sutherland, would continue into the 1850s.

Upper Canada’s waves of Highlanders appear to have adjusted well to their new home. According to one contemporary, politician Thomas Rolph, though “not skilled in agriculture” Zorra’s Highland families were nonetheless, “eminently successful . . . frugal, loyal, faithful and a correct body of people” who possessed “strength, goodwill and
perseverance.” Their endurance of Upper Canada’s Highlanders, a trait which Mackay brought with him to Formosa, can be seen in nearly every facet of his missionary life and daily work. This included going barefoot on lengthy missionary journeys through North Formosa, a custom from his boyhood in Zorra that went back to the early pioneers, who walked to church carrying their shoes in hand.

Frugality and austerity were not the only Scottish virtues he brought to Formosa as essential to evangelical outreach. Quoting his mentor, Scottish Presbyterian missionary Alexander Duff, Mackay reduced success in the mission field to four basic requirements: entire consecration, humility, perseverance, and common sense. Already fifty years earlier these had become the backbone of an immigrant society in the New World. In the early days of Zorra, communal help was a requirement for survival, and family, clan and community were intricately intertwined. One could discern with remarkable precision by their name alone where a family lived. The first Mackays settled on farmland east of Embro. Isobel, in her eighties, mother of the two Mackay brothers, Angus and William, died only three months after the perilous journey to Canada. Her husband George, distinguished as ‘Relochan’ (the name of his Sutherlandshire home) spent his remaining years on the family farm located on the 9th concession road. Literally hewn out of the dense forests of Upper Canada in the 1820s, the farm belonged to William, the first Mackay to inhabit Zorra, known as ‘Captain’ because of his rank in the 93rd Sutherland and Argyleshire Highland regiment, having served during the peninsular war before coming to Canada. On the 10th concession road lived William’s son, George, his wife Helen Sutherland, and their six children, including George Leslie Mackay, the youngest and smallest member of the family.

8 W.D. McIntosh, One Hundred Years in the Zorra Church [Knox United, Embro] (Toronto: United Church Publishing House 1930), 7-9.
9 Mackay’s Diaries, January 26, 1881, (p. 335).
10 Mackays appeared to be everywhere, thirteen of them settling on the sixth concession road north of Zorra. In the area known as “Little Ireland.” W.A. Ross, History of Zorra and Embro: Pioneer Sketches of 60 Years Ago (Embro: Embro Courier Office 1909), 14.
11 Ibid, 15.
12 His siblings were Alexander, James, John, Bella and Mary. Mary died in 1872. See Mackay’s Diaries, February 9, 1872, (p. 67). His parents both died in 1885. See Mackay’s Diaries, December 31, 1885 (p. 471).
Education

In the phrasing of Victorian didactic literature, “the people of Scotland have always been noted for their love of learning,” a love that allegedly went back in time to John Knox’s institution of parish schools, and even earlier, to the year 563 when St. Columba came from Iona and “established a Christian college from which missionary educators went forth.” In actual fact, elementary education penetrated the Highlands only in the first decades of the nineteenth century, largely through the efforts of the Moderate wing in the Church of Scotland. Educating their young was among the treasured goals of Highland immigrants and the first communal structure in the Zorra settlement, not surprisingly, was a log schoolhouse. Located less than a mile from the Mackay farm, the school was nonetheless a long walk through dense forest. In 1850 (which would have been around the time young George Leslie began school) the provincial Superintendent of Education and Methodist preacher Egerton Ryerson, had introduced the Free School System, but it would be some time before its benefits were felt. In actual fact, as recalled by a contemporary who attended one of the two schools in the area, learning was a haphazard affair with plenty of opportunity for student mischief. With a few notable exceptions, teachers were poorly trained, and expected to teach pupils of all ages in cramped quarters for very little pay. Student attendance was also intermittent at best, a reality which often resulted in poor teacher morale and pedagogical indifference.

Despite less than ideal conditions for learning, there was near complete agreement on the moral and religious mandate of public education. Each school day began with the teacher reading a chapter from the Bible, followed by prayer and then questions from the Shorter Catechism. The core curriculum was divided equally between the three Rs—reading, writing, and arithmetic—with spelling added to the mix for good measure. The New Testament was the textbook, with the study of the English alphabet soundly linked to various lessons in moral living. The letter H,

---

14 Ibid, 236
15 Previous to this a school had been erected wherever there were enough families to support a teacher, each family subscribing in proportion to the number of children attending. See Susan E. Houston and Alison Prentice, *Schooling and Scholars in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1988), 33-88.
16 Ross, *History of Zorra*, chpt. 3.
for example, reminded the budding student to “Honor father and mother.” The best way to learn was through memorization, beginning with the Psalms. Those who failed to master such texts found themselves at the wrong end of the teacher’s birch rod, administered with a vengeance to the hand or posterior region. Flogging was imposed for such academic infractions as whispering, failure to enumerate the nomenclature of history and geography, or the inability to recite verbatim the Shorter Catechism on command.

On the benefits of the Shorter Catechism, American historian David B. Calhoun notes: “For generations Scottish children were brought up, it was said, on porridge and the Shorter Catechism—a blessing for both heart and mind. Oatmeal is now touted as one of the most heart-healthy foods we can eat. And the discipline of learning the Shorter Catechism strengthened generations of Scottish minds.” In a more sober vein, Robert Lewis Stevenson commented, “The happiest lot on earth is to be born a Scotchman [but] you must pay for it in many ways, as for all other advantages on earth. You have to learn the [Psalm] paraphrases and the Shorter Catechism.” Scotland’s youthful transplants in Zorra were less grateful. W.A. Mackay recalled: “Oh! How the Presbyterians envied the other denominations for their privilege of exemption from the Catechism,” and added “had it been left to ‘us boys,’ all Zorra would be Methodist today.” In later years, George Leslie Mackay’s generation of Presbyterian ministers would, however, speak affectionately of the Shorter Catechism and its practice of memorized questions and answers. Not surprisingly, this became Mackay’s preferred method of instructing Formosans converts in the basics of the Christian faith.

As young boys the favourite ways of learning, however, took place outside the classroom. This included regular visits to nearby Indian camps where they observed with admiration the practical skills of their native peers, seemingly oblivious to their white observers. This same pattern of

---

19 Mackay, *Zorra Boys*, 249.
participant observation would find application years later in Formosa when Mackay spent his first months as a keen observer and listener, and in consequence mastered the native language and culture in record time. In his journals comparisons can be found between Canada’s native peoples and the Formosan aborigines to whom he ministered. “Twenty savages came on the eve. . . .,” he recorded on March 29, 1872 in his diary,” Well I was not much surprised, for I was accustomed to see North American Indians.”

A second popular opportunity for learning took place when children were needed at home, and through observation and participation acquired such practical skills as logging, clearing, and barn and house construction. Physical outdoor work inspired the one anecdote we have from Mackay’s childhood. Found in Marian Keith’s 1912 juvenile biography, The Black Bearded Barbarian and allegedly told to her long after the fact by his brother Alexander, the story has a moral framework designed for young readers. Albeit the smallest and youngest of the group of boys in question, he allegedly was known for his refusal to countenance the idea of ‘I can’t.’ At the end of a long day splitting stones, and contrary to the predictions of his peers, young Mackay insisted that it would take only a little additional effort to break the one remaining stone—a formidable obstacle, approximately four feet in diameter. Galvanizing everyone to help gather wood and build a fire next to the bolder, his determination to succeed paid off. Keith here did not emphasize Mackay’s competitive nature, a point hinted at by several biographers and evident in his choice of Formosa as a mission field: “the very field waiting for me. No other laborer ever before me.” Instead, she suggested that tenacity and persistence trumped age and size in leadership training. These were the same character traits that late nineteenth-century historians of Zorra and other settler communities would emphasize, even though they themselves had never handled a chopping axe or endured the backbreaking work of clearing tree stumps.

Stories of pioneer tenacity and of martial exploits such as those of grandfather William Mackay, who had fought alongside Wellington in the Peninsular War, gave impetus to a sizeable body of edifying folklore that informed the life and future work of George Leslie and his friends. No matter how adamantly educators proclaimed that ‘brain beats brawn’ or that the pen was mightier than the sword, for boys of Mackay’s generation,

21 Mackay’s Diaries, 20.
22 Saturday, March 9, 1872, Mackay’s Diaries, 16. On his ambition as a young boy and youth to be first, see W.A. Mackay, Zorra Boys, 139, and R.P. Mackay, “Life of George Leslie Mackay,” 40-1.
feats of physical endurance and engineering genius were the real ideals to emulate. In his adult years Mackay held himself to the highest intellectual and religious standards, but he also reveled in the arduous, physical challenges of the mission field. Indeed, the spiritual and physical were inseparable in his mind as the following diary entry illustrates:

Went out to Bang-kah and took off my coat. Worked at the fire-place with two masons. . . . Put on a fire. Splendid. Not smoking. Crowds in looking at the success. All for Christ. Thanks my humble home was on a farm. Dear home! 23

For evangelism to be convincing to a skeptical audience, it was important to put into practice the physical skills honed years earlier on a Canadian farm.

Religion

By the time of Zorra’s third generation, the children of the 1850s, the framework that gave coherence to family ties and moral and physical training had become a clearly-defined Highland Presbyterian culture. Local histories and biographies say little about the religious influences that Sutherlandshire Highlanders brought from Scotland. Instead, they emphasize the communal nature of religious life during the early years of settlement. From other sources we know that as early as the 1820s parliamentary legislation had laid the groundwork for concerted Protestant evangelization of the Highlands through financial grants permitting the Church of Scotland to strengthen its presence and influence in the region through church construction. 24 As a leading landlord, the Earl of Sutherland was one of those who availed himself of the financial provisions to construct much-needed church buildings. 25 Influential also

23 Mackay’s Diaries, December 27, 1885, (p. 471).
24 Fifteen hundred pounds per parish were made available to construct a church sufficient to hold a congregation of 400 and provide the resident minister with a manse and a glebe. Given the large size of parishes, church buildings offered in this way might relieve a landlord of his obligations to make religious provisions for his people. Allan I. Macinnes, “Evangelical Protestantism in the nineteenth-century Highlands” in Sermons and Battle Hymns: Protestant Popular Culture in Modern Scotland, eds. Graham Walker and Tom Gallagher (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), 43-68.
25 Ibid, 45-46. The spread of evangelical religion in these communities, however, was largely the work of the secession churches that had originated in the eighteenth century.
in the early 1800s were dissenting itinerant preachers and teachers, such as Neil Douglas and James and Robert Haldane. Their revivalist preaching sparked a renewed interest in Sabbath observance and the sacramental season or ‘holy fairs’ within Gaelic speaking congregations of the Church of Scotland. Theirs was an evangelical Calvinism, rooted in God’s sovereignty and providence, the authority of Scripture, Christ’s atonement for sin, and the need for repentance and spiritual renewal. In his autobiography, Mackay wrote that while some saw it as narrow, it was a theology “deep and high” in its simple doctrines and biblical foundations. As is evident from his journal entries, this evangelical Calvinism of Mackay’s native Scotland shaped his evangelistic work in Formosa from the moment he arrived until his death. It included an unwavering belief in divine sovereignty and a deep sense of God’s personal providence which he conveyed to his ministerial students through sermons, catechism, and Scripture, and in the study of science through the inductive Baconian method whose goal was to teach them “the wonderful creations of our God.”

Two complementary cultural influences contributed to the vitality of evangelical Presbyterianism in the Highlands in the years immediately preceding the Sutherlandshire emigration. One was the spread of Gaelic through spiritual poetry and song, including the Psalms, and through the Gaelic School Societies, financed by public subscription and run from Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Inverness. The other were the lay leaders known as na daoine or “the Men.” Crucial to both was the household prayer meeting, considered a godly alternative to the ceilidh, the traditional Gaelic social gathering where one might dance or sing and be entertained by a gifted storyteller. Church-building programmes, the Gaelic language, song and poetry, lay leaders, Sabbath observance, and household religion were forms that readily lent themselves to cultural transmission by Zorra’s Scottish immigrants.

Sunday schools and young people’s societies, the normal channels of religious socialization, did not appear until well after Mackay reached

27 Mackay, From Far Formosa, 15.
28 Mackay’s Diaries, Monday November 12, 1888, (p. 626). For his use of the catechism in teaching new converts, see Mackay’s Diaries, Monday April 29, 1872, (p. 26).
Religious socialization into the Presbyterian faith began at the family hearth with morning and evening Bible reading and prayer led by the father, and in his absence, by the mother. In annual ministerial reports to the Presbytery, household religion outranked church attendance as a better indication of vital Christianity. Religion learned at a mother’s knee in godly homes received special praise in biographies and autobiographies of late nineteenth-century Canadian denominational leaders such as Mackay. Typical of its genre, the first chapter of *From Far Formosa* is dedicated to such hallowed memories.

The home also offered a public setting for communal catechizing. In selected homes, special catechizing sessions were held from time to time; called by the minister, these events would bring together several generations of families in the region. In these communal household settings, old and young, sometimes with discreet prompting from friends and neighbours, were expected to recite the answers to the questions called out by the minister.

As in Scotland, spiritual songs continued to be a favourite means of expressing and transmitting faith in the home, school, and church. Sung *a cappella* with a precentor ‘lining out’ each line to be repeated by the congregation, either in Gaelic or English depending on the language of the service, the words, not the melody, were considered paramount in offering praise to the Almighty. In addition to the Psalms and patriotic Scottish verses, the sentimental religious poetry and hymnody of Dugald Buchanan and Peter Grant were early Zorra favourites. With such evangelical titles as “The Love of My Redeemer,” “Eternal Home,” and “The Song of the Missionaries,” they worked in tandem with the Shorter Catechism to help religious knowledge enter both heart and mind. Mackay’s journals frequently make mention of how greatly he enjoyed breaking into song. His gift to the man who would become his first convert, Giam Cheng Hoa, upon their initial meeting on April 19, 1872 was a hymnbook, and thereafter singing became a recurring way to publicize the Gospel and socialize converts into the Christian faith. Unhampered by any

---

29 Mackay, *From Far Formosa*, 15.
32 See for example Mackay’s *Diaries*, Sunday May 12, 1872, (p. 25), “Afternoon went with A Hoa to several villages singing hymns,” and Saturday April 27, 1872,
instrumental accompaniment (it was not until 1900 that the Zorra church admitted an organ)\(^{33}\) and with the words of the Shorter Catechism internalized since childhood, Mackay brought Formosan converts into the Presbyterian form of Christianity with which he had grown up in Zorra.

Unlike the Presbyterian Church of Canada of the 1870s when Mackay left for Formosa, religious life during his youth in Zorra had been defined more by communal than by ecclesiastical structures. Patriarchal in nature, religious culture in the Highland tradition of *na daione* (the men) valued personal testimony, biblical exposition, and lay leaders seasoned by experience and respected by the congregation. In the first four decades of immigrant life, lay leadership continued even after the arrival of an ordained minister from the homeland. During their first two years in Upper Canada, settlers held weekly prayer meetings in homes, all the while petitioning the Church of Scotland for an ordained minister. Although the denomination had been slow to persuade its clergy to emigrate, the Zorra/Embro Presbyterians were fortunate. Shortly after the decision to build a log meeting house in the area, they were successful in calling a minister, Donald Mackenzie, who in 1835 began a thirty-eight-year ministry that ended in 1871, the year Mackay left for his mission to Formosa.\(^{34}\) Although never excelling as a preacher, Mackenzie was respected and admired for his deep faith and wise advice, which often saw him adjudicating conflicts among congregational members.

In 1844, the year of Mackay’s birth and only a year after the Great Disruption in Scotland, the Free Church established itself in Canada. Its entry into Canada, in a context quite different from the formative political and ecclesiastical issues present in the mother country, has generally been attributed to the influence of evangelical missionary ministers sent to the colonies by the Church of Scotland, especially through its Glasgow

\(^{33}\) McIntosh, *One Hundred Years*, 83.

\(^{34}\) Ibid, 18-20; Mackay, *Pioneer Life*, 254-271. Born in Inverness in 1798, Mackenzie completed his course of theological studies at King’s College, Aberdeen, and studied one session in Edinburgh under Thomas Chalmers, thereafter inspiring his audience with his stories about the great leader of the Disruption. Sent as a missionary to his expatriated countrymen in Canada upon his ordination in 1834, Mackenzie traveled around to various groups of Highlanders in western Ontario before being inducted into the pastoral charge of the Zorra congregation.
Missionary Society. In the case of Zorra, the close theological and spiritual fit between the congregation and its minister which had been evident already as Mackenzie’s induction ensured a unanimous vote to join the Free Church in 1844, followed by the decision in 1861 to enter the Canadian Presbyterian Church, formed by a union of the Free and Secessionist churches.

The Highland customs of worship such as the sacramaid or annual long communion continued intact in the Gaelic speaking congregations of the Church of Scotland and the Free Church during the first decades of Mackay’s life. Stretched over five days, the sacramental season was a time of communal solemnity under patriarchal leadership. Although initially the Highland tradition of holding the sacramental services out of doors had continued, by the time of Mackay’s youth these now took place inside the Zorra church. Services alternated between Gaelic and English, and each day had its own significance. Thursday was “Fast day” with no work to be done as families gathered from far and near for rest and worship. Friday was “Men’s Day,” also known as “Question Day,” and was dedicated to self-examination through singing and sermonizing with the service preceded and followed by the testimonies of laymen revered for their mature religious experience. The young and the female part of the community kept silent, for it was not deemed appropriate that they enter the discussion. Saturday, a time of private, family and public prayer was “Preparation Day,” when communion tokens were distributed to members in good standing. The Sunday communion services were the highlight of the sacramental season. These began with the distinctly Highland custom of “fencing the tables” as the minister gave a solemn warning against any unworthy partaking of “the Supper,” followed by an invitation to all “who truly love the Saviour and are seeking to serve him” to come forward to the tables. After a short address, the bread and wine were administered in silence, followed by an exhortation to the congregation to remember their vows and to go forth into the world in ways that would reflect that they had been with their Lord. Monday, the final day, was a day of “Thanksgivings,” a theme elaborated in psalms, scripture readings, prayers, and a sermon. Never failing was the reminder that although the communion services had come to an end, their results must continue to be felt. As one sympathetic observer noted, “True worshippers returned to

36 McIntosh, *One Hundred Years*, 109-10.
their homes spiritually enriched by the mountain-top experience with their Saviour and one another.”

Although intended to be outside the reach of time as a foretaste of eternity, the “long communion” soon lost its distinctive traits. Already in 1863, after much deliberation the Zorra Church Session decided to hold communion services not once, but twice yearly. Gradually services became shorter in length, and by 1878 the Gaelic services had lost their place of prominence. By the time of Mackay’s adult years and his departure for Formosa, this distinctive sacramental celebration was receding into memory. To try to transplant it to an Asian mission field had little point, but transmitting its significance remained critical for him. The same sense of solemnity and awesome self-searching that traditionally had marked the communion season in the Zorra of his boyhood is evident in his brief description of the first communion service he conducted in Formosa, on the “second Sabbath of 16 February, 1873.” As described for Canadian readers, it was a “day of tender memory.” To new converts the celebration was “a solemn and mysterious performance.” When the scriptural warrant for the service was read after the Scottish fashion, one of the converts broke down completely, sobbing, “I am unworthy, retired for a season and then returned and partook of the sacred emblems.” Although there was no traditional Monday Thanksgiving service, “in the eve,” as he noted in his journal, “we had a glorious thanksgiving.”

Other journal entries show how he further adapted Sunday services and the Presbyterian communion season to the Formosan context. In the tradition of Christianity’s founder who healed on the Jewish holy day, Mackay was not averse to combining dental work with evangelism on the Sabbath. And to meet the needs of the mission field, the communion service followed closely upon the baptism of new converts, and might on occasion close with women exhorting the unconverted of their own sex.

This last innovation diverged from the Highland institution of the “Men,” another of the central features of the long communion. Originating in Ross-shire and Sutherland, the Na Daoine or “old Christian inquirers”

37 Ibid, 60.
38 Mackay’s Diaries, Sunday February 16, 1873, (p.68).
39 As described in Mackay, Pioneer Life, 392-393.
40 See for example Mackay’s Diaries., Sunday May 1, 1898, (p. 1159).
41 See for example Mackay’s Diaries, February 9, 1872, (p. 67), and Sunday, March 17, 1878, (p. 239).
42 Ibid, Sunday December 13, 1891, (p. 842).
were part of a tradition of messianic peasant leaders since the Middle Ages. Often employed as lay preachers and catechists, they played a considerable role in ensuring the widespread acceptance of evangelical influences prior to the Disruption of 1843, and have been credited as a major influence in carrying the Highlands into the Free Church. With little formal education and of humble social origins, they owed their spiritual leadership in the region’s evangelical crofting communities to their ability to draw on native powers of imagination and language to interpret passages of Scripture. This tradition had been faithfully carried over to Presbyterian communities in Cape Breton, Glengarry and Zorra, and in the early years when ministers were scarce, the Men functioned as lay preachers and catechists. On the Friday of the communion season, they were the ones who, historian Laurie Stanley-Blackwell notes, “offered searching commentary on the ‘marks’ or ‘tokens’ of genuine grace.” Among the legendary Men of the early Zorra community was Mackay’s great-grandfather, George Mackay, who in his mid 80s had left the Highlands for Upper Canada. It was recalled how on “Men’s Day” this “aged saint. . . . tottering into the grave. . . . with a heavenly glow upon his countenance” spoke to the gathered young people and children of his decision many years earlier “to follow the Man.” Sixty years later, when this incident was recounted, he continued to be presented as a source of inspiration: “Such an appeal coming from a veteran Christian, covered with the scars of battle made a powerful impression.”

By this time, as had been the case with the long communion, the tradition of the Men had faded into memory. In Scotland the Free Church, intent on exercising a restraining institutional influence in the Highlands following the revivalist waves of 1859-6, placed the Men under greater ministerial control by encouraging them to serve on kirk sessions as elders. Analyzing their declining influence in Cape Breton, Stanley-Blackwell notes that by the 1870s a similar strategy of clerical intervention was evident there also. In the interests of controlling the earlier spontaneity,

---

44 Ibid, 96.
45 Mackay, *Pioneer Life*, 78-99, 101-113. For the reference to George Mackay, see p. 94
ministers gradually took over the role of spiritual testimony traditionally offered by the Men prior to communion. Even more devastating to the influence of the Men was the synodical decision to replace the traditional Gaelic catechist with a probationer, that is, a divinity student.\footnote{Stanley-Blackwell, “Tabernacles,” 114-5.}

Order and sobriety were the moral imperatives of a new generation of Presbyterian clergymen, not only in Cape Breton, but also in Ontario. Mackay’s youth spanned a similar shift in social and religious life within the Zorra settlement. In 1847 the cornerstone had been laid for a brick building to replace the old log church as log houses gave way to frame and stone and brick, and the bush trails gradually developed into graveled roads. In 1855 the first buggy appeared in Zorra, and with improved communication the village of Embro became a separate municipality, and only five years later boasted a population of 550, two schools and two newspapers. In this more sophisticated environment with greater opportunities for education, there are hints that the young became less content to wait quietly until that distant time when the mantle of “the Men” would fall on them. As children of the covenant, they were expected not simply to follow the faith of their parents, but also to give witness to a personal experience of the faith.\footnote{Robert S. Rayburn, “The Presbyterian Doctrines of Covenant Children, Covenant Nurture, and Covenant Succession,” \textit{Presbyterian} 22/2 (1966): 76-112.} Mackay states that in his case this had occurred at age ten.\footnote{Mackay, \textit{From Far Formosa}, 16.}

With this emphasis on youthful decision and conversion, the preaching and spiritual direction of ministers acquired a new more intimate influence. Typical of this influence was Zorra’s minister, Donald Mackenzie, described by W.A. Mackay in \textit{Pioneer Life in Zorra} as “tall, erect, and with a kingly brow,” whose countenance glowed and whose eyes gleamed with fire as he preached, and who left no doubt in the hearts and minds of his listeners “that he was fully alive to the realities with which he was dealing.”\footnote{Mackay, \textit{Pioneer Life}, 259.} During his lengthy tenure, some thirty-eight men entered the ministry, and reference to his role as a model and mentor abound. W.A. Mackay, for example, devotes the final third of his book to Mackenzie and the three ministers who with him shared the Presbyterian pulpits in nineteenth-century Zorra and Embro. Different in temperament and personal appearance these were “all manly men who kept back nothing
that was profitable but each regarded himself ‘a messenger of grace to guilty men.’”

In addition there were the missionaries and revivalist preachers. These rather than the congregational minister receive special mention in Mackay’s own account of the spiritual mentors and models of his youth. Foremost was William Chalmers Burns, who laid the 1847 cornerstone of Zorra’s new church, and that same year went as missionary to China with the English Presbyterian Church. There, until his death in 1868, he would adopt Chinese dress and habits in ways later practiced by Mackay. Once the latter was on the mission field, the global dimensions of the evangelical revival encouraged a shared approach between missionary and revivalist preacher. Taking time in Chicago in 1893 during his second furlough to become better acquainted with the work of Dwight Moody and after listening to several visiting Scottish urban revivalists, Mackay exulted in his diary, “Well, now I never heard these Men (not even dear Moody) before and I notice how very similar they conducted their meetings to our glorious gatherings in beloved Formosa.”

Other aspects of evangelical culture took longer to transmit. Juvenile missionary societies, for example, which began to appear in Britain in the 1840s as a fundraising agency and a means to inculcate ‘the rising generation’ with the missionary spirit, would not become part of the experience of Canadian children and youth until well after Mackay’s removal to Formosa. According to his own testimony and that of others, he had taken the decision to become a foreign missionary on his own at an early age. He maintained it unwaveringly during his schooling in Embro and Woodstock, his brief time as a teacher in Maitlandville and Maplewood, and his subsequent studies at the Omemee Grammar School and the Free Church’s Knox College in Toronto. Choosing Princeton

---

51 Ibid, 323.
53 Mackay’s Diaries, October 27, 1893, (p.959).
55 He attended school in Embro and Woodstock (1850-55) and then taught several years at age 14, in order to finance his further secondary school education. See Ontario Heritage Foundation, “Reverend George Leslie Mackay, 1844-1901,” 2 [2001]. Thereafter he completed his secondary schooling at the Omemee Grammar School, which had opened its doors in 1858, and which lists him on its website
rather than Knox for his theological education, Mackay was typical of many evangelical Presbyterians born in Canada, with 277 attending that institution between 1812 and 1929.\textsuperscript{56} In his case, in addition to Princeton’s reputation for theological orthodoxy, there was the attraction of the student body’s longstanding interest in foreign missions.\textsuperscript{57}

At Princeton, like many others, he fell under the spell of Charles Hodge. It may seem incongruous that someone as innovative in the mission field as Mackay would choose as mentor a man renowned for his tenacious defense of the traditional standards of Presbyterianism against those seeking their modernization. It is important, therefore, to recognize the religious challenges of the period. In the Presbyterian culture of Mackay’s childhood and youth the old and the new been maintained in equilibrium, but by the early 1870s when he set out to Formosa the tension became harder to maintain.\textsuperscript{58} Change was gaining the upper hand. In many ways the denomination’s decision to send him overseas as a missionary was part of a new and exciting period in Presbyterian self-awareness. The year 1875 saw the formation of a large united Canadian Presbyterian Church whose resources and confidence would extend to an ever-increasing sphere of influence in home and foreign missions. With that institutional growth also came a new ethos, a more centralized, businesslike and efficient approach to religious and church life. Those who like Mackay chose the mission field often engaged in a love/hate relationship with the bureaucracy and the institution that sent and supported them. James Rohrer has analyzed this so effectively in his

\textsuperscript{56} Peter Bush, “Princeton Theological Seminary and The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1820-1929,” Canadian Society of Presbyterian History Papers (2006): 1-2. Bush also notes that probably because of the unsatisfactory nature of theological education available in the 1860s, the flow was especially large during Mackay’s time, and in the period 1868 to 1873 an average of 18 Canadians annually were in attendance.

\textsuperscript{57} David B. Calhoun, Faith and Learning (1812-1868), vol. 1 of Princeton Seminary (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust 1994), passim.

\textsuperscript{58} See the description of these changes as experienced by Canadian novelist, Charles Gordon (Ralph Connor) who in 1870 moved to Zorra from Glengarry as a ten-year old son of the manse, Charles W. Gordon, Postscript to Adventure: The Autobiography of Ralph Connor (New York: Farrar & Rinehart 1938), 29-38.
detailed biographical studies that I do not need to elaborate. 59 Mackay rejected out of hand any institutional interference in his mission field, and yet during his two furloughs to Canada he appeared to flourish in the Presbyterian culture of the congregations in which he spoke. The same can be said about his deliberations in the church courts and his election as moderator of the Presbyterian General Assembly in 1894.

These were years when home-bound Presbyterians like his cousin W.A. Mackay were memorializing the bygone ways of the Highland Presbyterian culture of their boyhood. Speaking of the faith-driven people of those early years, he noted with typical hyperbole, “The pioneers, like the apostle, were ‘filled with the company of the brethren’,” and concluded ‘May we be worthy of noble sires.’ 60 It is not without significance that having extolled the virtues of three such pioneer ministers, he included as his fourth and final subject, his cousin, George Leslie Mackay, who in distant Formosa had established a spirit-filled community no longer possible in the urbanizing and industrializing Canada of the 1890s. During his two furloughs it is evident that Mackay’s own stories kindled not only the hearts and imaginations but also the memories of the many Presbyterians who flocked to hear his stories of facing and overcoming the challenges to faith and life in distant Formosa. It has already been noted how he drew on the Presbyterian culture of his youth for models of faith and worship in a new context. There is also evidence that this process of translation allowed him to maintain and renew faith practices which he considered to be under siege in his native country. Describing in his journal a service with his converts on Sunday April 18, 1875 he exulted, “Glorious time! Sang for hours together. . . . Though indeed not up in time and tune to suit Modern fashion. Still Just as good as what used to pour into our younger ears in dear Zorra in days gone by forever.” 61

Those years in “dear Zorra” were indeed gone forever, not only for Mackay, but also for the Canada he had left behind. However, thanks to the mission field the earlier intensity of faith would continue. In Formosa the old faith could take root in new soil under the ministry of spirit-filled


60 Probably because of the unsatisfactory nature of theological education available in the 1860s, the flow was especially large during Mackay’s time, and in the period 1868 to 1873 an average of 18 Canadians annually attended Princeton.

61 Mackay’s Diaries, Sunday April 18, 1875, (p.158).
leaders. This time, however, it would be adult men and women, and not children who would be socialized into the faith by song, memorization, prayer, Scripture and sacrament.

Here we must briefly turn again to the questions raised at the beginning of this paper: “What were some of the influences from the old homestead in Zorra which George Leslie Mackay took with him in those boxes labeled Formosa, and how did these translate on the mission field and in his home denomination?” Religious experience and its translation into different forms and idioms must always be understood within their particular context. Religion, cultural historian Robert Orsi, argues “is not sui generis, distinct from other dimensions of experience called ‘profane,’” but rather “comes into being in an ongoing, dynamic relationship with the realities of everyday life.” To understand it as practice one must be aware of the “idiomatic possibility and limitation in a culture—the limits of what can be desired, fantasized, imagined, and felt.” Unlike some missionaries, George Leslie Mackay never committed his missiological theory to writing and so one must look at his religious practice, at how he and his contemporaries lived in, with, through, and against the religious idioms available to them in their culture. Chinese historian Philip Yuen-Sang Leung offers helpful insight into how this applies to mission history: “Missions and missionaries were not operating from the heaven above but situated in a socio-political context. Their work and their values were inseparably linked to the society they grew up in.” Commenting on how the mental world of missionaries shaped their practical ministry, he makes the crucial point that “The divine and the mundane, the sacred and the secular, could not be easily separated or clearly distinguished.”

George Leslie Mackay’s youthful experiences and subsequent ministry were no exception. As is evident from the preceding analysis of his Canadian Presbyterian formation, it was precisely this blurring between the sacred and the secular that allowed nineteenth-century evangelical

65 Ibid, 61.
religion to be adapted and translated, first from the Scottish Highlands to the immigrant communities of early nineteenth-century Canada, then to the mission field in Formosa and, finally back again to the urbanizing world of Canadian Presbyterianism. In this way the story of Mackay’s work in Formosa is not only part of mission history but also becomes a link to Taiwanese church history. We still know very little about the idiomatic world of his Formosan converts. As James Rohrer has forcefully argued elsewhere in this collection, the contextual nature of religious conversion requires giving sustained and informed attention to how several thousand Taiwanese people in the late Ch’ing period were drawn to and appropriated on their own terms the form of Christianity presented by Mackay. Much remains to be researched for the new academic interest in the global dimensions of Christianity has raised the importance of adopting a more multi-centered approach to missions history. In examining George Leslie Mackay’s Presbyterian faith formation this paper offers one center from which to begin to understand the complex and sometimes contradictory ways whereby past and present flowed together in Mackay’s encounter with Taiwanese Christian converts as “a bridge between and beyond origins.”

---

66 Ibid, 74, and more generally, the essays in Shenk ed., Enlarging the Story.
PUTTING TAIWAN’S PEOPLE IN THE CENTER OF THE STORY: REFLECTIONS ON THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN MISSION IN TAIWAN

JAMES R. ROHRER
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY, UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT KEARNEY

Mackay and Prize Student A-Hoa Pulling Teeth
The field of Taiwan studies has flowered in recent years. During the past decade prestigious academic publishers have released a stream of well-received monographs on many facets of Taiwan’s past. Students around the globe can now readily locate detailed accounts of Japanese colonialism in Taiwan, the development of distinctively Taiwanese strands of Buddhism and Taoism, the island’s evolving commercial relations with the world, and its tangled political history. We even have two academic monographs on the history of Baseball in Taiwan.¹

Yet when we turn to the History of Christianity in Taiwan, the bibliography of published critical studies remains quite short, and many of the studies which have been published appear in small journals with very limited circulation. As a result, the global community of scholars who study the history of religion remains largely unaware of the rich and complex story of Christianity in this remarkable island. I could cite many examples to illustrate the pattern of invisibility, but will mention only one striking instance. Samuel Hugh Moffett, the distinguished professor of Ecumenics and Mission at Princeton Theological Seminary and a lifelong student of Christianity in Asia, recently produced a critically acclaimed two volume synthesis of Asian Christian history. His second volume (2005), covering the period from 1500-1900, is a massive tome of 740 pages.² Moffett, who grew up in Korea as a missionary kid, devotes two chapters to Korea. He has several chapters on India, and several more on


Japan. The Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam, Malaysia, Thailand, all receive chapters. Christianity in China takes up approximately one quarter of his book. Yet Moffett allots only three and a half pages to a discussion of the 17th century Dutch mission in Formosa, and fails to mention the nineteenth century Catholic and Protestant communities in Taiwan at all. One searches in vain his extensive bibliography, which runs to an amazing 68 pages, for sources on the birth of Taiwan’s Christian communities.

My point is not that Samuel Moffett or other scholars are intentionally slighting Christianity in Taiwan. My point is that relatively few scholars beyond Taiwan have taken a deep interest in the history of Christianity here, and fewer have published in venues that capture the attention of generalists like Samuel Moffett. The relative challenges confronting students seeking information about Taiwan’s Christian history, particularly in the pre-colonial years, are formidable, and will not be overcome quickly. But it is important that we begin to confront them, and work more aggressively to create a research infrastructure that will put Taiwanese Christianity on the radar screens of scholars around the world.

It is fitting that an international gathering devoted to Christianity in Taiwan should meet here in Tamsui, a port city that served as one of Taiwan’s most important points of contact with the outside world during the Victorian era. In his book Maritime Taiwan, Shih-Shan Henry Tsai has argued that Taiwan’s distinct identity has been forged by its long history of interaction with seafaring nations. Always a crossroads for traders and migrant settlers, pirates and military schemers from around the world, Taiwan society has been forged by intercultural exchanges. Shih counts British and Canadian missionaries like George Leslie Mackay among the cross-cultural influences that have helped to mold modern Taiwan. This approach recognizes that missionaries like Mackay, and

---

3 There have been some excellent scholarly works on Christianity in modern Taiwan, but these fall outside the period covered by Moffett’s history. See, for example, A. Hamish Ion, The Cross in the Dark Valley: The Canadian Protestant Missionary Movement in the Japanese Empire, 1931-1945 (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1999); Murray A. Rubinstein, The Protestant Community of Modern Taiwan: Mission, Seminary and Church (Armonk, NY & London: M. E. Sharpe, 1991); Peter Chen-Main Wang, “Christianity in Modern Taiwan—Struggling Over the Path of Contextualization,” in Stephen Uhalley, Jr. and Xiaoxin Wu, eds. China and Christianity: Burdened Past and Hopeful Future (Armonk, NY & London: M. E. Sharpe, 2001).

4 Shih-Shan Henry Tsai, Maritime Taiwan: Historical Encounters with the East and the West (Armonk, NY & London: M. E. Sharpe, 2009).
certainly their native converts, are central components of the Taiwanese historical narrative, not merely exotics on the fringes of society.

This awareness reflects a major historiographical shift in the past generation. Mission history was for most of the 20th century dominated by missionary practitioners who wrote self-consciously for Christian audiences. Now a growing army of scholars from many disciplines is being drawn to study the history of mission. Historians increasingly recognize that missionary activity has been among the major influences in World History, central to the concerns of anthropologists, sociologists, economists, and political scientists as well as Church historians and students of religious studies. The historiography of Christian mission, and the methodological sophistication of mission history, has grown exponentially as a result. As we study the history of Christianity in Taiwan, we need consciously to be in dialogue with scholars in varied disciplines who are working along parallel lines in other cultural settings.

Among other things, this means that we must avoid the tendency to focus too narrowly upon the person of the missionary. Without denying that conversion is an essentially religious phenomenon, we must remember that every missionary encounter is shaped by a complex interplay of social, political, psychological, and cultural factors. The missionary is only one among many variables at work in the process of conversion, and not necessarily the most important. While the precise configuration of personal, religious, and environmental factors differs from setting to setting and individual to individual, in all cases conversion occurs within a unique cultural matrix and derives its meaning for the convert from within that context. Lewis Rambo, a leading scholar of religious conversion, has concluded that “the process of conversion is a product of the interaction among the convert’s aspirations, needs, and orientations, the nature of the

---

group into which she or he is being converted, and the particular social matrix in which these processes are taking place.”

To understand the infant church in North Formosa, this means that we need to go beyond the well known exploits of George Leslie Mackay and focus instead upon the complex environmental forces within Taiwan that conditioned his work, as well as the agency of the Taiwanese people who heard and responded favorably or unfavorably to his presence. Too often mission history has followed the lead of missionary narratives, which invariably are tales about missionary initiative and indigenous responses. Even in Mackay’s book, From Far Formosa, which concludes with a ringing defense of native agency, the literary formula required the subordination of the converts to the missionary. The Holy Spirit, working through Mackay, is presented as the real agent of change. The converts appear as largely passive figures, acted upon more than actors in their own right. With a few exceptions they remain largely anonymous, an abstract collective known simply as the “native helpers.”

To take seriously the contextual nature of religious conversion is to ask why several thousand Taiwanese people in the late Ch’ing period found in the “Jesus doctrine” an attractive religious option. Who, specifically, were these converts? What were their aspirations and struggles? What factors impelled them to embrace openly a heterodox ideology, and to regard the small, bearded Scots-Canadian not simply as an irritating foreigner but as a spiritual guide? What led some of them to take up the task of preaching the Jesus doctrine themselves? How did they understand their newfound commitments and integrate these into their lives as Taiwanese people? In short, what did Christianity mean to them within the context of their myriad social relationships?

Christian mission—to the extent that it is successful—triggers the formation of new “bicultures.” A biculture can be defined as a localized society in which people from different cultures relate to one another according to clearly defined social roles. It is thus a stable society with institutionalized roles regulating the members, as distinct from a casual meeting between strangers in the marketplace or a brief conference such as this one. Bicultural communities constitute new and very complex subcultures within society. They originate when people from one culture (in this case missionaries) move into another culture with the intention of settling down, becoming integrated, and introducing cultural innovations that will transform the people. As these cross-cultural innovators engage

7 Mackay, From Far Formosa, 335-38.
the local people, they trigger diverse reactions, often reflecting existing tensions and conflicting interests within society. Over time some people choose to embrace the innovation (in this case missionary teaching), thus bringing into existence a new type of community that is composed of people from two or more different cultures. As this new “bicul
ture” evolves, the members draw selectively upon the ideas, rhetoric, values, rituals, and artistic expressions of both contributing cultures. Thus a biculture is a distinctive hybrid that serves as a meeting point and place of exchange between two worlds.\footnote{Paul G. Hiebert, \textit{Anthropological Insights for Missionaries} (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), offers a particularly lucid application of the concept of bicultures to missionary encounters. See especially pp. 227-253.}

George Leslie Mackay called into existence such a biculture when in 1872 he decided to cast his lot among the people of North Formosa. Obviously his Canadian beliefs, ideas, and values decisively shaped the growing Christian community here. But the values and beliefs of the Taiwanese were equally decisive. The converts shaped Mackay, and the contours of the nascent Christian movement in Taiwan, just as surely as Mackay shaped them. It is crucially important that we learn far more about the Taiwanese side of the equation.

For example, Protestant missionaries like Mackay typically assigned supreme importance to the act of preaching. Mackay devoted most of his time and energy to the task of training native preachers. We know that he jealously claimed for himself the sole authority to select and train the men who would become the first indigenous cadre of preachers in North Formosa. During the course of his career he personally trained more than one hundred native preachers.

How does a foreign teacher, at first with an imperfect grasp of the local language and culture, go about training his students to preach to their own people, especially given the significant differences between Chinese rhetorical tradition and the rhetorical conventions of Victorian Canada? What methods should be used to teach the art of preaching in a mission context? What manner of delivery should preachers employ? What mode of argumentation? We know that Mackay attended Princeton Seminary, where he studied Alexander Vinet’s textbook \textit{Homiletics; or The Theory of Preaching}. We know, too, from diary references that he drilled his students in elocution, a system of body motions, hand gestures, and principles of vocalization that was designed to elevate public speaking to a high art. It is difficult to imagine Mackay’s students actually following the homiletical principles of Vinet or practicing elocution when they stood before their fellow Taiwanese to proclaim their faith in Jesus. What did
Mackay actually teach, and more importantly, what did his students actually appropriate from his lessons? Week in and week out for a generation, the native preachers were the crucial face of the Christian movement in dozens of Taiwanese villages. To understand the development of Christianity in Taiwan it is just as important to know what they were preaching as what Mackay was teaching.

For example, how did Mackay’s students handle Confucius? Throughout the late nineteenth century missionaries in China debated heatedly how to appropriate the teachings of Confucius. Most missionaries believed that Chinese preachers needed a working knowledge of Confucius in order to gain a hearing, since familiarity with the classics was the mark of a scholar. At the same time many missionaries feared that too much acquaintance with the sage would spoil native preachers. The problem, they thought, required careful discernment. Certain rhetorical principles drawn from the Confucian canon seemed to complement

---


10 This topic appears repeatedly in Victorian mission magazines as well as the *Chinese Recorder*, the weekly journal that served the various Protestant mission agencies of the Chinese empire throughout the late 19th century. For one helpful entry into the debate see *Records of the General Conference of the Protestant Missionaries of China, Held at Shanghai, May 7-20, 1890* (Shanghai: American Presbyterian Mission Press, 1890), especially pp. 490-513. Ralph R. Covell, *Confucius, the Buddha and Christ: A History of the Gospel in Chinese* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1986) has a useful survey of early Protestant approaches to the Chinese classics.
Christianity, such as the emphasis upon *ethos* as crucial to persuasion. After all, Aristotle stressed the importance of virtue, as did the New Testament. Missionaries also had no problem with the Confucian appeal to ancient tradition rather than personal belief. Here, too, the sage resonated with Christian conceptions of divine revelation and biblical authority.

Yet most missionaries did not want Chinese preachers to appeal to the authority of Confucius himself, or to Chinese tradition, in support of Christian claims. If not carefully handled, quoting Confucius in a sermon might leave the impression that Jesus should be followed because he supports Confucius, rather than the sage of China pointing toward the far greater sage from heaven as the ultimate authority. Moreover, evangelical missionaries disliked the emphasis upon ritual propriety and the Confucian rejection of appeals to emotion. Confucian influence, missionaries sometimes charged, caused Chinese preachers to be lackluster in their delivery, and to refrain from directly confronting the sinfulness of their audience when a prophetic confrontation was necessary.

We know that Mackay read the Confucian classics and taught them at Oxford College. He wanted preachers who could accurately recite both Confucius and scripture as ancient authorities that demonstrated the truth of Christianity, and who would be prepared to meet challenges from teachers of Chinese religion. But in their day to day teaching and preaching, how did Mackay’s students actually handle the two traditions? It would be wonderful if we could answer this question.

Mackay also wanted native preachers who possessed a basic grasp of natural science. Like virtually every Victorian evangelical, he assumed that God was both creator of the natural world and author of the Bible. At Knox College and at Princeton he had been taught that science and scripture cannot contradict, that inductive study of the Bible and of the natural world will both point unerringly to the same God who became flesh in Jesus. Mackay relished zoology, botany, geology, and anatomy. He assumed that the truly educated human, who had learned to seek God’s revelation in both nature and the Bible, could see, in the words of evangelical geologist William Whewell, “the evidence of God in every mechanism of the Universe.”


---

This belief in the unity of science and scripture still flourishes today in the world of Anglo-American evangelical Christianity, in Fundamentalist Bible Colleges and the so-called Creation Science movement. It continues to exert a powerful influence upon popular culture in the West. But at the time that Mackay brought these ideas to Taiwan, the Victorian fusion of science and theology was already in eclipse among academic scientists in the United States. Canadian universities began to turn away from natural theology about the time that Mackay died in 1901. In both church and academy, the 20th century witnessed a split between evangelical biblical theology on the one hand, and the methodology of natural science on the other. The Victorian faith in the unity of theology and science gave way to a perceived “warfare” between authentic science and evangelical models of biblical inspiration.

Mackay introduced his faith in the unity of science and scripture to Christians in Taiwan. His letters and diaries demonstrate that he spent countless hours teaching his students the rudiments of geology, botany and anatomy as an essential part of their preparation to preach and teach. He dissected pigs and fish to convince them that there is a design in nature that proves the existence of a creator God. He used microscopes to open to his students “a new world . . . of which they never dreamed.” As he noted in his diary for 29 April 1873: “Nothing like having as clear a conception as possible of the God we worship. It brings Him nearer to us when we study what He made. When we take a flower between our fingers and ponder every part, then we can see Jehovah our God.”

We know that at least some of the larger churches in North Formosa were set up as classrooms, equipped with astronomical and anatomical


12 Mackay’s views reflect an almost universally shared evangelical worldview that typified Protestantism in Britain, Canada, and the United States in the early nineteenth century and which lingered until the turn of the century in Canada. For more on this topic see Berger, Science, God and Nature in Victorian Canada; Bozeman, Protestants in an Age of Science; Michael Gauvreau, The Evangelical Century: College and Creed in English Canada from the Great Revival to the Great Depression (Montreal & Kingston: McGill Queen’s, 1991); and Herbert Hovenkamp, Science and Religion in America, 1800-1860 (Philadelphia: U of PA Press, 1978).
charts, microscopes, and natural science specimens. Mackay’s preachers served as village teachers as well as evangelists, and presumably were expected to make some use of this scientific apparatus in the classroom. Again we are led to ask what they actually appropriated from Mackay’s teaching. Day by day, as they preached and taught school, what elements of Mackay’s science lessons, if any, did they incorporate into their own lessons? And did the introduction of Victorian natural science and natural theology have any long term impact upon Christianity in Taiwan?

Mackay’s medical work raises parallel questions. At the time Mackay arrived in Taiwan, regular physicians (those trained in university medical programs) had not yet achieved domination of Western medicine. In Mackay’s youth, rural families in Upper Canada commonly self-diagnosed and treated themselves. Popular volumes of materia medica were widely available for home use. In addition to regular doctors, Canadian towns were served by practitioners of numerous contending systems of healing. Among the most popular were the Eclectics, medical pragmatists who freely used whatever concepts and therapies seemed to achieve practical results. In 1871 at least 1000 eclectics practiced medicine in the Dominion of Canada. These doctors might have a smattering knowledge of the science taught in medical colleges, but were just as likely to employ folk remedies and new fads not approved by regular physicians.

Mackay himself seems to have been something of an eclectic. While he had taken a few undergraduate courses that were part of any regular medical program, he had no medical college diploma and apparently did not believe that regular doctors were necessarily the best physicians. He himself began to study materia medica as a teenager, likely a volume owned by his family, in preparation for missionary work, and his diaries suggest that he felt himself perfectly competent to instruct his students in materia medica and to dispense medicines once he reached Taiwan.

---

13 Claims for damages in cases involving chapel destruction by Chinese mobs in 1884 itemize the furnishings of the chapels. These are held in the consular records at the Public Record Office, London.

May 3, 1873 Mackay would have the assistance of the British physician B. S. Ringer, the first of a series of University trained medical men who would take up residence in the port. Yet he records in his diary for May 5, 1873 that he had already prescribed medicine to more than one thousand patients, explicitly noting that Ringer’s arrival “is not the beginning of medical work in North Formosa, for I dispensed all along.” Just a few weeks after he met his first student, Giam Chheng-Hoa, he was already teaching A-Hoa “how to dispense medicines.”

Mackay clearly respected the professional medical personnel, such as Ringer, who were employed by the Chinese Customs Service to attend to the medical needs of the Port of Tamsui. His diaries and letters suggest that he cultivated warm relations with them, and came to rely upon them to perform the most serious surgical cases in the mission clinic. Eventually he had his students at Oxford College assist and observe these physicians as a basic part of their training for ministry. Nonetheless he steadfastly opposed adding medical missionaries with regular medical college diplomas, and insisted that his Taiwanese students were better equipped than any Western physician to serve as healers of their own people. Although the training his students received was rudimentary by the standards of the rapidly evolving medical profession in Canada, Mackay did not hesitate to provide them with surgical equipment and Western drugs and to send them forth to practice medicine on their own in the churches scattered around North Formosa.  

Although he does not state explicitly the resources that he used in teaching his students medicine, he almost certainly relied heavily upon the widely circulated materia medica produced by Frederick Porter Smith, a British medical missionary in Central China. Smith’s volume listed both common western drugs such as Quinine, but primarily focused upon traditional Chinese herbal remedies that could be secured readily by missionaries in local shops. Mackay also may have used the special medical appendix found in Rev. James MacGowan’s English and Chinese Dictionary of the Amoy Dialect, which listed hundreds of questions in English, Chinese character, and Romanized Chinese that would allow missionaries and their native students to conduct detailed medical examinations.  

---

15 This paragraph is based upon the myriad references to medical work in Mackay’s diaries and his letters to the Foreign Mission Committee of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, United Church of Canada Archives in Toronto.
16 Frederick Porter Smith, Contributions Toward the Materia Medica and Natural History of China for the Use of Medical Missionaries & Native Medical Students (Shanghai: American Presbyterian Mission Press, 1871). A later edition of Rev. J.
Clearly, then, there was abundant opportunity to blend western and traditional concepts of healing in the missions of China. What role did Chinese medicine play in the Christian community of North Taiwan? What use did Mackay’s students make of the drugs and medical instruments housed in the mission chapels? Given the fact that Mackay regarded the medical work of his students as the single most effective aspect of their ministry, these are very important questions.

They are questions that cannot be answered by the remaining archival records alone. All historians confront the challenge posed by incomplete and fragmentary sources. In the case of mission history, we face the additional challenge that our fragmentary archival sources are heavily skewed toward the missionary perspective. The published mission memoirs, newspapers, field reports and conference records, as well as the private correspondence produced by missionaries and their sending agencies, tend to assume for us a dangerous degree of authority. For all the light that they throw on the cross-cultural process, they cast deep shadows as well. In order to recover the indigenous voice in the story, to gain a more accurate and comprehensive understanding of Christian origins in Taiwan, we need to read existing documentary records with more sensitivity to the suppressed native contribution. Most importantly we need to preserve and disseminate as widely as possible other forms of source material.

I began these reflections by urging that we collectively take steps to increase international awareness of Taiwan’s Christian history. I want to conclude by making several concrete suggestions, the first of which is that we focus more intentionally upon saving the local memories that have not been already recorded and archived. During my years of visiting and teaching in Taiwan, pastors and elderly church members have frequently shared with me the history of their families or congregations. I have heard many stories of Mackay and other missionaries that have been passed down orally across several generations. More importantly, there are many stories in the oral tradition about the first Christian converts, and how Christianity had impacted the fortunes of their families.

I suspect that most of these rich stories have never been recorded and archived. Although oral tradition must be used cautiously, there is often no substitute for it in recovering the voices of indigenous Christians. I am

Macgowan, *English and Chinese Dictionary of the Amoy Dialect* (Amoy, 1883) contains a lengthy medical appendix. I have been unable to ascertain whether or not this resource was available when Mackay first arrived in Formosa in 1872. He notes in his diary that he studied Macgowan while learning Chinese, but it is not clear whether the medical appendix was included at that date.
concerned that with each passing year precious source material is disappearing as people age and die. While the publication of missionary writings is a worthy and important project, I believe that the more urgent need is systematic oral history to record and disseminate the vitally important memories of Taiwan’s Christians before they are lost forever.

Many important sources for Taiwan Christian history have already been recorded in locally published newspapers and books here in Taiwan. Also some local Taiwanese churches have preserved old church records, and a few have produced congregational histories that reproduce some of this precious material. The *Taiwan Church News*, for example, has been published for many generations and is an incredibly important historical source. Even as we take steps to publish missionary letters and diaries, we need to be equally aggressive in translating and disseminating these local sources written in Romanized Taiwanese. Obviously this is a big job, complicated by the fact that even many Taiwanese today cannot readily understand the Romanization used by early Christian publications. Some sort of organized effort to translate and publish the most important early Taiwanese sources would be an invaluable aid to making Taiwan Christian history more accessible to the global scholarly community.

Finally I want to urge that the growing interest in Mackay be extended to the English mission in the South, to the various Catholic missions, and to the many foreign and indigenous expressions of Christianity that have taken root here in the 20th century. I recall once, after speaking about Mackay, being gently chided by a Presbyterian pastor from Tainan who reminded me that Tainan also had many missionaries who made important contributions to the church in Taiwan. Of course, he was right; the English Presbyterian mission in South Formosa needs to be as rigorously analyzed as the Canadian mission, with native Christians occupying the center of the story. But my concern is not simply to give the English Presbyterian missionaries equal time. Far more importantly, it is a mistake to tell the history of Christianity in Taiwan through the lens of Western denominationalism. Missionaries may have been members of separate and sometimes rival organizations, but all of them were being conditioned by common environmental forces within Taiwanese society. We will better understand those forces, and hence be better able to place the people of Taiwan in the center of the story, if we examine as rigorously as possible all of the manifold encounters between Christianity and Taiwan culture rather than selectively focusing only upon selected missionaries like George Leslie Mackay.
MORE TREASURES PRESERVED ABROAD: NEW MACKAY LETTERS IN THE PRESBYTERIAN ARCHIVES

REV. MICHAEL STAINTON
YORK CENTRE FOR ASIAN RESEARCH & CANADIAN MACKAY COMMITTEE

College closed for 10 days only and work will begin soon again. Bandits are all over robbing the poor people. The Japanese are doing better than they did. Six officers came yesterday to see our museum and all seemed very much pleased. Pa drills students every night when here. Oranges are now in season. We bought some American apples in Hong Kong and they are delicious.

Miss Mary & Mackay, Woodstock, Ontario.
In the spring and summer 2009, the Archives of the Presbyterian Church in Canada received two packets of materials found in the closet of George Leslie Mackay’s granddaughter, Isabel Mackay, after she moved from her Toronto apartment to a retirement residence. These English and Romanized Taiwanese letters and recollections, some still in their envelopes with early Japanese-era stamps and postmarks, are precious artifacts, and important documents offering new perspectives on Mackay and Taiwan. In particular, these letters and documents give us new insights into Mackay’s marriage and family life, his relations with his Taiwanese coworkers, and life in Tamsui in the early Japanese period before 1901. Because most are family letters, and many from the somewhat naive perspective of his teenaged daughters, they also free us from the debate as to whether they were written for public consumption and thus crafted to make a particular impression. In this way, they truly are treasures. Here I introduce some of the more interesting finds in this treasure trove.

Letter from George Leslie Mackay
to his wife Tiu- Chhang-mia-

Tam-sui, Tai-eng 21st, 1883

My beloved Chhang-miâ~, you are in Hong Kong with the children, I am worried here. Now you should not let them go out to get sunburned or in the rain, and be careful about eating uncooked food. You should buy Ko-lo-din in case you get sick, and eat sän-tō-liân in case of worms. No matter who wants to take the children swimming or somewhere else, you must be careful and not let them. You and the children should eat beef, and beef soup, and other good foods. Buy fish.

You yourself should listen to them read 10, 40, 411 in the room. Kiss Pai-chi-a for me, tell I-li and Ma-lian that I miss them. Mail their pictures, taken that day, to me. You must not scold the children there or let other people be in charge.

I have itinerated churches. San-Hsia, Hou-lung, Hsi-chih, everywhere. Some are truly happy to see me, in others people cling to idols, really evil. As far as I know you are in Hong Kong. The French are in Keelung. Boats from Hobe can only go as far as the harbor, they can’t enter the harbor to turn around. People in the interior are really bad.

Thiam-a has not come, his father came to say that he is busy doing account books. Kiok-a came to ask me. I have sent Cheng Ho back to the

1 Almost certainly referring to their hymnbook, not the psalms. Mackay’s Diaries (Aug 9, 1898) mentions singing “Forever with the Lord 41 hymn” at Tan-he’s funeral.
hills. Sunday afternoon I accepted Giam and He (?) to be ministers. Rev. Giam, Rev. Lau, I have increased other people’s pay. 12 people wanted Sun-a to be minister. 20 people chose Lien Ho but not to be. I only accepted two.

My mother is going to her heavenly home. My father is there. Mary is also there. Gradually drawing closer. Everyone here is pêng-an. When Mrs. Kai has the opportunity mail lemons to me.

G.L. Mackay

(I must write again (when?) you can come. Say hello to Mr. Ko for me.

This personal letter in Romanized Taiwanese from Mackay to his wife Kai (Tiu~) Chhang-mia, was clearly written on October 21, 1884, not 1883. Mackay’s reference to the French being in Tamsui and the harbor being closed confirm this. Mackay’s diaries (October 12, 1884) record that “Rev. J. Jamieson, Mrs. Mac & children left Tamsui.” This is ten days after the French bombardment (Oct 2) and their defeated landing attempt (October 8). The French fleet lay off Tamsui. October 19 the French announced there would be a blockade of Taiwan beginning October 23. Mackay left Tamsui for Amoy on October 21, on what must have been the last boat, and arrived in Hong Kong October 25. Thereafter Tamsui was blockaded by the French. Mackay was not able to return to Tamsui until April 19, 1885. The letter is dated April 21 and must have been carried out that day. It appears Mackay wrote the letter, then suddenly decided to go to Hong Kong himself, along with Sun-a, on the last boat out, the Fukien, which left at 5PM (Diaries, October 21, 1884). The letter itself contains signs of haste and written under considerable stress—viz. the wrong date, confused contents, and references to the death of family members.

Another new document from Margaret Mackay, written May 2010, explains this confused state of mind. A note from Dr. Johansen, dated May 17, 1888 also tells us that,

during the time of the French invasion . . . Dr. Mackay was overburdened with work and in anxiety about the Christians belonging to the Mission. This[.] connected with the pernicious influence of the hot Tamsui climate[,] brought about an inflammation of the brain. During 32 days Dr. Mackay was without any sleep, and strong delirium brought on utter exhaustion of his system. The fever was never less than 100 during these days . . . all medicines having failed to produce sleep in the patient. I fortunately heard

2 Giam Chheng-hoa
3 All translations are my own.
4 Why he wrote this four years later we can only guess. Mackay’s diary for May 16, 1888 (p. 589) records “In the eve Dr. Johansen called up and we had a long conversation on the Verandah about various Scien[ces].”
that the S.S. Hai-loong has brought ice to Tamsui for Mr. Dodd. At my request Mr. Dodd gave me all the ice he had to soak Dr. Mackay’s burning head. Dr. Mackay nearly immediately after the application of the ice fell into a sound sleep which lasted for 36 hours without interruption.

Mackay’s diaries for August to October 1884 are very sparse. Clearly he was feeling the stress of the French attack (the French bombarded Keelung on August 4). On October 7 he wrote: “7 AM. We gave up hope.” The reference to accepting Giam and He as ministers on Sunday afternoon must refer to Sunday, October 19. Was Mackay making arrangements in anticipation of his possible expulsion should the French—who were Catholic—take over Taiwan, or was this out of concern for his own life? However, the actual ordination of the only two people Mackay ordained as full ministers did not happen until May 17, 1885 and after his return from Hong Kong. The two he ordained were Giam Chheng-hoa and Tan Eng-hoe.

Mackay’s touching “my beloved Chhang-mia,” his parental concern for the safety of their children, instructions to eat healthy food, sing hymns, and that she not scold them can all be seen as proof of a deep love and strong family life, which then contradicts the idea that Mackay’s marriage was only for the mission. Indeed, it must have been such feelings that prompted him to board the last ship out later the same day that he wrote this letter. In From Far Formosa, he recounts that “On the 21st I was induced to board the steamship ‘Fu-kien’ to make a round trip and return to Tamsui. Four days afterward, as we entered the Hong Kong harbour, we heard that Tamsui was blockaded and we could not return.” Whether or not Mackay was “induced” and did not know that there would be a blockade is debatable, but in view of his strong commitment to staying in Taiwan famously stated only a couple weeks earlier, the departure seems unusual. In early October, Mackay had been urged by a British officer to board a British warship, leave Tamsui, and as he explains, to bring my wife and all my precious belongings on board. I told these good friends, “My precious belongings are in and around the school and I know they cannot be brought on board. What could be more valuable than them? They are the children of the God I have served. They traveled with me, took care of me when I was ill, crossed rivers, climbed mountains, and faced dangers on land and sea with me. They are not afraid of any enemy.
They are my precious belongings. As long as they are on the land, I will not board the ship. If they must suffer I will suffer with them.”

In these materials there is also a sixty-nine-page account, in Mackay’s handwriting, of thirty-six cases of Christians being persecuted in northern Taiwan during the 1884-5 French blockade. Unlike the brief account in From Far Formosa (pp. 189-193), there are names and details concerning these Taiwanese Presbyterian martyrs.

**Letters from Kai (Tiu~) Chhang-mia**

There are two letters written by Kai (Tiu~) Chhang-mia. One is from Canada in Romanized Taiwanese to Mrs. James Maxwell in London (England) written January 1881, and another in English written to her niece, Mary Ellen Mackay in Canada, May 20, 1896. These are the only known extent writings of Chhang-mia or Minnie Mackay as she was known. The 1881 letter exists in three drafts with only minor variations. It appears that Minnie was practicing her Romanized Taiwanese. We can see that her written Taiwanese is quite accomplished. The letter recounts her first Canadian winter: “Every day it is cold, snowing, the water frozen, and people ride wooden sleighs pulled by horses to get around.” The 1896 letter gives a lively description of her life during the late mission years. She cannot teach at the Girls School because, she explains, “I am very busy just now.” Life is very different from the early years. They brought back from Canada a stove, irons, tin ware, and seeds from the Woodstock Fair. She bakes pies, has a large rose garden and small farm with “50 chickens, 2 pigs, one rabbit[, two pigeons and several varieties of birds,” as well as two dogs—Tom and Prince. She asks, “I wonder why Mrs. Jamieson did not write . . . we wrote to her since we came back but she never answered.” She signs the letter “Minnie Mackay”.

**Mackay’s Health: Letter from Dr. James Fraser to Giam Chheng-hoa**

An undated note in Romanize Taiwanese from Dr. J.R Fraser to Giam Chheng-Hoa concerns “The Minister” who is sick with smallpox in Sintiam. Thanks to Mackay’s diaries, we can date this and thus ascertain its

---

true meaning. Mackay’s diaries (pp. 210-212) record that he was sick with smallpox in Sintiam from January 7, 1877 onwards. For Wednesday January 10 it reads: “Sick. Dr. Fraser arrived in eve.” Mackay continued to be very sick through February 4. This letter, still in the original envelope, is not dated except for the time, “10AM” Ho-be. It appears to have been sent by hand. Fraser came to Sin-tiam on January 10 and so it must have been sent either January 8 or 9 (1877). Fraser was the first missionary to work with Mackay in Taiwan (but for only two years, 1875 to 1877). Yet, Fraser’s written Taiwanese is quite good and a testimony to the speed with which the Romanized script could be learned.

Three Monthly Reports from Giam Chheng-hoa to Mackay

Three monthly letters from Giam Chheng-hoa to Mackay dated February, April and May 1880 report on the situation of the church after Mackay left for Canada, assuring him that all are “peng-an” and urging him to return soon. They give insights into the relationship between Giam Chheng-hoa, Mackay, and K.F. Junor. Giam Chheng-hoa (A-Hoa) refers to Mackay as “this man, like a Sage of China” and that “I can see that Rev. Junor loves you, because everywhere he goes he speaks your name, comparing you to Paul (chhin-chhiu-Po-lo) and praises you.” On the other hand, in his February 24 letter, Giam Chheng-hoa asks:

Now I need to ask you, Rev. Junor has asked me, he wants to know how many account books for the chapels there are (ū tôe kong-gûn ê siáu-phô). I don’t know if I should let him look at the account books or not. You must tell me. I will write you again in another month to keep you informed.

It appears that Giam Chheng-hoa did not take orders from Junor! Giam’s letters are also dated using two systems, which solves another problem. Mackay and Minnie date their letters using “Tai Eng.” I had no idea what this meant until I read in Giam’s letter: “6th Year of Guang-Xu, First Month 15th Day, which is Tai-eng February 24, 1880.”

Letters from Bella, Mary and William

There are thirty-seven fascinating and important letters, in English, from Mackay’s children to cousins in Canada. Written between 1896 and 1901 by Mary and Bella, then in their late teens, and Willie (only two letters from him), and they include lively details of life in Tamsui under the Japanese in the early years. They also supplement and enliven the laconic
entries in Mackay’s diaries. One of the best examples is Mary’s letter of September 21, 1898:

Some one of us writes every month and now it is my turn. It is not at all here like with you. Now there are Post Offices and letters are brought right to our house. Every day and can’t tell when letters may come. These are from all over North Formosa. They are sent to Pa. We open and read them very often. Well, all kinds of troubles, sickness, disputes, deaths and persecution and robbing and all of us think and talk. Pa’s work is attending to other peoples affairs all the time. Besides carry on the Hospital and College and We are all concerned also. We have no going out calling on the neighbors. No shows etc. We are every day and every night going to the College. George was home and left for Hong Kong. We miss him. Life here is not at all like anything you have seen. The Gauld’s play lawn tennis every night. They go home in spring. We prefer our way of living every day. You saw Pa in Canada trying to get rest but you have no idea of all the troubles, cares and work he has to bear. As I write people are at the back of the house waiting to talk about the rebels. Rebels and robbers are all around here we don’t know what may take place tomorrow.

The Japanese and so-called “rebels, bandits, and robbers” receive a good deal of attention\(^6\) and in connection to drought, pestilence, and typhoons. According to Bella, because of the drought in 1896 “grasshoppers came . . . and flew in black clouds so that in places the sun was darkened” (Bella, Sept. 4, 1896). The typhoons in 1898 also turned over “boats . . . right over before our eyes here. Hundreds of people were killed or drowned” (Bella, Oct. 18, 1898). Three years later, Bella’s letter writing suggest an interest in the on-going rebellion, plague, and typhoons:

The rebels are quiet here in the north . . . there is “plague” here all over in the towns and cities, tho[ugh] worse in the south . . . Pa is busy arranging about twenty chapels that were destroyed last year by foods and typhoons. We are just now repairing the college and girls school (Bella May 15, 1899).

---

\(^6\) “The Japanese are very numerous here. The Rebels are in the hills and catch natives to get money” (Mary, Nov. 3, 1896); “Very many so called ‘Rebels’ are up arms against the Japanese, and seize, and rob natives” (Bella, Dec. 16, 1896); “We don’t know exactly how many churches have been destroyed by Rebels. Japanese come and go” (Bella, Feb. 11, 1897); “Trouble, trouble, robbing all over, not peace yet in Formosa. You cannot understand very well how things are here, it is so different from Canada” (Bella, Oct. 18, 1898); “The Japanese seem to get on some what [sic] better with the natives; but the people do not like them” (Bella, Nov. 30, 1899).
Along with the Japanese and rebels, Bella is concerned for her father’s museum of Taiwanese artifacts in the wake of such political upheaval:

Pa’s museum is getting full again and very interesting. Japanese come in large numbers to see it and buy his book “From Far Formosa.” I caught a butterfly and put it in the museum” (Bella, April 1, 1896). . . . “The Governor General and Officers called at our house to see Pa. The Governor was so glad to see the museum in our house” (Bella, Dec. 16, 1896). . . .Our museum is getting larger and larger every week. A man brought in an albatross alive, he caught him on the seashore when asleep. From tip to tip of wings is 7 feet and 4 inches. George likes natural history so Pa bled the bird and students helped to stuff it. It is a fine looking bird (Bella, Feb. 8, 1899).

Mary’s letters suggest an abiding interest in her father’s rare collection of Formosan artifacts as well: “A Man near Tamsui caught a wild creature like a cat and stuffed it and now we have it in our museum” (Mary, Jan. 22, 1897).

**Marriage of Mackay’s Daughters to his Students**

One of the most touching letters is Bella’s report of her marriage to Koa Kau on March 9, 1899:

March 16, 1899

My Dear Uncle Alex, Auntie and Cousins:

Since returning I have seen many people here and have thought a great deal. I saw Pa’s great respect for Koa Kau and saw how he thought more of him than any one in all North Formosa and I began to think why was this? And I saw he was truly a sincere, honest, genuine young man and has been so all his life and I just came to have respect th[e]n affection and love for him. And on the 9th Inst. We were married in our house. Private ceremony still Preachers, Students, Bible women and the Gaulds were present. Pa was 27 years that day in Formosa. I was dressed in silk orange color and had an orange colored Rose. Our dining hall was decorated and lighted beautifully and everybody seemed happy. Then Pa and Ma, Mr. and Mrs. Gauld, A Hoa and George, Mary and her husband and Mr. Koa and I sat down to a big dinner. I send you a piece of the wedding cake. How strange it all seems and how we are led on by our Father in Heaven

Mary Ellen wrote a shorter letter the next day:

I now write you a very short letter; but it is not like any one I ever wrote you. Pa was here 27 years on the 9th Inst. And I was married that day
to Cheng-gi, a son of Rev. Tan-He. Our dining room was nicely fitted up. . . . How strange it all seems but that is the way in this world.

Interestingly, neither mentions that it was a double wedding, although both use the phrase “How strange it all seems.” Mackay uses a similar word in his large entry about the wedding in his diaries (March 9, 1899), recalling that “Twenty-seven years ago this day I landed here, at Tamsui. Landed as a stranger among strangers.” Mackay performed the wedding himself, so one can only speculate whether this was not also the underlying theme and perhaps Ephesians 2:19 his text, “Ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God.” The juxtaposition of the anniversary of coming to Taiwan and double marriage of his daughters Bella and Mary leads one to wonder how much paterfamilias did to arrange these marriages—clearly, a realization in the flesh of his identification with Taiwan and consistent with his practice of treating the church as his own family. The fact that in May (1899) he begins referring to Koa Kau as “my son-in-law” and has the deed to the new Tek Chham church made out in Koa Kau’s name (Mackay’s Diaries, May 19, 1899) certainly supports this. But Bella’s letter is important because it contains an expression of her own agency in coming to love Koa Kau.

**Mackay’s Death**

The first mention of the fatal throat cancer that took Mackay’s life appears in a letter from Mary dated Oct 29, 1900, “Pa has a sore throat,” and another from Bella the next day: “Pa is at his usual work but suffers with his throat; a student reads for him.” Mackay left for treatment in Hong Kong November 1. Letters in the spring of 1901 detail the progress of his disease, and the worry it causes everyone. Still, in April, they express hope. An eight-page letter, dated June 2, and written over the next several days by Mrs. Gauld to Mrs. Alex Mackay recounts the death and funeral of George Leslie Mackay. There is also a thirteen-page letter from Bella dated July 20, 1901, which she copied from her diary (we do not have this) and a typed transcript of the same recounting these sad events. Finally, an old photocopy of a longer letter, entitled “my dear cousin Mary Ellen” and apparently in George Jr.’s handwriting, reads: “I felt as if I could never be happy again, as in days of yore”. 

And More

Two pocket diaries for 1880 and 1881 used on the road by Mackay were also among the recent findings. Their contents are reproduced in the Makay diaries at Aletheia University, but differ in some details, such as individual contributions at meetings, everything from “a boy 50 cents” to “Mrs. Mackay Windsor $500 not pd yet.” Their intended use is also specified: “for me . . . for the mission . . . for Bangkahch.” There is also a short note about cash received from Dr. Reid for the sum of $1,343.56, “1000 for passage to Formosa, 300 for my salary, and a little more then all square,” Mackay writes.

Mackay’s often perilous health (or his enduring medical interest) is reflected in a scribbled recipe for chronic diarrhea: “Wire (nails) Iron ½ oz + nitric acid tonic; One ounce & half by measure; Water 7 or 8 oz by measure; Acid mix water with iron; In 12 hours all night; Add then as much water; As fill two ale bottles; Then dose = teaspoonful; 2 or three times a day; when taking mix a little water.”

There is more still. A small booklet with a forty-page biography of leading minister Gō Ek-ju (1843-1920) in Romanized Taiwanese, handwritten sometime after 1913 by his wife; small Christmas cards mailed by the daughters to their cousin; drawings of Minnie, the farmhouse in Oxford County, and a Japanese Geisha; an original typed nine-page manuscript for a newspaper report on the 1881 meeting that donated to Oxford College (and not the same as the report in the Woodstock Sentinel-Review). Two maps of the Formosa mission ca. 1930 and the diaries and reports of George William Mackay (George Jr.) round out the list—and so, enough for a few more research papers!

Do these new discoveries tell us anything “new”?  

The short answer is certainly yes. Mackay’s letter to Minnie is fascinating, revealing a far more emotional and loving husband and father than we see in his diaries. He was clearly a worrywart, exacerbated by the stress of being separated from his family. There is no question concerning the kind of father he was and the fatherly concern that he had for his students. Giam’s letters are a case in point and full of devotion, shedding light on the life of early pastors and their difficulties with the church. Giam’s attention to scholarly detail can be seen in his dating system, bold, calligraphic hand, and tendency to write on the 23/24th each month.

These letters show how accomplished many were at using the Romanized Taiwanese. Fraser had been in Taiwan less than two years and
yet he writes well. There are also more clues to some new Taiwanese terms (to me and my dictionaries at least) that reflect the native language as spoken in Tamsui: *hai-a*, *Tai-Eng, na-kui*, and a baby name for George Jr., *Pai-chi-a*, the latter appearing only once in Mackay’s dairies.\(^7\)

Two letters from Drs. Fraser and Johansen show how close the world came to losing Mackay in 1877 and then again in 1884, how perilous his health often was, Mackay managing to survive because of an amazing and very strong constitution—not to mention a shipment of ice from Amoy. Mackay’s medical history is surely a subject of more research in itself.

The letters from the Mackay children provide us with a detailed picture of life in the first years of Japanese rule and how highly the Japanese held Mackay. The number of foreign visitors and many letters show how much the mission was now part of a larger world. Copious references to the museum elevate its importance in the life of Northern Taiwan. Clearly it was a teaching tool at Oxford College and central to Mackay’s work. He is teaching day and night, and the meetings at the College every evening are attended by the whole family. These new discoveries underscore the fact that the mission to Formosa was now a family affair, with Mackay at the centre of everything, adored by his children and students alike, the Mackays a family farm and the frequent mention of animals, roses, corn, beets, squash, and more caraway seeds from Canada by Minnie.

One thing that strikes me is the absence of pious ejaculations and Bible quotes that characterize much evangelical missionary writing today. We know that Mackay was a man of powerful faith, and his children also, but they did not fill their letters with religious rhetoric. Was this typical of the times or just a factor of being Taiwanese and Presbyterian?

Finally, Mackay’s children help us to see more clearly the continuities as well as the changes in Mackay’s life and missionary work. The world of Tamsui in 1896-1901 was completely unlike that of North Formosa in the 1870s, for example. A degree of routinization had clearly set in, the peripatetic single hero becoming paterfamilias of a large church family. With unmatched and endless charismatic energy it would seem, Mackay continued to be at the centre of that world, admired and loved by all around him. In her June 2, 1901 letter, Mrs. Gauld writes:

> Dr. Mackay is gone, but his works do follow him. We may not have seen eye to eye with him in all things but we are glad we never had the semblance of a quarrel or any unkind words whatever. For this we thank God. The Dr. was always ready to do us a kindness if he could.

---

\(^7\) But what does *Pai-chi-a* mean? The only guess I can make is 破肢仔 (which I translate here “little crawler”).
COMPARATIVE LITERATURE
HEROIC MEMOIRS FROM A HOT COUNTRY: TAIWAN MISSIONARY LIFE WRITING

MARY GOODWIN
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH,
NATIONAL TAIWAN NORMAL UNIVERSITY

“Mrs. Dickson treats mountain people at Po-Li” (top left), “Lillian Dickson and nurse Grace Eng with baby of a leprous parent” (top right), and “Mrs. Dickson, Jim Dickson, Daughter Marilyn and a Chinese orphan whom the Dicksons are caring for in their home” (bottom centre). These My People: Serving Christ Among the Mountain People of Formosa (University of Michigan Archives), 44, 60.
Life writing in the form of the missionary memoir serves as a record not only of an individual life but also as a window on historical cross-cultural encounters and imperial ambitions, the real-life history of linguistic and cultural mixing as well as gendered work and roles. Records and memoirs left by Christian missionaries around the world offer a special vantage point on early cross-cultural contacts between those from developed western powers on the relatively less developed world, as was true with the Jesuits in China, the Spanish and Portuguese in the Americas and the British in India. As Anna Johnston remarks in *Missionary Writing and Empire, 1800-1860*:

Missionary texts are crucial to understanding cross-cultural encounter under the aegis of empire because they illuminate the formation of a mode of mutual imbrications between white imperial subjects, white colonial subjects, and non-white colonial subjects.¹

Missionary work has often been intertwined with commercial ventures and trading opportunities, and subject as well to the vicissitudes of politics and empire, as was the case in China and Hong Kong and India, where networks of special treaties and concessions granted missionaries protection and a freer rein. In *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci*, Jonathan Spence comments on the commercial acumen of the Jesuits in Japan, who “in the 1560s tried to push trade in the direction of Japanese nobles who might seek conversion to the Christian faith […]. For some years at the end of the century the whole city of Nagasaki was even technically owned by the Jesuits, after a newly converted Japanese nobleman deeded it to them.”²

Most significantly, missionaries have served as a conduit for the exchange of culture and knowledge east and west. Some of the earliest efforts at cross-cultural understanding were undertaken by missionaries such as the Italian Matteo Ricci in China, who learned the language of the missionary field, wrote dictionaries translating little-studied languages into the major European languages, brought Western ideas and language to Asia and other mission outposts, and carried word of those remote cultures back to the West.

One relatively understudied area of Western missionary culture is Taiwan, which in its position at a crossroads of empire has been hit with

---

successive waves of colonization over the centuries, first by the Dutch, and then Portuguese and Spanish, Japanese, and finally the mainland KMT forces in the twentieth century. The Dutch occupiers brought Christianity in the 1700s, as recorded later in William Campbell’s *Formosa under the Dutch: Described from Contemporary Records, with Explanatory Notes and a Bibliography of the Island.* 3 The heyday of Anglo-American Protestant missionary work in Taiwan came in the nineteenth century, when British medical missionaries James Laidlaw Maxwell (1836-1921), William Campbell (1841-1921), and George Leslie Mackay (1844-1901) settled in Taiwan and opened churches, clinics, and schools north and south on the island. Mackay, originally from Ontario, Canada, came from a family of Highland Scots refugees. After studying at Princeton Seminary and Edinburgh University, Mackay was sent in 1871 to Taiwan (then called Formosa) to begin the first Canadian Presbyterian mission overseas. He arrived in Tamsui, northern Taiwan, a town which served as the base for his work on the island for more than 30 years, until his death in 1901. Mackay, who became fluent in the Taiwanese language, married a Taiwanese woman, Chang Tsung-ming (Tiun Chhiong-mi in Taiwanese), also known as Minnie, and had three children. He left written accounts of his evangelizing work as well as extensive ethnological and environmental studies of Taiwan, and is credited as the founder of Taiwan’s first hospital, a modern version of which now bears his name, the first modern school (Oxford College in Tamsui, now Aletheia University), and the first museum in Taiwan, at Oxford College. 4 Alec MacLeod notes that “Alone of all missionaries who worked in Taiwan, he is remembered in school textbooks and a commemorative stamp, issued in 2001, on the centenary of his death on June 2, 1901.” 5

Mackay’s memoir, *From Far Formosa,* from Mackay’s notes and

---


4 The Tamsui Oxford Museum, established by Mackay, is cited inside the building of *Oxford College.* Established on July 26, 1882, the Museum is now listed as a National Heritage site by the ROC (Taiwan) Ministry of Interior. Major collections include Mackay’s diaries and manuscripts, his collections, the history of The Northern Synod of Taiwan Presbyterian Church, and the history of Aletheia University. See the Aletheia University website, accessed June 10, 2010. http://www.au.edu.tw/eng/htm/compus-scenery_tamsui.htm

diaries compiled and edited by the Reverend J. A. MacDonald, made him the most famous Westerner of his age in Taiwan. A century later, Mackay’s name passed into popular culture with the premiere in Taipei on November 27, 2008, of Mackay: Black Bearded Bible Man, the world’s first bilingual Taiwanese/English musical. In November 2009 and June 2010, Aletheia University in Tamsui sponsored an international workshop and conference devoted to Mackay scholarship.

In the next century, the American Presbyterian Lillian Dickson arrived in Taiwan in 1923 with her Canadian husband, Dr James Dickson, founder of the Taiwan Theological College. In her fifty years in Taiwan, Mrs. Dickson’s role expanded from that of missionary’s wife to a powerfully effective mission campaigner in her own right. With a local guide, Mrs. Dickson embarked on arduous treks into the remote mountain areas to support churches in aboriginal villages, opened leper hospitals, maternity centers and orphanages, and inaugurated the Mustard Seed foundation to support her projects. Like Mackay a veritable whirlwind of activity, Dickson also produced extensive written documentation of her work in numerous publications, in particular Loving the Lepers and These My People and a collection of her letters, Chuckles Behind the Door, edited by her daughter Marilyn Dickson Tank. Articles about her also appeared in Reader’s Digest in the 1960s, and a biography by Kenneth Wilson, Angel At Her Shoulder, appeared in 1965.

Taken together, the life writing of George Mackay and Lillian Dickson

---

7 The opera was inspired by Marian Keith’s biography Black-Bearded Barbarian, published in Toronto, Canada, in 1912.
8 “Origins, Inheritance, Legacy: A Re-Evaluation of George Leslie Mackay's Influence,” a workshop on Mackay held at Queen’s University (Kingston, Ontario, Canada) in November 2009. In June 2010 an international conference on Mackay was held at Aletheia entitled "Danshui: Origins, Inheritance, and Legacy of George Leslie Mackay."
spans a period of about 100 years in Taiwan, and reveals complex, at times ambivalent, attitudes toward the mission in Taiwan, toward the missionary calling itself, and toward Taiwan’s people. Using the theoretical framework of the heroic memoir, a type of autobiography or life writing that is part Christian witness, part adventure fiction, part historical survey and part self-aggrandizing promotion, this essay explores issues in these missionaries’ memoirs related to place, genre and gender against a background of the Western cultural penetration of Taiwan.

In her work *Traditions of Victorian Women's Autobiography: The Poetics and Politics of Life Writing*, Linda Peterson describes a species of biography that rose to popularity in the nineteenth century called the heroic female missionary memoir. In a chapter on *Jane Eyre*, Peterson discusses the British protestant women missionaries in India in the Victorian imperial period and their tradition of spiritual autobiography, as well as a “new form of autobiography that became popular in the 1820s, ’30s and ’40s: the heroic female missionary memoir, ‘the life story of the heroic female missionary.’” As women began to be approved for missionary service in India and Asia, and with the success of women like Ann Hasseltine Judson, Sarah Hall Boardman, and Margaret Wilson, who had gone unofficially to India and whose lives and work were widely publicized in memoirs of the 1830s and 1840s, women writers began to discover, as did missionary Arabella W Stuart, that “[t]he missionary enterprise opens to women a sphere of activity, usefulness and distinction not, under the present constitution of society, to be found elsewhere.” As a result, both new careers and new forms of self-definition are open to women of the period: “Women missionaries and their memoirists developed a new form of Victorian life writing, one that represented women taking heroic action, women engaged in serious work outside the home.”

Such accounts follow on the work of male Christian missionaries, who had already become proficient in the heroic memoir in the earlier years of the nineteenth century, describing daring deeds accomplished in wild places as they pursued their calling to spread the Gospel. Anna Johnston notes that the early missionary texts were almost uniformly male; although

---

11 Ibid, 95.
12 Ibid, 97.
13 One famous example is the British missionary David Livingstone (1813-1873) in Africa, whose legend grew from the perilous explorations he made in the service of missionary work, recorded in his journals and research papers.
later missionary women in India “had a particular insight into the details of
domestic arrangements and gender practices denied to their male partners
and, as a result, they were encouraged to publish accounts of their
experiences.”¹⁴ The memoirs, which show women acting independently
far afield from their native place, were both full of exotic horrors and
dangers, as well as the memoirist’s unfailingly cheerful resistance to the
dangers she encounters. Through these memoirs, these women were able
to develop independent careers and also to deliver a picture of distant
cultures to home audience of readers.¹⁵

The study of missionary life writing opens up issues related to the
depiction of the self, personal and public ambitions, standards of heroism
and “exotic” foreign adventure against the background of the colonial
enterprise. Both Mackay and Dickson were well aware of the public reach
and potential influence of their accounts. As a record of emplacement and
cross cultural contacts between Western Christian medical missionaries
and local populations in Taiwan in the nineteenth and early twentieth
centuries, these missionaries’ memoirs present provocative contrasts in
terms of attitude toward the missionary work itself, and toward the mission
field in Taiwan.

Indeed the “heroic” accounts both Mackay and Dickson produced
reflects the conventions of the nineteenth-century missionary memoirs:
dangerous deeds performed with cheerful sang-froid, as both Mackay and
Dickson write of remaining coolheaded even in showdowns with
headhunting aborigines, poisonous snakes, angry mobs bent on chasing
out the foreigner, and close and prolonged contact with terrible diseases.
One concern in this paper is with the genre of the heroic missionary
memoir and the creation of the “heroic” self in these records.

As a type of autobiography, the heroic memoir is part Christian witness,
part adventure fiction and part personal promotion in the development of
an image of the self. The heroic memoir genre in the colonial context can
play an important role in the development of the national image. But in
creating a heroic persona in the record of a life, what material must be
included, and what is best left out? For one instance, neither Mackay nor
Dickson reveals much of their private lives or family situations; mentions
of spouses and children occur rarely in their writing— in Mackay’s case

¹⁴ Johnston, Missionary Writing, 7
¹⁵ Well-known examples of memoirs by nineteenth-century foreign missionary
women include writing by Ann Hasseltine Judson (1789-1826); Harriet Newell
(1793-1812, whose Life and Writings of Mrs Harriet Newell was published in
Philadelphia in 1831; Harriet Tytler (1826-1907), An Englishwoman in India; and
Margaret Wilson’s Bombay Memoirs (1838).
only a handful of times; in Dickson’s case, only as a segue to another episode in the high adventure of her life in Taiwan.

A further issue concerns whether there are gendered differences in these “heroic” accounts, and whether gendered expectations feed into the missionaries’ conception of their career. Mackay was outspoken in his condemnation of cultural habits among the Taiwanese that degraded women and limited their potential contributions to their society. Dickson, meanwhile, apparently accepted her “subordinate” role as helpmeet to her missionary husband. However, shielded perhaps by the cheerful, uncomplaining persona we see in her memoirs, Dickson managed not only to work independently in dangerous areas, but also to support her own projects through a vast network of “unofficial” contacts.

This paper also explores the “emplacement” of these memoirs in Taiwan, and the local cultural and historical factors influencing each writer’s experience. The careers of Mackay and Dickson take place over a century-long span of Taiwan’s history, during which time the island underwent revolutionary political and economic changes, as the Qing dynastic rulers were replaced by Japanese colonial overlords and then mainland Kuomingtang, or National Party, forces. These historical conflicts and transformations are embedded in the autobiographical accounts that Mackay and Dickson produced in these decades.

The “emplacement” of their life writing is further complicated by the approaches both missionaries used in Taiwan—primarily medical missionary work—as well as the populations targeted by both missionaries, as they both worked extensively with Taiwan aboriginal peoples in the remote mountain areas. Throughout the decades Mackay and Dickson worked in Taiwan, the aboriginal populations were involved in struggles for survival against other dominant groups—the Chinese settlers of the plains and cities, as well as the colonial Japanese government. Mackay and Dickson, among other Western missionaries in the area, played many-sided roles both in bringing the various groups together, and occasionally, in pitting them against each other.

Mackay’s and Dickson’s interactions with local Taiwan people reveal each missionary’s depth of interest in the local culture, art, history, geography, native religious practices and social organization. Mackay in particular was fascinated with Taiwan’s natural environment; his memoir contains chapters devoted to taxonomies of local flora and fauna. Mackay also created a museum at his school in Tamsui with artifacts from Taiwanese culture and religious practices. Mackay became fluent in the local Taiwanese language. Dickson, meanwhile, seemed to have a tourist’s casual interest in the landscape she viewed in Taiwan, but was a close and
careful student of the social and familial relations among the local population, as well as of the leadership hierarchy among island government officials and among her own churchmen.

A final issue in this paper concerns the intended readership or audience for Mackay’s and Dickson’s memoirs – clearly, as they are written in English, they seem intended for the home audience, not for the Taiwan converts themselves or even for an Asian audience. These life writings contain numerous appeals both for money and for greater sympathy and understanding from the home audience for the work they did in the Taiwan mission field. Mackay’s memoir is a frequently vexed self-defense of both his interest in local culture, and of the effectiveness of his work. Indeed, issues of emotional commitment to the missionary project and ego gratification further complicate the memoirist’s relationship with his or her material. Mackay’s “vexed” and defensive attitude stands in marked contrast to that of Dickson, who in her narratives manages to cloak or smooth over frustrations with unflagging good cheer, gliding along to the next order of business. But both display “righteous” anger at perceived injustices, either to themselves and their reputations, as in Mackay’s case, or to those in their care.

In the matter of the heroic self as it is created and presented to the public, both Mackay and Dickson seemed quite conscious of the public role they played. Mackay is depicted from the beginning of his From Far Formosa as a man of action who was happiest in the field, too impatient even to spare time for the onerous task of writing his life story. As editor MacDonald remarks in the preface,

To a man of his ardent temperament and active habits prolonged literary work is the most irksome drudgery. He would rather face a heathen mob than write a chapter for a book.\(^\text{16}\)

As Anna Johnston mentions, the European Christian missionary endeavor was tied to “development of muscular Christianity, in which missionary men discovered and invented their masculinity through their encounter with other, colonised cultures […]. Vigorous but pious British manliness was contrasted with depraved native masculinity, and missionary texts anxiously but assertively represented the world in these terms.”\(^\text{17}\)

Indeed Mackay comes across as a fearless, dominant character in his autobiography, which is filled with anecdotes about challenges and dangers faced on the mission trail. Facing howling anti-foreign mobs,

\(^\text{16}\) Mackay, From Far Formosa, 4.
\(^\text{17}\) Johnston, Missionary Writing, 8.
headhunters, snakes and life-threatening diseases, Mackay’s attitude is cool-headed and uncompromising. This awareness of the potential heroism of his mission seems to influence his stance toward the local environment and population, creating an adversarial relationship. This attitude is well illustrated in Chapter XVII of From Far Formosa, called “How Bang-kah was Taken,” in which he describes a first mission foray into a town in northern Taiwan that was at first “intensely anti-foreign in all its interests and sympathies.” Under the chapter title are the following subtitles, thrilling in their promise of a first-rate adventure:


In this chapter, Mackay constructs a military martial narrative to illustrate the difficult conditions in which he began missionary work, claiming that the town was a “Gibraltar of heathenism” flooded with evil, down to the cobblestones of the streets. He has difficulty finding a place to rent; after finally finding lodging, he claims that crowds immediately gather and begin tearing the house apart, poised to murder him and his company. Mackay comments on the danger facing him: “One who has ever heard the fiendish yells of a murderous Chinese mob can have no conception of their hideousness.” But in his rather melodramatic account Mackay is undaunted, even when the Chinese mandarin official begs him to leave town: “the mandarin was literally on his knees beseeching me to leave the city. I showed him my forceps and my Bible, and told him I would not quit the city, but would extract teeth and preach the gospel.” Approaching the mission field as a field of battle, Mackay is the general; success (“subduing” Bang-kah) or defeat are described in military terms that would be familiar perhaps to readers who expect a modern crusade narrative from those on the foreign mission field.

Half a century later, Lillian Dickson is also aware of the heroic potential of her story: “It is said that we unconsciously make ourselves the hero or heroine of everything we read or write,” she wrote in one of her extraordinary letters home from the mission field. Dickson’s life writing, in numerous accounts and letters, follows the species of autobiography termed the heroic female missionary memoir that became popular in the

---

18 Mackay, From Far Formosa, Chapter 17.
19 Ibid, 164.
21 Ibid, 168.
22 Dickson, Chuckles, 75.
1830s as British women began to be accepted into missionary service in India and the East. Doing work that allowed them to pursue “heroic” careers not possible at home, these women produced “heroic memoirs” that set a new standard for female endeavor – both for the western women, and for the native women for whom they built and operated schools and hospital wards.

Although encountering many of the same dangers that Mackay faced—hostile tribespeople, snakes, perilous landscapes, deadly diseases, intransigent officials—Dickson displays a rather more domesticated and rather less angry or vexed heroism than Mackay does. Even in life-threatening situations she describes playing the role of outraged mother superior, or schoolmarm, as in one instance in a mountain village when she woke up a village chief and threatened him for beating up Christians.

“We'll wake him up,” I answered, my former schoolteacher training coming to the fore…. “You’ve been beating the Christians,” I told him.

“And I can make big trouble for you. I don’t want to make trouble for you, but I can do it. If I hear of just one more instance, I will do it.”

In a further difference from Mackay’s account, Dickson’s tone has a kind of daring gallows’ humor about it: “We had no knife to slice our bread with, so I borrowed a headhunter’s knife and it sliced the bread beautifully! It is not the dainty instrument that one usually connects with picnic parties.” This cool, level-headed, occasionally ironic persona is present in all her accounts, from the 13 years she spent assisting her husband Dr James Dickson, founder of the Taiwan Theological College, and in later years as well, when Lillian determined she would serve as a missionary wife rather than merely as wife of a missionary. In her work in Taiwan she traveled mountain trails to isolated churches, with snakes on one side and fearsome headhunters on the other; worked in leper colonies and opened homes for the children of lepers who had been abandoned by their countrymen; coped with Japanese colonial overlords, the threat of war, and all manner of squalor and disease; and left a legacy in her Mustard Seed foundation, which today is an international organization with missions in seven countries worldwide that support medical teams and projects aimed at raising the quality of life for the poor.

One of the most important factors of nineteenth-century Taiwan

---

23 Dickson, These My People, 71.
24 Dickson, Chuckles, 119
25 The website for Dickson’s Mustard Seed International can be found at http://www.mustardseed.org/msi-about-history.php
missionary work was the introduction of new Western medical techniques among the native population. Mackay, trained as a dentist, was one of a distinguished group of doctors including James Laidlaw Maxwell, a Scottish medical missionary who opened the first western-style hospital in Taiwan, Sin-lau Hospital in Tainan, and William Campbell, another Scottish medical missionary who opened Taiwan’s first school for the blind.

In the next century, Lillian Dickson—although not trained as a medical worker—accompanied medical missions throughout Taiwan and used her network to open hospices for lepers as well as clinics for orphans and women. These missionaries followed the same rather roundabout path to the heart of the Formosan people—targeting bodies first, primarily in outcast social groups, such as the mountain aborigines—in order to win souls. Mackay describes the effectiveness of this strategy:

> The importance of medical missions does not any longer need to be emphasized… from the very beginning of our work in Formosa, heed was given to the words and example of the Lord, and by means of the healing art a wide door for immediate usefulness was opened … tooth-extracting has been more than anything else effective in breaking down prejudice and opposition.\(^26\)

At the same time, Mackay makes a harsh judgment on the local medical practices he finds when he arrives: “I have no more faith in the prescriptions of the native doctors than I have in those of the priests or sorcerers.”\(^27\) The tools of his work are forceps, for pulling teeth, and a Bible; his mission relies on these twin “weapons” to introduce Western scientific methods with the aim of instilling Western theology among the native population.

As for targeting the outcast aboriginal groups, which was a common strategy for all Western missionaries in Taiwan, Murray Rubinstein in *The Protestant Community on Modern Taiwan: Mission, Seminary, and Church* writes that while the Han Chinese, Taiwanese and Hakka Chinese had well-established religious traditions that helped preserve social identity and “often expressed itself as open hostility to those introducing alien religious systems, as the Presbyterians would learn,”

> the aborigines’ religious system was to be less of a challenge to those Western missionaries. They possessed a system of belief and practiced that is best described as animist…. Because the aborigines possessed a more

---

\(^{26}\) Mackay, *From Far Formosa*, 308, 316.

\(^{27}\) Ibid, 313.
primitive religious system, they were more open to change and to the message the missionaries brought with them. Presbyterian missionaries discovered this, much to their delight, in the late 1860s.28

There was also a political advantage for the missionaries in targeting an outcast group, who were at odds with both the Chinese population of Taiwan, and the Japanese colonial overlords who would arrive at the turn of the century:

That the alien religion, Christianity, would appeal to déclassé groups or ethnic and racial minorities is not unusual. A new faith can provide such people with a sense of self-worth and perhaps even a feeling of moral superiority.29

The Presbyterians and other missionaries who targeted Taiwan aboriginal groups and approached them as doctors ministering to their bodily and material needs seem to have gambled intelligently, as their strategy worked. One hundred years later, “more than 64 percent of aboriginal population (at 400,000) is identified as Christian, versus only 3 percent of the 22 million who were of Chinese origin.”30

Although Lillian Dickson was not a doctor, she was aware of the urgent need for medical care among the local people, in particular the direst cases among the aboriginal groups riddled with tuberculosis, as well as the outcast leper population among the Chinese of Taiwan. Dickson’s tone again differs from that of Mackay, who presented Western medicine as a kind of superior cultural product; Dickson responds as a caring and concerned parent might, rather than as a medical authority; her self-presentation is largely in maternal images. She offers comfort and sympathy, as well as a formidable network of friends in high and low places who offer political and financial support.

29 Ibid, 30.
Our unit has a threefold purpose: to present Christ as Savior to all we meet, to heal disease and all manner of suffering, and to love sincerely and deeply those whose lives we are privileged to touch.\(^{31}\)

In terms of these missionaries’ interest in local culture, Mackay spent years studying the Taiwanese language (often in conversations with herdboys and people he met on the road), and also cataloguing the flora, fauna and ethnology of the island. *From Far Formosa* is filled with a minutely detailed and enthusiastic account of local culture, as witnessed by the titles of his chapters: “Geography and History”; “Geology”; “Trees, Plants and Flowers”; “Animal Life”; “Ethnology in Outline.” The memoir also includes 11 chapters on the history and culture of the Chinese, six chapters on the “Conquered Aborigines” and two chapters on “Native Savages.” Mackay’s detailed study of Taiwan and its natural environment and social culture became an important source of information about Taiwan for Westerners. As Clyde Forsberg mentions in a recent study on Mackay, “theology was not Mackay’s true passion […] Mackay was first and foremost a Christian naturalist.”\(^{32}\) Mackay’s editor, the Rev. J A MacDonald, mentions that the missionary wanted that “prominence should be given to what may be least romantic, but […] most instructive” about Taiwan, and that only “the exigencies of space” prevented the inclusion of more details concerning “Formosa, its resources and people.”\(^{33}\)

Indeed, Mackay himself takes his role as ethnographer and natural scientist so seriously that he needs to remind himself, at one point in the memoir, that he is in Taiwan to spread the Gospel, not to study the island:

> Why am I here? Is it to study the geology, botany or zoology of Formosa? . . . . My commission is clear. . . . Go ye out into the entire world and preach the gospel to every creature. To get the gospel of the grace of God into the minds and hearts of the heathen, and when converted to build them up in their faith—that was my purpose in going to Formosa.\(^{34}\)

Despite what he might profess as hatred for “heathen” ways, Mackay had an ongoing fascination with the local culture, history and even religious

\(^{31}\) Dickson, *These My People*, 52.

\(^{32}\) Clyde R. Forsberg Jr., “Late Victorian Creation Science, Nordic Origins, and Interracial Marriage—The Interesting Case of George Leslie Mackay,” in *2010 International Conference—Tamsui, Bridge Between and Beyond: Origins, Inheritance, and Legacy of George Leslie Mackay* (Conference Proceedings, College of Liberal Arts, Department of Religious Culture and Organization Management Studies, Department of English, Aletheia University, June 2010), 5-6.


\(^{34}\) Ibid, 135.
practices. Upon making converts, he instructs them to burn their former idols and ancestral tablets. However, Mackay rescues some of these items from the flames, and transports them to the museum he is developing at his school in Tamsui. In defending this museum collection of “heathen” items, with “idols enough to stock a temple,”35 Mackay writes directly to his home audience:

There may be good people in Christian lands who will read these pages with painful astonishment, horrified that a missionary should spend time collecting and studying these things. I do not attempt to justify my conduct in the eyes of such persons. . . . could they conceive the reflux influence of all this study on mission work, in humbling the proud graduate, conciliating the haughty mandarin, and attracting the best and brightest of the officials, both native and foreign, they would not so readily write across these paragraphs their ignorant and supercilious “Cui bono?”36

At times as much the social anthropologist as preacher, Mackay also finds, within certain Chinese social customs, cause for respect:

There are some things that appeal to human nature in this ancestral idolatry. Its motive may be fear, but its basis is filial piety. And there is something very solemn about their annual family gatherings before the spirit tablets of their dead . . . It has been my custom never to denounce or revile what is so sacredly cherished, but rather to recognize whatever of truth or beauty there is in it, and to utilize it as an “open sesame” to the heart.37

Mackay is also capable of very sharp judgment of local groups, including the Lam-si-hoan, a tribe whose “lives have not been touched by the great movements that have fixed the standards of manners in Christian civilization, and they never indulge the habits of thought and introspection that awaken self-consciousness and a sense of shame . . . to their minds, darkened by innumerable superstitions, the thought of anything unseen that is not to be dreaded is hard to grasp.”38 He concludes, therefore, that this group would not be worth much effort on the part of the missionaries: “It seemed unwise to expend much of our strength on this unstable and vanishing tribe.”39

This hardheaded and unsympathetic approach is very unlike that

37 Ibid, 132-33.
38 Ibid, 247.
evident in Dickson’s memoir, who opens her arms in a maternal embrace to all comers, no matter how desperate the case. After seeing 700 patients in one day at a remote village, she wonders, “Who would have taken care of these people if we had not come? Who would care for them when we went away? Where were the people who should have been trying to bring them home to heaven?”

She and the medical teams she travels with minister in particular to the doomed and the dying, outcast tribes and lepers, the cases Mackay and most everyone else may have found “hopeless.” Very often Dickson comments on the “the helpless and hopeless” nature of the people she finds – the very high infant mortality rate and rate of tuberculosis among some of the aboriginal populations, for example.

Dickson’s interest in Taiwan’s physical landscape and flora and fauna is limited to its picturesque quality. Unlike Mackay, who painstakingly produces a naturalist’s detailed description of the Taiwan environment, Dickson seems to regard the natural world as mainly a backdrop for the human drama. When she does mention the natural beauty of Taiwan, she links it to the missionary task at hand, saying that the aborigines live in a beautiful place but may not be able to see it for their spiritual blindness.

To live amid scenes of marvelous natural beauty is not enough. They would have to have a knowledge of God and the Saviour in order to become noble and happy and purposeful.

Dickson seems more interested in affect than in fact and scientific catalogues, in how factors like heat, disease, sorrow, heart-rending loss work on the hearts and minds of those she encounters in Taiwan, in particular on their capacity of faith. In a remarkable letter written early in her career in Taiwan, she describes the effect of the subtropical summer heat and humidity on the people, both westerners and Taiwanese:

From early morning the white waves of heat come shifting down. They make a cruel glare on the road and street. . . . It is practically impossible for you to imagine the whiteness of the sunshine. It has an electric quality as if it were made of lightning. . . . If you could step into a shaft of lightning, I daresay the brilliance of the light alone would be enough to set you mad. . . . the effect that this intense, brilliant light and merciless heat have on everyone, we all go half mad! . . . gentle natures turn harsh;

---

40 Dickson, *These My People*, 59.
41 Ibid, 59.
careful persons become wildly reckless, studious souls descend to
detective stories, happy folk become misanthropes.\textsuperscript{42}

Critical to an analysis of these memoirs is the matter of their intended or
actual audience, an issue which cuts to the heart of the motivation for
writing these accounts, Anna Johnston remarks on characteristic features
of the genre among nineteenth-century British mission workers:

Published missionary texts are fundamentally and frankly propagandist in
nature. Their aim was variously to inculcate public support for missionary
endeavors; to ensure an ongoing supply of donated funds . . . as a result,
missionary writing conforms to an identifiable set of generic regulations. . . . Missionary figures are almost exclusively heroic, long-
suffering, and do not experience religious doubts, debilitating diseases or
personal crises.\textsuperscript{43}

Missionary autobiographies in general had a specific audience, the church
fellowship and supporters in the home country, and a specific purpose,
which was to raise funds for ongoing projects. In the main, these records
evince a certain uniformity of tone: cheerful, dedicated, uncomplaining,
and positive. They were not written for the converts in churches in the
mission field. In keeping with the conventions of the genre, Mackay
maintains a stiff upper lip in the face of many obstacles:

Up and down through that plain we labored, tour after tour, and still no one
came forward to accept our message of salvation. “How discouraging!” I hear
someone say. Who calls such experiences discouraging? I do not. I never
did. Our business is to do our duty, and to do it independently, of what
men call encouragement and discouragement. I never say anything to
discourage in twenty-three long years in Formosa.\textsuperscript{44}

However, Mackay departs from the typical upbeat and cheerful style of
other missionary memoirs in his many vexed and frustrated remarks, most
of which are aimed at real or imagined critics in the home audience. As
Johnston remarks, “Missionaries in India often battled as much with white
colonial elites as with the ‘blinded votaries’ of Hinduism.”\textsuperscript{45} Mackay notes
the strained relationships between missionaries and the more “worldly”
Westerners in foreign parts:

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{42} Dickson, \textit{Chuckles}, 7.
\item\textsuperscript{43} Johnston, \textit{Missionary Writing}, 7
\item\textsuperscript{44} Ibid, 217.
\item\textsuperscript{45} Ibid, 5.
\end{itemize}
It is a common complaint on the part of missionaries that foreigners, whether merchants residing in the country or travelers passing through it, are either indifferent or hostile to Christian missions. . . . Missionaries, on the other hand, hint that foreign merchants worldly, the military and naval officers loose livers, the consuls unsympathetic and unspiritual, and the average traveler a one-eyed, prejudiced, vagabond globe trotter.

But Mackay reserves his own special disdain for his critics at home, whether real or imagined:

I wish that it were possible for the critics of foreign mission work to drop down and, just for once, see for themselves that the gospel of Christ is still the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth || . . . With more than two thousand confessed followers of Jesus Christ now in the churches of North Formosa . . . am I to be told by some unread and untraveled critic that mission money is wasted, that missionary success is mere sentiment, and that converts do not stand? I profess to know something about foreign mission work, having studied it at first-hand on the ground.

Such comments reveal an interesting struggle in Mackay, whose real need for support (moral and financial) from his church community in North America comes into conflict with his impatient and rather scornful attitude toward “homebodies” who could not understand the brutal difficulties of life in the mission field.

Also deeply aware of the power her accounts had to move the audience at home, Lillian Dickson frequently addresses the outside world and Western readers in the same maternal terms she uses to describe her mission work: “I wished passionately that Christians in America might hear across the wide waters that separate us, His voice saying longingly, ‘Are we not brothers?’ so they would unite with us in this work of building the Kingdom, fighting against evil, teaching of love.”

But the peculiar aspect of this “maternal” address is that, although Dickson displays a close, warm and humorous relationship with her children, particularly daughter Marilyn, in her collected letters, *Chuckles Behind the Door*, she rarely mentions her children or husband in her memoirs *These My People* and *Loving the Lepers*. Indeed her husband, who is off on his own work at the Theological College much of the time, appears in her accounts only as a kind of segue to her own independent adventures–if he couldn’t spare the time to visit a remote mountain church,

---

46 Mackay, *From Far Formosa*, 318
48 Dickson, *These My People*, 82.
for example, his wife went in his place. Dickson nurses many children—orphans, lepers, aboriginal village children—in these memoirs, but the children she gave birth to are largely absent, including those two children who died shortly after birth. Her biographer Kenneth Wilson comments that “part of the cost of being a missionary, Lil had known all along, was that one’s own children were so far away, so soon. She had her own son with her for a comparatively few years, but there had been other boys, close at hand, who needed mothering.”

Dickson’s reticence about her private life is similar to Mackay’s, whose memoir very rarely mentions the Taiwanese woman he married and children they had together. In remarking on Mackay’s silence on his private life, Clyde Forsberg says that “this may well be a factor of his British upbringing and sensibility.” But this habit of obscuring or omitting information about personal relationships seems rather a convention of the missionary memoir, as evidenced in a range of missionary life writing, including for example that of Pearl Buck’s father, a long-term missionary in China, whose autobiography of his many decades in China came to a scant 24 pages, with rare mention of his wife or children, and several children omitted entirely. The public persona each missionary created in their life writing—whether the irascible, stern, paternal figure, as in Mackay’s case, or the all-embracing mother figure, for Dickson—is a species apart from their private selves, which is subordinated to the legend in the making.

The maternal persona Dickson develops in her memoirs is one to which her audience responded to enthusiastically, and the warm admiration that flowed in from outside Taiwan had a financial heft to it as well. Dickson’s biographer quotes her as saying that she was surprised when fellow Americans heard of her work and began to send financial contributions: “When I first wrote, I had no thought of anyone’s sending money. I was pouring out my heart, telling what I thought of things I saw happen. But money did come in. I tried to use it carefully, but I used it all.”

Both Mackay and Dickson are quite outspoken on the issue of women’s dignity and social value. Mackay’s commentary on social conditions

49 Wilson, *Angel on Her Shoulder*, 185.
50 Forsberg, “Late Victorian Creation Science,” 37.
51 Pearl Buck’s biography of her father, *Absalom Sydenstricker, Fighting Angel: Portrait of a Soul* (1936), was mentioned by the Nobel Prize committee as an important factor, along with Buck’s memoir of her mother, in the decision to award Buck the 1938 Literature Prize.
52 Wilson, *Angel*, 175
among Taiwan people, including gender discrimination, reveals an ethnographic interest that traces religious habits to harmful consequences. Mackay observes, for example, that local customs, while admirable in certain ways, tend to lead to the degradation of women:

Ancestral worship has its beauties, and in its exaltation of marriage it may indirectly have been a blessing; but it has its darker side, and in its train follow domestic infelicity. . . . A marriage that does not result in the birth of a son, who will guard his father’s grave and worship at the ancestral shrine, is a source of perpetual misery, giving the husband just cause for ill-treating his wife.\(^53\)

Meanwhile, Dickson experiences gender discrimination firsthand, from her own countrymen in the matter of her role as the wife of a missionary, and in her position in Asia. But rather than rage against the status quo, she learns how to manipulate conditions in order to get what she wants. On many occasions, in carrying out her surveys of churches in the field, she travels “under cover,” bringing with her a male pastor and pretending to be his assistant: “Women are not much value in the Orient, but if I went in as an adjunct to the Formosan pastor who would have standing and authority, it would be all right.”\(^54\) Rather than complaining about her treatment, Dickson adapts and finds ways to get what she wants and get her work done, despite the obvious barriers. This attitude is apparent even in her remarks about her countrymen, the male mission leaders who happily dump a great deal of work on her “unofficial” shoulders. She evinces a humble, apparently unironic attitude toward this situation, as she says when charged with writing a vacation Bible study for thousands of local children: “Most of the rest of the committee were busy men, pastors, all important men, and they didn’t want to bother with this little matter.”\(^55\) Most importantly, Dickson managed to break away from restrictions on women’s role and status east and west when in 1954 she inaugurated her Mustard Seed foundation, which supported her hospital and social service projects. This organization has since expanded to seven countries worldwide, offering medical treatment and basic support to the needy.

The heroic memoir functions best if the life recorded is somewhat larger than life, spiritual celebrity-style, and that in most cases is what was produced. However the genre itself is betrayed at times by intrusions from the missionary’s real life—for Dickson, in her letters, which have a clear-eyed poetic power that stands in contrast to the often clichéd conclusions

---

\(^{53}\) Mackay, *From Far Formosa*, 133-134.

\(^{54}\) Dickson, *These My People*, 65.

\(^{55}\) Ibid, 85.
drawn in the frenetically positive memoirs she produced for public view, as well as in Kenneth Wilson’s biography. As for Mackay, his memoir itself reveals some tension between his natural interests in ethnography and taxonomy, and the mission he was charged with in Taiwan; much of the time, the curious and fascinating display of life around him often got the better of him. He also struggles in print against his church colleagues and countrymen. Considered as articles of life writing influenced variously by historical and social conditions, as well as by the individual personalities of the memoirists, the work of Taiwan missionaries George Mackay and Lillian Dickson offers and valuable accounts of a gradually “globalizing” world shaped by both colonial incursions and local tensions. Through these missionaries’ writing we observe as well early “global citizens” who are instrumental in both consuming and disseminating culture and cultural values, and whose particular advantage lies in having hit the beach first, ahead of the cross-cultural tsunamis that would soon follow them.
DRAMATURGY
THE BLACK BEARDED BIBLE MAN:
FLAGSHIP OPERA.
FORMOSAN EPIC, EMBLEM, AND ENIGMA

LLYN SCOTT
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH,
ALETHEIA UNIVERSITY, TAMSUI, TAIWAN

The Black Bearded Bible Man, National Theatre, Taipei (Taiwan)
2008/11/27-30
The National Theatre flagship Opera *The Black Bearded Bible Man* produced by the National Chiang Kai-Shek Cultural Center, National Symphony Orchestra of Taiwan, and Taipei Philharmonic Choir premiered on 27 November 2008, at the National Theatre under the design and direction of German opera director Lukas Hemleb. The libretto by Joyce Y. Chiou, Executive Director of the National Symphony Orchestra, featured American baritone Thomas Meglioranza as George Leslie Mackay and Taiwanese soprano Mei-Lin Chen as Chhang-miâ, and eight other well-known opera soloists. The music by composer Gordon G.W. Chin, Music Director of the Yin Qi Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, was conducted by Wen-Pin Chien, Music Director for the National Symphony Orchestra. According to Artistic Director, Chang-Shu Liu, *The Black Bearded Bible Man (Bible Man)* is a “new form of opera” that opened on the twenty-first anniversary of the NTCH. Producer Yu-Chiou Tchen announced the world premier of a Minnan opera depicting the life of an adopted Canadian native son in effect that “demonstrates the character and soul” of Taiwan culture. This paper will examine how the libretto, performance, and production documentary on two souvenir DVDs treat the Mackay story as epic, emblem, and enigma, in an attempt to understand in what ways, if any, the opera is representative of Taiwanese culture.

Advance reviews picked up and played the unique Taiwanese identity of the new opera. The Association of Asia Pacific Performing Arts Centres (AAPPAC) *Quarterly Newsletter* touted the “world premier of Taiwanese Opera.”\(^1\) The Cultural Center spread the word the opera was the world’s first large-scale opera to be performed in both Taiwanese and English. The *Newsletter* goes on to describe *Bible Man* as “Taiwanese opera in the western operatic tradition, helping to mold the history and culture of Taiwan, and bringing together elements of Taiwanese indigenous melodies and western church music.”\(^2\) Writing for Taiwan’s *Culture* website, Hermia Lin also mentions the global aspirations of an all-Taiwanese work in her article.\(^3\) Since publicity for an opera by The Metropolitan Opera for example, usually focuses on the composer and title of the work rather than national language or cultural identity of the story, more seems to be at stake here than an opera premier. Significantly, just ahead of *Bible Man* in

---

2. Ibid.
March 2008, the Beijing Performing Arts Center scheduled its first season in the world’s largest new opera house, but “faced a dilemma regarding their first domestic opera production.” According to local authorities, no Chinese operas were deemed “mature enough” to fill the bill. The chance for cultural one-upmanship scored by an all-Taiwanese opera premier of *Bible Man* could not be overlooked. However, Composer Gordon G. W. Chin disavowed using neither “any Taiwanese folk songs nor any Aboriginal music for the play. . . .” A review in *Taiwan Today* concurs and adds that “[i]nstead of producing a collage of traditional Holo-Taiwanese ballads and Christian music,” Chin pursued his own “modernist style.” In a review for Taiwan’s English language newspaper *Taipei Times*, Ian Bartholomew questions, “But will this Western-style opera sung in Hoklo by non-native speakers live up to the hype?”

Preparations for the opera did augur a grand outcome. As early as 1998, and recognized as one of a few scholar-artists in Taiwan with professional training in both theater and music, Chiou began thinking about the life of Mackay as the basis for a drama of “altruistic love and devotion to the island.” In 2002, she met with composer Gordon G.W. Chin who offered several reasons why the Mackay story should be turned into an opera. According to Chin, even though western opera is a rarity in Taiwan, it would be accessible to the general public since it entails essentially drama and acting. Chin and Chiou have both lobbied tirelessly for the arts as serving a social function in Taiwanese society. The potential social impact of a Mackay opera was an important consideration. Chin writes, “We wanted to present a power that touches Taiwan society beyond the walls of the concert hall.” Their goal was unanimously accepted and resonated

---

5 Ibid.
6 Lin, *Culture*.
with the aims of the Council of Cultural Affairs which had commissioned Chin to compose an opera in accordance with Taiwanese history, Tchen’s unique artistic vision, and the NTCH mission statement. Quoting the familiar English proverb, “the eyes are the windows of the soul,” Tchen characterized artistic performances at the NTCH as an expression of the creative essence of Taiwanese culture. The centrality of Mackay to the development of Taiwan is not in dispute; the Bible Man’s inclusion in “Taiwan’s Glory Internet Index” and TaiwanDNA website are a testament to his legacy as a major cultural player in the modernization of Taiwan. Guest director Hemleb described the Mackay heritage as not only the story of a foreign missionary with a modern message, but a window into a “decisive period in contemporary Taiwan society when modernization challenges the pre-urban structures and tribal superstitions.”

An impressive budget of TWD 10,000,000.00 led to further endorsements as well as consensus in the initial planning stages.

The original architects of the Mackay opera had high artistic hopes and standards. In the wake of some twenty years of professional theater at the National Chiang Kai-Shek Cultural Center, the Mackay opera would break new artistic ground, raising the bar for future productions. According to Tchen, as the first Western opera in the Taiwanese or Minnan language—a southern dialect from Fukien province in China—the production would be Taiwan’s theatrical debut on the world stage. Hemleb elaborated on this vis-à-vis “heritage and fashion.” Besides the historical significance of the Mackay period (1872 to 1901), the production would feature the latest in “international art, creativity, and technology.” The desire to create something new was foremost in the minds of planners. The employment both of Taiwanese and English languages in the libretto would set the Mackay opera apart as well. This was accompanied by educational programs in cooperation with a Mackay exhibition at the Tamsui Municipal High School, and three local Mackay conferences which, in the opinion of artistic director Chang-Shu Liu, heralded a new operatic day.

The planning and development of any large cultural event is no small task; but whether this particular opera can be called a success or not is less than clear. The design and scenography of Bible Man did set a new technical standard for theater in Taiwan. According to Hemleb, the style of the libretto was perhaps better suited to a “large scale cinemascope” rather than the stage. In an early production meeting with Technical Director Austin M.C. Wang, Hemleb cautioned that the script contained “a huge

---

10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
amount . . . that can’t be realized on stage,” such as simultaneous locations within the same scene, flashbacks, and extra-narrative scenes.\textsuperscript{13} Video Designer Jun-Jieh Wang likened the project to a film production with multiple projection techniques including front and rear on three different screen types: silk, regular, and string curtain. Flashbacks required special pre-recorded sound tracks as the actor recalled memories from Mackay’s childhood. Mackay’s diary required the same degree of pre-recorded audiovisual ingenuity and special effects such as video of Meglioranza’s hand penning the entries. Interactive stage and video scenes are not new to Taiwan, but the size and complexity of the hydraulic motorized platform frames that Hemleb designed and Austin Wang engineered were a first. To solve the twin problems of simultaneous locations and the chronological leaps they necessitated, Hemleb designed an abstract European-style setting with six parallel frames parallel in diminishing perspective, tilting or slanting left and right like seesaws, and able to imitate the motion of a ship at sea. Wang would later describe the set as the “biggest and heaviest design the National Theater has ever seen.”\textsuperscript{14}

\textbf{East Meets West: The Black Bearded Bible Man “Epic” Proportions}

The grandiosity and complexity of the scenography were largely a factor of the libretto and librettist. Indeed, the overall success of the opera hinged in some respect on Chiou’s intentions and dramatic treatment of Mackay’s biography, \textit{From Far Formosa}, in particular her decision to cast Mackay in the role of epic hero. The appearance and usage of the term “epic” in the performance publicity suggests something quite different from the epic tradition or the theater of Bertolt Brecht, for example: “The Black Bearded Bible Man depicts the epic of the pioneering missionary to Taiwan, Dr. Mackay. . . .”\textsuperscript{15} In the DVD documentary recording of the opera already mentioned, Chiou explains that from the start, she wanted to write in the epic style, but the term “epic” appears alongside references to the chorus in Greek tragedy. Brechtian dialectical propaganda is nowhere to be

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
seen. Whether the Mackay opera delivered on its promises as Taiwanese epic is somewhat in doubt.

Adeline Johns-Putra identifies four characteristic tropes of the epic as exemplified in classic narrative poetry and wherein a sense “of profound national or even universal relevance” and “a virtuous hero or heroes (virtuous as defined by the culture of the epic) are paramount. He has also shown that the “epic impulse” and much twentieth and twenty-first century “epic imagination” have been affected by such popular epic films as Braveheart (2000), Troy (2004), Kingdom of Heaven (2005), Avatar (2009), but also the evening news, “sporting contests, corporate takeovers, [and] political elections. The history of the epic,” he goes on to explain, “shows the epic has come, to us, to connote the immensity of life, and resonates with questions of morality, social responsibility, and subjectivity.”

The salient point is that Mackay’s story, and the man himself, had all the makings on an epic, past and present, East and West.

Merely calling the Mackay opera an epic does not make it so. Chiou admits that Mackay conducted a mission of great importance to Taiwan some one-hundred-and-thirty-nine years later. However, she worried that Mackay’s character needed something more, “It is difficult to make such a simple mission into a great achievement,” she argues, “there should be some strong driving force.” In Chiou’s view, Mackay came to Taiwan alone and without any fanfare, his story lacking the necessary pomp and circumstance to qualify as an epic. For this reason she devised a pseudo-Greek chorus for dramatic effect and thus “prop up the main character.”

Rightly or wrongly, Chiou dramatized Mackay’s twenty-nine-year mission in Taiwan using cinematically charged scenes and protean chorus in the classical style, hoping to lend credence and dramatic weight to Mackay’s character and story.

The identity of the Chorus in Bible Man is linked to the presence of historical markers informing stage and costume design. If the Bible Man Chorus, like the Chorus in Oedipus Rex in Sophocles, represents society wherein action unfolds, then Chiou’s Chorus ought to reflect the various

18 Ibid.
19 Bible Man. Documentary Recording.
20 Ibid.
Taiwanese players described by Hemleb as “tribes, mountain people, aborigines” and in the lyrics of Mackay as “Chinese, Pepohoan, or Aborigine.” Costumer Yu-Fan Tsai chose instead to set the period uniformly in the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912) which is commonly recognized as Chinese. Although Tsai re-interpreted the solemn box-like Qing silhouette, constructing costumes out of hemp (a rough-textured fabric seen in some aboriginal clothing) this adaptation was meant to add a “humanist quality” rather than depict the contrasting tribal culture of Taiwan’s aborigine population. The costumes were ahistoricized in essence using superimposed hand-painted abstract designs in a palate of colors that ranged from cool blues and greens to warm oranges and reds depending on the scene. Tsai explains in the DVD documentary that an image of Tamsui Township as impressionistic “scenic painting” was the hope. Whereas black outlines of aboriginal totem figures are visible on the sides of the set frames, they are not repeated elsewhere. The costumes for the shepherd boys/girls who initiate Mackay into the Minnan dialect are likewise dressed in the style of the Qing dynasty. Mackay is costumed in the abstract painted design, although the cut suggests a Western suit from the late Victorian period. In this case, Tsai dresses Mackay in the costume of a traveler rather than a missionary. Mackay arrives on the shores of Taiwan wearing the same dress as a chorus of immigrants that accompany him from Fukien, a strong interpretative design statement that matches the dramatic focus in Chiou’s libretto, to be sure. There are other equally dynamic currents of intervention at work.

The homogeneity of the opera’s costume design is mitigated, albeit briefly, by two historically specific scenes: a pre-recorded video of Mackay as a boy with his mother in act one and another depicting a Chinese Matsu temple procession in act two. These two scenes interject a sense of epic time—one from an earlier period in rural Canada filmed in sepia tones and overlaid with a Roman Catholic painting inspired by Belgian painter Aert van den Bossche, Virgin and Child in a Landscape (1492-1498), and the other of Buddhism’s ancient gold-clad god-puppet, stilt-walkers, and traditional Tibetan-style umbrella canopy in Chinese reds.

The Chorus appears in different guises, offering up alternating positive and negative opinions on Mackay. At first, they express the dreams of like-minded refugees in the guise of Fukien boat people. Conversely in act two, the Chorus enters as a gang of antagonistic Matsu temple worshipers who attack Mackay’s clinic. Later, the same Chorus will become the

---

21 Ibid.
exuberant young graduates from Oxford College. These individual Chorus members return *en masse* at the beginning of act three where an anti-foreigner, anti-Christian mob gather to persecute Mackay and his followers yet again. In the final scenes of the opera, the Chorus undergoes a final transformation, gathering around the prophet to grieve as they sense this will be Mackay’s last sermon. It must be stated here that these flip-flop or pro-anti Mackay demonstrations by a Taiwanese, Greek Chorus in generic, postmodern garb, do not quite elevate the stature of Mackay to that of an epic hero and often succeed only in marginalizing him, the Chorus and its near continuous onstage presence being the source of considerable tension if not confusion.

### Toward a Taiwanese-Brechtian Aesthetic: Bible Man’s Episodic Core

Turning to the dramatic structure of *Bible Man*, we see that Chiou applies yet another interpretation of an epic trope, in this case, the Brechtian aesthetic which has most influenced postmodern theater: episodic scenes. Doubling as both dramaturg and librettist, Chiou chose seventeen episodes from the life of Mackay to tell his story and in hopes of conveying a sense of epic national prominence. Mackay’s deathbed scene functions as the dramatic bookends of the opera. Moreover, the libretto incorporates two conventions of the classical epic: an invocation to the Muse, Mackay’s prayer to his mother that Formosa will be the “last stop of my life,” and an epilogue where Mackay returns *deus ex machina*, as Formosa’s guardian spirit. Mackay’s powerful, melodic aria in scene one, “I Overlook This Land,” is sung again, in Hokkien, insuring musical unity and a kind of reprisal/blessing on the future of the Gospel in Taiwan. All of the episodes between these two scenes are flashbacks and flash-forwards, beginning with the historic 1872 arrival by Sanpan and where the major secondary characters (Wang Chang Sui, A-Hoa, and Wang’s Wife) are introduced as fellow travelers.

The voyage is punctuated by Mackay’s aria “Weak Heart,” sung in English, but followed by lessons in the native dialect from A-Hoa and the stark realities of life in Tamsui in the song, “Rain, Rain, Rain,” which is sung in Hokkien to conclude act one. In act two, Chinese religious belief and the superstition of local authorities lead inexorably to conflicts. These episodes include Matsu temple worshipers who attack Mackay for disrespecting the local custom and *feng shui* in particular. The relationship

---

22 Barthes, “Brecht’s Epic Theatre.”
between Mackay and the characters in secondary roles is established in this scene. A-Hoa and another convert, Wu Yi-Yu, become Mackay’s protectors. Wang and his wife assist Mackay in opening his first clinic. In subsequent episodes, which are dramatic scenes, they will play leading roles in the action. Wu’s father objects when his sister enters Mackay’s clinic for treatment; an unidentified “Violent Man” attempts to murder Mackay, but later becomes a convert; and a “Chinese Official” reprimands Mackay for causing trouble. These episodes are interrupted by an encounter between a very lonely Mackay and admiring Chhang-miâ. A duet entitled “The Meaning of Love” and sung in Hokkien captures their budding romance. In the next episode, Mackay and Chhang-miâ appear as hard-working husband and devoted wife. In a lengthy recitative both sung and spoken in Hokkien, the money to build Oxford College that Mackay’s hometown donated segues into a long exposition on the course of their courtship, including the fact that many of Mackay’s family and fellow associates had initially objected to his choice of life partners.

In defense of their marriage, Mackay and Chhang-miâ express their mutual love and appreciation for each other. Mackay reveals his isolation as “nothing but a lonely black bearded barbarian” before he met Chhang-miâ. Chhang-miâ recalls how happy she was to learn English as a consequence. She sings, “You opened up my mind to a whole new world . . . to find the happiness of life and the source of happiness.”

This episode concludes with a second duet, also in Hokkien, and where Mackay bares his soul in song, “Because of you, I no longer sigh; I no longer feel lonely. I no longer am ashamed of myself. I’m no longer alone.”

Mackay’s educational reforms are the final centerpiece of act two and a source of cross-cultural conflict that begs to be resolved. The Oriental curriculum, transplanted from Fukien, consists largely of comprehensive examinations in the Confucian classics or Four Books and requisite to employment in the imperial civil service during the Ming and Qing periods. Mackay defends his Western curriculum of history, botany, geography, natural science, astronomy, medicine, ethics, and the Bible at Oxford College to a prospective student, but the idea of having to memorize so many books strikes fear into his heart and he flees the scene. Mackay then leaves A-Hoa, Yi-Yu, Wang, the “Violent Man” and recent convert to debate the merits of a western education. Yi-Yu comes to believe that Mackay’s curriculum is the more interesting path to follow. The episode ends jubilantly with the Chorus, now Oxford College students,

---

23 Joyce Y. Chiou, Bible Man. Performance Recording.
24 Ibid.
singing the praises of Western pedagogy: “The bells ringing in Oxford College wake us up, wake us up!” And so begins Mackay’s tenure as college president in 1882.

The remaining episodes (fourteen through eighteen) comprise act three, beginning with the blockade of Tamsui by the French in 1884. The Chorus, an anti-foreign and anti-Christian mob, descends upon Mackay’s clinic and college in one fell swoop, singing defiantly, “Burn, Burn, Burn” positioned between two projection surfaces—a silk screen and string curtain—while rapidly moving images of black smoke, the harbor, and charred wood are flashed across the screens for effect. The climax occurs when the mob charges through the string curtain in the direction of the Mackay clinic. Mackay then enters alone to survey the damage, his heart breaking as he sings in Hokkien, “Father forgive them; rid them of their blind hatred. Please make us a whole . . . harmony.” At the urging of his four friends, Mackay will make his escape to Hong Kong, concluding the episode.

Episode fifteen takes place some six months later and prior to Mackay’s triumphant return. His inner Taiwanese circle re-enters. The scene is one of ruins represented by the irregular tilted angles of the set frames. They lament Mackay’s absence and pray for the speedy and safe return of the Prophet and his family. Episode sixteen follows in rapid succession and in front of the sea-waves projection rather new setting configuration. A smaller Chorus of Tamsui Christians prays that the French warships will leave the harbor allowing Mackay’s boat to enter unharmed. The scene shifts to Hong Kong and the pier where Mackay and Chhang-miâ anxiously wait for their boat to Tamsui (episode seventeen). In this episode they pray for deliverance. Mackay regrets his decision to desert Tamsui in its time of need and begs for Divine intervention. Chhang-miâ suggests that they kneel together and ask for the blessing of the Holy Spirit. Now an unseen Chorus joins them in this heartfelt invocation, all sung in Hokkien:

In this chaotic time, we have to comfort each other to survive the harsh winter in this time of turmoil and confusion. Faith, we must have faith in God’s blessing. Hope, we must look forward to have hope. Love, love will change everything. Faith, hope, and love.

---

25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
The final episode jumps forward in time to Mackay’s deathbed scene (1901) which was also the opening scene. Mackay approaches his bed, dressed in the same white gown as scene one and sings once again of his mission and mystical connection to Formosa and his “final resting place.” Mackay’s concluding lyrical utterances, sung in Hokkien, are full of gratitude to the Taiwanese people for taking in a stranger, but to Chhang-miâ most of all. That said, Formosa, he intones is the “love of my heart.”

The Chorus then vows: “I shall humbly face the challenge of the world to practice medicine and preach” as the video image of an enormous white dove in a nearby grove ascends to heaven. Obscured by the cloud projections, Mackay disappears from stage only to reappear at his funeral. Passing through the crowd of mourners, Mackay re-emerges in the epilogue as a spirit, clothed in white and singing a reprise of “I Overlook this Land,” again all in Hokkien: “I love to look at this land . . . up at the lofty peaks, down its yawning chasms, and away out on the surging sea. I love its dark-skinned people. I didn’t think about myself. I hope the Gospel will continue for a 1000 years.” Meanwhile, and behind him, pre-recorded video screen projections are shown of a new generation of Oxford College graduates in search of brighter futures as a close-up of Mackay’s eye and moral vision become the backdrop of the opera’s finale.

Chiou’s libretto of eighteen episodes is based on eight events from Mackay’s life and intended to convey the seemingly simple story of a Christian missionary as Taiwanese national epic hero: (1) his voyage to Tamsui by boat; (2) how he was quick to master the Hokkien language; (3) his treatment of the sick; (4) how he converted many of his enemies; (5) his brave decision to take a local girl, Chhang-miâ, as his wife; (6) the establishment of Taiwan’s first Western-style college; (7) how he endured attacks and setbacks; and finally (8) his death and burial in Formosa. Of the eight happenings, the first and third are dominated by the Chorus and three secondary characters, A-Hoa, Yi-Yu, and Wang, already mentioned. In the first episode or voyage to Tamsui, Mackay is just one of several immigrants in search of opportunity and a new beginning. The arias sung by Wang, “I hope to find a utopia,” and by A-Hoa, “I have been on the drift,” are full of musicality and emotion. Rather un-heroic and certainly unattractive, a disinterested Mackay sleeps as Wang’s poor wife suffers from seasickness and then faints from exhaustion. Mackay is oblivious to his surroundings and quite deaf to Wang’s plea for help. Mackay’s aria, “Answer to My Prayer,” also lacks a certain emotional resonance, but a
factor of the awkward English syntax of the lyrics in this case, exacerbated by a failure of the musical score to match the inflections of the spoken English. This disconnect proves so distracting, and with only four English songs in the entire opera, the legitimacy of advertising Bible Man as the first English and Minnan opera is very much in doubt.

A few examples will suffice. One line from Mackay’s aria, “Can it be that I made a mistake?” surely ought to read as anapest, i.e., two short syllables followed by one long one: “Can it be that I made a mistake?” However, both the musical tempo and pitch of the score leave Mackay little choice but to truncate and/or elongate so that the aforementioned reads instead: “Can it be that I made a mistake?” In other cases, the lyrics are problematic from a purely grammatical point of view. For example, “The keeper of my soul, please answer to my prayer,” suffers from the erroneous addition of the preposition “to” and, of course, the necessary linguistic polish expected of a bilingual opera for the national stage. With reference to the English at least, the musical accompaniment does not accord with the natural rhythm of English lyric in places, the stress often on the personal pronouns. Moreover, to the ear of any native English speaker in the audience, Mackay’s character is certain to appear unnatural and even arrogant when he says, “The keeper of my soul, please answer to my prayer.” In the final line of his aria, moreover, subject and verb do not agree in number: “Into-my-mind-come [sic]-the-turbid-ebb-and-flow-of-the-people-of Formosa.”

Set as primarily screen enactments, episodes six and seven, the founding of Oxford College and the French naval blockade of Tamsui, leave Mackay offstage and out of the picture. In the historical record, when Tamsui came under fire, Mackay set up an emergency field hospital and precedent for the Red Cross presence in Taiwan. Instead of including this as an episode unto itself, locating Mackay at the center of the action, a somewhat monotonous and overly melodramatic series of five prayers for Divine intervention takes center stage. The inclusion of a Christmas carol, “While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks” to accompany Mackay’s childhood in scene one, and a quote from St. Paul, “The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things,” delivered by Mackay in the final scene further typify the libretto’s use of religious allusions to eulogize Mackay rather than real action.

31 Ibid.
34 Philippians 4:9 (NAS).
Chiou’s Mackay often looks on passively or gives in to pressures to flee whenever the going gets rough. A persistent pattern in Chiou’s treatment of Mackay, he either withdraws voluntarily or is escorted from the scene, the clash with rival Matzu temple vigilantes a case in point. Mackay’s hands-on approach to the “Violent Man” and his song to evangelical outreach, “We’re Close to Each Other,” proves the exception. A testament to his powerful gaze and magnetic personality, the “Violent Man” will convert to the faith in the end, exclaiming, “There’s a light in his eyes. I will understand that we are not enemies.” However, episodes of type eight (Mackay’s death-bed scenes) reinforce his passivity and thus contradict the notion of Mackay as an epic hero of the more active type.

Chhang-miâ overshadows Mackay in places. Her opening aria-eulogy, “All These Years,” recaps Mackay’s missionary accomplishments, indeed the churches, schools, and hospitals he created. However, Mackay is almost voiceless, the victim of throat cancer, and thus not quite the pioneering agent of change and/or action in this instance. The pre-recorded, extreme close-up of Mackay’s face (and death-mask), revolving intermittently on the upstage screen, does not help matters, the overall effect surreal rather than synopsis—and a celebration least of all. In the deathbed scene toward the end of the opera, Mackay loses his voice completely and must defer to Chhang-miâ who delivers a last sermon on his behalf to the gathering of students and friends. Inexplicably, a farewell follows this and sung by Mackay no less, his voice making a miraculous recovery of sorts. That he sings to himself only adds to the confusion and irony, too, the lyric inappropriate in places and even cause for laughter rather than grief: “There are so many words I want to say, but I just don’t know how to start. . . .” Having lost his voice, the operative verbiage or Grammatik is modal, for Mackay “can’t” speak. To suggest that he finds himself at a loss for words in some internal or psychological sense belies the thesis of a larger-than-life itinerant preacher and orator par excellent.

Of course, with “so many words [he wants] to say,” the rest should read, “I don’t know where to start. . . .” [emphasis mine]. And so, Mackay appears from the outset to be weak physically and spiritually which, in turn, undermine his believability.

In fact, one can overlook the aforementioned as the stuff of inconsistency. Mackay’s confusing tumble from bed and no less clumsy “resurrection” in the opening (deathbed) scene simply leaves much to be desired. The libretto proves no less problematic, Mackay in a drug-induced state of

35 Chiou Bible Man.. Performance Recording.
36 Ibid.
delirium wherein childhood memories and communications with his deceased mother prove a less than flattering introduction to the man. Mackay’s death mask revolves on the screen above, fading into a montage of the Canadian Rockies as pre-recorded images of his mother, a young George Leslie and other children, and _The Virgin and Child in a Landscape_ appear side by side. Mackay’s presence onstage looks small by comparison. The employment of a Catholic pictorial and comparison to mother and son as Madonna and Christ respectively, given Mackay’s strident anti-Catholicism, seems out of place, too. Thematically, Mackay’s epic heroism is diminished by these onscreen flashbacks to his youth, tucked into bed by an enormous virtual mother. Mackay appears as somewhat “boyish,” such prepubescent reminiscence—and which the libretto does little to correct—emphasizing the maternal over the marital. His relationship with Chhang-miā takes a back seat. Finally, and closing out the scene, the dark and sinister gaze of a cherub and/or much younger George Leslie peering down from heaven on his dying, future self casts a gloomy shadow over the entire opera; odd, indeed, for a theatrical production intent upon celebrating the life and work of a Taiwanese cultural icon and national hero. In short, Mackay’s death does not an epic drama make, at least not a very convincing or powerful one.

**The Black Bearded Bible Man as Emblematic/Enigmatic Animistic Deity?**

Chiou set out to write a Christian epic opera and inadvertently excised the classic masculine epic hero. In his place, she constructed a feminized animistic deity—an emblem of Formosa. Firstly, Chiou imbues three secondary characters—A-Hoa, Yi-Yu, and Wang—with authentic desires which they express musically, using melodic interior monologues and, dramatically, through action and their relationship to Mackay. The masculine humanism of their lyrics, which laud the virtues of seeking work and finding purpose in life, often upstages Mackay’s lyrics which are weighted down by a little too much extreme piety, prayer, and professions of love for Formosa that are over the top in some respects. Mackay is upstaged by his friends who often appear en masse and overwhelm him by their strength in numbers. Two examples are noteworthy: the scene following Mackay’s departure for Hong Kong and another when his students are left once again to watch over Oxford College. They carry Mackay throughout the opera and, quite literally at the end, to his deathbed. Dressed in the same white knee-length gown that he wore in the opening deathbed scene, Mackay is never alone or his character able it would seem
to carry the scene alone. And he often appears alongside strong female characters who buoy him up—Chhang-miâ, the shepherd girls, his virtual mother, and a white dove symbolizing his “soul’s” ascent to heaven and into the “arms of God.”

Although it is tempting to see in this mere Christian imagery, Chiou’s employment of so much that is also nature imagery points to an interpretative possibility that is not entirely Christian; and if not so, out of step with the orthodox or conservative theology to which Mackay subscribed. A stark dualism is detectible, Chiou’s separation of his body and soul can be seen as mystical rather than soteriological and the basis for a work of Christian heresy in effect: the metamorphosis of a Christian missionary of great social vision and importance into a Taiwanese animistic deity of supernatural power. Mackay refers to “land” and “Formosa” constantly throughout the opera. On his deathbed, he seems transfixed, if not transfigured, by visions of Formosa’s mountain peaks, cloudy mist, rising and falling ocean tides, yawning geological chasms, and bamboo forests. Chhang-miâ compares Mackay to the winds that sweep the island, its towering mountain peaks, and oceanic panorama. Mackay is wont to credit nature as his biggest inspiring him in his aria, “I love to look at this land.”

Hence, his huge, disembodied eye, staring at the audience from the elevated stage screen is very much that of a god of nature, if not the God of Nature—to which he devoted so much study and in whom he had no shortage of faith. Tchen’s hope that the opera would become the “eye of the . . . soul of Taiwan culture” takes on new meaning.

What audiences who saw Bible Man left with was an operatic enigma on several levels. A marvel of theatrical, technical ingenuity, the opera cannot be called an absolute success. How did this happen? Six years of planning, a budget of TWD 10,000,000, a cast and crew of some 500 people, top-notch vocalists and musicians, world-class director and composer, experienced set and costume designers, and construction crews, superb lighting, sound, and visual effects, as well as a very sincere desire on the part of producers to create something worthy of Taiwanese culture and international winner. Chin’s original observation that opera is—or ought to be—a collaborative art is worth remembering. Just one weak link and the chain breaks. Not only were there weak links, but missing links. For a documentary and/or historical work of such monumental scope and importance, the failure to seek the assistance of at least one dramaturg

37 Ibid.
38 Chiou Bible Man. Documentary Recording.
proved problematic. The English of Bible Man also could have benefitted from the assistance of a native English consultant and editor.\textsuperscript{39} In the long chain of events that brought the story of George Leslie Mackay to the national stage in Taiwan, an acting and singing coach appears not to be among them, especially where singers in the Chorus with little or no acting experience were concerned. However, the greatest failing of the opera as a production with international aspirations (and the capital to make it so) must be laid at the feet of the libretto. As Taipei Times reporters, Bartholomew and Buchan, pointed out, “What is missing is a creative sensibility to direct these resources to make something more than a bald narrative of a worthy life.”\textsuperscript{40} Ultimately, the moral of the story comes down to theatrical basics. Royal roads are paved with hard work. In this case, the organizers of the Bible Man would have been wise in hindsight to have put their support behind an operatic and cultural event that was conceived, constructed, and written in accordance with international dramatic conventions and theatrical standards. When director Hemleb first read the libretto, he said it all. “Ouch!”\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{39} Hartie Chang translated the English titles. She is a Marketing Specialist at Chunghwa Telecom Global with educational background and business expertise in mapping neighborhoods.


http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/feat/archives/2008/12/31/2003432543

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.
HISTORIOGRAPHY AND CULTURAL STUDIES
Pan Celtic Anglo-Saxonism, Polar Eden, and Crossing Racial Divides: The Interesting Case of George Leslie Mackay

Clyde R. Forsberg Jr.
Assistant Professor, Department of English & Taiwan Mackay Research Group, Aletheia University, Tamsui, Taiwan

George Leslie Mackay, George Jr., Bella, Mary, and “Mrs. Mackay”
Here in Taiwan, Mackay’s meteoric rise to fame of late is a factor of local politicking. The oriental opera at the National Theatre of Taiwan in 2008, *The Black Bearded Bible Man*, literally sang his praises. However, it is important to remember that criticism of Chinese and Confucian culture in his famous autobiography, *From Far Formosa*, was censored by the Kuomintang (KMT) or Chinese ruling party. And so, Mackay’s celebrity in Taiwan, equal to that of Chang Kai Shek in some religious circles, begins where military dictatorship and one-party rule ends, that being, the creation and rise to power of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) or Taiwanese independence movement under Chen Shui-bian in 2000. Taiwanese Mackay scholars and churchmen who credit the Presbyterian missionary to Formosa with a kind of political prescience, defending Taiwanese independence long before it was fashionable or tenable, might be said to reel history backwards.

Had Mackay come to Taiwan in the 1950s and bravely preached the same anti-Chinese, iconoclastic gospel, then truly he would deserve all of the praise laid at his feet as an early champion of Taiwanese independence. But he arrived on the shores of northern Formosa in the 1870s, a little island under the control of the Chinese and then the Japanese in 1895. Importantly, the Treaty of Shimonoseki (April 17, 1895) and Japanese rule gave impetus to a doomed Taiwanese independence movement led by the Taiwanese noble Chiu Feng-Chia and Qing Governor-General T’ang Ching-Sung who agreed to become the republic’s first President. A formal declaration of independence was drafted. The fledgling “Republic of Formosa” lasted all of five months before the Japanese took control of the island by force a second and final time. This first Taiwanese independence movement did not succeed in gaining international support or legitimacy, either. Importantly, Mackay supported the Japanese occupation of Formosa to his dying day and with conviction. Taiwanese independence for Mackay was religious in the main vis-à-vis his ordination of native preachers and sectarian church governance.

---

Mackay’s mission to the aborigines of Taiwan and any political, social, economic, and religious motivations he may have had require a better understanding and appreciation of the times and cultural context in which he lived. The intention, indeed motivation of my own study of the man, is motivated by a deep respect for Mackay as a remarkable specimen of late nineteenth-century Christian faith and social justice that calls for an approach that separates the man from the myth. The issue is not the quality of Mackay’s many good works, but to what degree he was also in silent agreement with the racial theorizing of the times—indeed, where he stood on the issue of race in relation to his extensive nocturnal reading on the subject. Whether this calls for a slight revision of the perception of Mackay in both Taiwanese and Canadian Presbyterian circles, as a champion of aboriginal rights, is the question.

Mackay’s decision to take a Taiwanese wife was almost certain to raise eyebrows back in Canada and a courtship in accordance with Chinese custom. Chhang-miâ (Tsung-Ze) satisfied Mackay’s criteria of “good health, decent look[s], and no footbinding,” but the Chinese record of events also states that “her skin was dark and her hands were coarse” as a consequence of working outdoors and tending ducks. To “improve Tsung-Ze’s appearance,” she was fed better food and kept out of the sun for six months, her face becoming “whiter” which then qualified her as “Mackay’s fair lady.” The latter requirement can be attributed to Chinese class prejudice, ironically, and not necessarily something Mackay required.

Mackay’s general attitude toward Chinese culture and savage mountain tribes as decadent and inferior respectively was typical of late, nineteenth-century Canadian racial prejudice—religious and secular. Critical of Darwinism because it contradicted the Bible, he favored an opposing scientific worldview that was Eurocentric and, by implication, anti-African. A defender of Formosa’s aborigines and harsh critic of the abuses of local Chinese imperial authorities, his beloved Taiwanese were nonetheless

---

5 To be clear, Chhang-miâ (Tsung-Ze) was a former child bride and chattel slave. Marriage to Mackay saved her from a pretty miserable life under the arbitrary and cruel hand of her adopted mother following the death of her first husband-to-be. Initially, it was the promise of one silver dollar and other cash rewards for learning to read the Bible that brought her to Oxford College. Mackay chose her, too, employing a traditional Chinese matchmaker who proposed marriage on his behalf, paying a dowry of thirty silver dollars and three dollars every month thereafter. See Church Historical Remarks 2: 190-194.

6 Ibid, 2: 194. English translation thanks to the generosity of Prof. Jane Lee, Chair of English Department, Aletheia University.
inferior, “less solid and stable” in his view. Mackay had no reservations about the superiority of his Christian faith and British social, economic, and political traditions. He came to Formosa to elevate heathen one and all to a higher religious and material plane as he saw it. Although one cannot deny the importance of faith (grace) in all that he did, to what degree his work in the mission field can also be attributed to the intellectual times in which he lived, is also the question. In fact, the answer will no doubt surprise, especially post-colonial scholars, for as Van Die argues elsewhere, Mackay was no mere agent of Presbyterian tradition with regard to gender. Here, too, Mackay’s relationship and, indeed, debt to Victorian creation science in particular proves no less innovative vis-à-vis race and gender. Importantly, the issue is not grace versus race, or race versus gender, but a synthesis of faith and reason that merits serious reflection and respect in the final analysis.

What Mackay Read and What It May Tell Us

A very private man, MacKay wrote comparatively little his diaries notwithstanding. However, his diaries do provide us with a near-encyclopedic bibliography of his nocturnal reading, which was extensive, as well as some indication of his likes and dislikes. As Trevor Colbourn’s *The Lamp of Experience: Whig History and the Intellectual Origins of the American Revolution* has shown, a personal library is one way to chart the myriad intellectual forces at play in the life and mission of colonial-era figures. Using a similar approach, an assessment of Mackay on the issue of race in particular, using his personal library and works of early creation science and racial theory that he claimed to read, does have something to add to the discussion of his mind and opinions on such matters.

What soon becomes clear is that theology was not Mackay’s true passion. The little fiction that he read—not including John Bunyan’s

---

8 (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund 1998). Many thanks to my dear friend Dr. Gordon D. Pollock for this title and an important methodological reminder in his review of my paper, but also to another respected colleague, Prof. James Rohrer for his cautionary words on the degree to which this can be applied to Mackay. Obviously, the example is illustrative and not a perfect fit.
9 See *Mackay’s Diaries: Original English Version*, transcribed and edited by Neng-Che Yeh and Chih-Rung Chen (Tamsui: The relic Committee of the Northern Synod of the Taiwan Presbyterian Church, Aletheia University, 2007). Mackay’s reading and study of Christian theology per se took a back seat to science, consisting of a much shorter list of authors and works: the Puritan Divine
Richard Baxter and his *Saints Everlasting Rest: or, a Treatise on the Blessed State of the Saints* (London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1872) and John Bunyan’s classic Christian allegory, *The Pilgrim’s Progress from This World to That Which Is to Come* (first published in 1678) and from which he derived a great deal of comfort; the Presbyterian theologian Charles Hodge at Princeton and his *Systematic Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner and Co., 1872); Samuel Harris at Yale and his *Philosophical Basis of Theism: An Examination of the Personality of Man to Ascertain his Capacity to Know and Serve God, and the Validity of the Principles Underlying the Defence of Theism* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1888); and Charles H. Spurgeon, the British “Particular Baptist” and his missionary magazine *The Sword and the Trowel*.


Herbert Spencer’s _Principles of Biology_ (1864), and Thomas H. Huxley’s “Agnosticism” (1889) and “Physiography.” However, Wilberforce, Gladstone, and Campbell the 8th Duke of Argyll proved more to his liking. Mackay went to great lengths to know his enemy, Thomas Paine a favorite of his at Princeton, also noting in his diary that Karl Robert Eduard von Hartman’s _The Philosophy of the Unconscious: Speculative Results According To The Inductive Method Of Physical_ (1869-1890) proved “dangerous,” leaving “no room for a personal God.” Mackay did not remain silent when the Christian tradition came under attack. In most cases, when science and philosophy appeared to challenge faith, a slight correction solved the problem in his view. Mackay’s reading of the best in modern science and philosophy was a balancing act of sorts. In fact,
he spent the bulk of his time cataloguing proof for intelligent design in nature.  

Mackay was an interesting mixture of religious devotion and scientific discipline. As David N. Livingstone has shown, several prominent conservative Evangelical divines embraced Darwinism, the Harvard botanist Asa Gray for example, and a Godsend in comparison with the work of Swiss biologist, secularist, and racist Louis Agassiz at Harvard. Others to take the side of Darwin were Thomas Chalmers, Hugh Miller, Benjamin Silliman, and James Dwight Dana, all of whom Mackay read. However, a vocal minority resisted the temptation to jump on the Lamarckian-Darwinian bandwagon: McGill University Principal John W. Dawson, Princeton theologian Charles Hodge, and President of Princeton James McCosh.  

McCosh authored several influential apologies for intelligent design that Mackay may have read. Of course, Hodge would prove to be Darwin’s most perceptive religious critic, arguing that evolution (natural selection) was materialism, pure and simple. Dawson penned three works of creationist apologia, one of which Mackay certainly read. Dawson’s position, as Livingstone explains, was “a theistic form of evolution . . . distinct from Darwinianism or Neo-Lamarckianism … the universe as the development of His plans by secondary causes and His own institution.” Likewise, Mackay believed that God “use[d] laws of nature as means,” and so however objectionable it might be, evolution

read Chambers’ *Astronomy* prior to its publication (*Mackay’s Diaries*, 9 Apr. 1890) and so it was perhaps Chambers’ *Handbook* since his Astronomy was published in 1907 six years after Mackay’s death.

19 “Well, now Evolutionist what do you anyhow make of the Monkeys belong[ing] to the Miocene period, being like our Pet Monkey from the mountains of Eastern Formosa. Mesopithecus, sure enough is very similar” (*Mackay’s Diaries*, 6 Feb. 1892).


25 *Mackay’s Diaries*, 30 Nov. 1889.
contained the seeds of an argument for intelligent design. However, the creation science to which Mackay subscribed would attempt to discredit Darwin’s defense of Africa as the birthplace of humankind by arguing instead for the North Pole as the location of the Garden of Eden and part and parcel of a defense of Celtic-Anglo-Saxon superiority and Westward expansion on a global scale.

26 Other works in this vein that Mackay consulted: Hugh Miller’s *Old Red Sandstone; or, New Walks in an Old Field* (Edinburgh: William P. Nimmo, 1841, rpt. 1877); the writings of Scottish-Canadian oceanographer and creationist John Murray; Cassells’ *Natural History: The Feathered Tribes* (New York: Alexander Montgomery, 1854) and C.W. Gedney’s *Foreign Caged Birds* (London, 1887) where the “God of grace—of Nature,” Mackay writes, can be “seen even in the cage birds” (30 Nov. 1889); Samuel Kinns’ *Moses and Geology; or, the Harmony of the Bible with Science* (Cassell Petter Galpin & Co., London, 1883); James D. Dana’s *Manual of geology: Treating of the Principles of the Science with Special Reference to American geological history* (New York: Ivison, Blakeman, Taylor and Co., 1880) and author of *Science and the Bible: a review of "the six days of creation" of Prof. Taylor Lewis* (Andover: Warren F. Draper, 1856); Sir George Gabriel Stokes’ Burnett Lectures, entitled *On Light* (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1887, 1992), the fourth lecture arguing that “Scientific investigation is adverse to the hypothesis of the spontaneous origination of life … difficulties of the Darwinian theory if regarded as a solution of the problem … [and] evidences of design afforded by an examination of the structure of living things” (Ibid, 324); the Rev. John G. Wood’s *Insects abroad; being a popular account of foreign insects, their structure, habits, and transformation* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1883) and *Homes Without Hands; Being a Description of the Inhabitants of Animals, Classed According to Their Principle of Construction* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1886), both “constructionist” or creationist and couched in terms of the beneficence of Nature; Louis Figuier’s *The Ocean World; Being a Descriptive History of the Sea and Its Living Inhabitants* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1868), and author of *The World Before the Deluge* (London: Cassel, Petter, Galpin & Co., 1872, First Edition 1863); Henry Drummond’s *Natural Law in the Spiritual World* (1883); Balfour Stewart and Peter Guthrie Tait’s *The Unseen Universe; or, Physical Speculations on a Future State* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1875) where a scientific case is made for life after death; Robert Brown’s *Science For All*, five volumes in total (1877-1882); *The Peoples of the World: A Popular Description of the Characteristics, Condition, and Customs of the Human Family* (London: Cassell, Fetter, Galpin, 1882) which kept him abreast of the latest in popular anti-Darwinian exploration, discovery, and ethnological research vis-à-vis a unitary theory of the human species in which Central Asia, Siberia, and the Arctic figure prominently.
Pan Celtic Anglo-Saxonism, the March Westward, and the New Rome

“Aryans follow the sun” or so the argument went. The emergence of modern Europe, England, and the United States was understood by many as the logical conclusion of a long westward trek that originated in Asia, in fact.27 As Reginald Horsman explains:

Those Aryan tribesman who had begun their march with the sun thousands of years before were now to return home. What had so long been prophesied was to come to pass: arts, science, religion, the whole of civilization were to return to their original birthplace after completing the circle of the globe.28

From this, “the Dominion of the United States” was born,

stretching the entire extent of America, the rich and fertile plains of Asia, together with the intermediate isles of the sea, in fulfillment of the great purpose of heaven, of the ultimate enlightenment of the whole earth, and the gradual elevation of man to the dignity and glory of the promised millennial day.29

For Robert J. Walker and Arthur Davies, Anglo-Saxonism pointed to the emergence of a new Rome.30 Theodore Poesche and Charles Goepp in The

27 The following is intended to give some idea of the prevalence of such ideas in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. Henry W. Hilliard of Alabama: “Civilization and intelligence started in the East, they have travelled and are still travelling westward” (cited in Horsman, Race and Manifest Destiny, 287). Cornelius Darragh of Pennsylvania: “we shall be neighbours of the Chinese” (Ibid, 287). H.W. Halleck, on California: “no other portion of the globe will exercise a greater influence upon the civilization and commerce of the world. The people of California will penetrate the hitherto inaccessible portions of Asia, carrying with them not only the arts and sciences, but the refining and purifying influence of civilization and Christianity” (Ibid, 287). Presley Ewing of Kentucky: “The march of civilization . . . from East to West” (Ibid, 288). E. L. Magoon: “travels of men, and the trade-currents of God, move spontaneously and perpetually toward the West” (Ibid, 288).

28 Ibid, 286. See in this connection what U.S. Secretary of Treasury Robert J. Walker said on trade with Asia and conversion of the “heathen” there: “the light of Christianity, following the path of commerce, would return with all its blessings to the East, from which it rose” (cited in Ibid, 289).


New Rome; or, The United States of the World also defend interracial marriage as essential to the spread and consolidation of American power and influence, “the most perfect and the most gross examples of the same species” joined in holy matrimony, “the ovum of the latter being thus untainted . . . the ovum is improved.” The underlying motivation for interracial marriage, then, was a “white washing . . . of the black race not capable of advantageous admixture with the white.”

Also known as Celtic Anglo-Saxonism, such theorizing dangled a small carrot as it carried a rather large stick. On the one hand, Europe and Asia were said to be “one great family.” On the other hand, the discovery of Indo-European by Sir William Jones supplied the necessary linguistic proof and a pretext for interminable Western expansion and colonial rule. Celtic Anglo-Saxonism per se was the invention of two Americans it is worth noting: Thomas Hart Benton, a Missourian, and New Englander Caleb Cushing, both of Scottish descent. Importantly, Benton defended Mongolians as superior to all but Whites, Asians in effect,

a race far above the Ethiopian, or Black—above the Malay, or Brown, (if we must admit five races), and above the American Indian, or Red: it is a race very above all these, but still, far below the White; and, like the rest, must receive an impression from the superior race whenever they come in contact.

Indeed, what Benton called “the arrival of the van of the Caucasian race (the Celtic-Anglo-Saxon division) upon the border of the sea which washes the shore of eastern Asia,” that is California and Oregon, promised to be the greatest event “since the dispersion of man upon [the] earth.” Moreover, by “impression,” an injection of Western culture is meant, Asia thus awakened to its true economic, social, economic, political and religious manifest destiny by the influx of an emergent Celtic Anglo-Saxon world order.

---

32 “The dwellers in Asia and the people of Europe ought to be treated in popular works as members of one vast family, and their history will never be separated by any student, anxious fully to comprehend the bearing of the whole. . . . As in popular history, the Europeans and Asiatics form only one great family, and Asia and Europe one indivisible body, we ought to contemplate the literature of all civilized people as the progressive development of one entire system, or as a single perfect structure” (Ibid, 522-526).
33 Cited in Horsman, Race and Manifest Destiny, 252.
34 Ibid.
Cushing, took a harder line, contending that genocide—cultural and physical—of all non-Whites was inevitable, the command given Adam and Eve to multiply and replenish the earth and genocidal race warfare two sides of the same millennial, imperial coin. “It is the Irish and Scotch and English and German blood of our fathers which constitutes our greatness, our power, and our liberty.” America’s mission was “to Christianize and to civilize,” adding that “men, nations, races, may, must, will, perish before us. . . . There can be no change for the better save at the expense of that which is. Out of decay springs fresh life.”

George Fitzhugh, the famous pro-slavery historian, comes straight to the point on the dangers of trade with Americans, who “by the arts of peace under the influence of free trade . . . can march to universal conquest . . . gradually extirpate or reduce to poverty the original owners ... [and] oppress and exterminate the weaker. . . .” Such was America’s plan for the future as the titular head of an emergent global conglomerate.

Where does Mackay fall in relation to such heady and, indeed, patently chauvinistic prognosticating? He was most certainly proud of his Canadian and Celtic heritage, lumping Britannia and the United States together into one and the same grand colonial power and force for good in the world. Mackay’s diaries are littered with declarations to Celtic Anglo-Saxon manifest destiny. “Yes old English I love thee, let me die under the flag. Then next dear American stars & stripes I love thee. One race one religion,” he writes in 1885. One may compare this to Hiram Bell’s defense of the annexation of Canada (1853), Canadians in his view “bone, as it were, of our bone, flesh of our flesh, deriving their origin from the same Anglo-Saxon source.” In 1892, as Mackay prepared to return to Canada one last time, he writes in his diary: “O how I long to see the whole of Britain’s possessions united in one Great and glorious Empire—Rule Britannia, rule!” Of the little fiction that Mackay found time to read, the fact that Sir Walter Scott is there (and his famous racist romance, Ivanhoe one presumes) is precisely the sort a proponent of Celtic Anglo-Saxonism might read. However, is it reasonable or fair to suppose that Mackay simply took it all in, hook, line, and sinker?

36 George Fitzhugh, Sociology of the South, or, the Failure of Free Society (New York: Burt Franklin, rpt. 1854), 231, 266-267, 287.
37 Mackay, Mackay’s Diaries, 26 Dec. 1885.
38 Cited in Horsman, Race and Manifest Destiny, 284.
39 Mackay, Mackay’s Diaries, 14 Nov. 1892.
40 Horsman, Race and Manifest Destiny, 158-164. See in this connection, William A. Caruthers, Knights of the Horse-Shoe (1841), “Anglo-Saxon race which was
Mackay was critical of American foreign policy concerning the Chinese, for example. “America haul down your [h]oisted flag of liberty!,” he writes in 1893, indeed “Shame on Christian America for such treatment of Heathen China.”\(^{41}\) On his second furlough to Canada, Mackay was deeply offended when Vancouver port authorities insisted that he pay the head tax, for Chhang-miâ was “a British subject and of course [his] children too.”\(^{42}\) In fact, he was reduced to borrowing the requisite fifty dollars to enter the country of his birth with his young family intact. By the time he got back to Formosa in 1894, his sense of national, cultural, and political oneness with America had clearly suffered as a result. Taking issue with the barbarism of the American West and its treatment of Asian immigrant workers, he writes: “Ah! American laws to debar a Chinaman from entering. How the land of Liberty is damaged by an ignorant mob out West! How thou art fallen O America! Britannia, My father land I love thee for Liberty is dominant there.”\(^{43}\) In this vein, he writes glowingly of British expansion into Tibet and the occupation of Christmas Island in 1888.\(^{44}\) In this case, Mackay appears slightly behind the curve. Unlike Chester Holcombe, for example, who excoriates his native England for the opium trade and other crimes of empire, Mackay chose to suspend judgment.\(^{45}\)

### Creation Science, Biblical Geography, and Polar Eden

Enter the notion of a Polar Eden which for Bible-believing Christians was essentially contrarian. Darwinian ‘man’ was African. And so, the biblical Adam was Nordic by default, the varieties of humankind descended from a

\[\text{and is destined to appropriate such a large portion of the Globe to themselves, and to disseminate their laws, their language, and their religion, over such countless millions} \]

\(^{41}\) Mackay, *Mackay’s Diaries*, 27 May 1893.
\(^{42}\) Mackay, *Mackay’s Diaries*, 26 Sept. 1893.
\(^{43}\) Ibid, 23 Jan. 1894.
\(^{44}\) Ibid, 15-16 Oct. 1888.
\(^{45}\) Chester Holcombe, *The Real Chinese Question* (New York: Young People’s Missionary Movement, 1900). “If the fair-minded and generous-spirited men and women of Great Britain had been accurately and plainly informed of the facts,” he writes; “if they have known what ruin was being wrought upon the Chinese . . . if they had understood the infamous purpose for which British soldiers and British ships of war were sent to China, and used there, and blood was shed, and lives wasted . . . it is not possible to believe that their government would have been allowed to persist in the opium traffic, and to work such a cruel wrong upon China” (Ibid, v).
single Arctic-Asian-Scandinavian bloodline, or so it went. Turning the globe on its side, this bizarre twist in early creation science asked readers like Mackay to take very seriously an argument allegedly from modern science, mythology, and Jewish antiquity which held that underneath the North Pole were the remains of the fabled Garden of Eden or “navel of the earth.”

William F. Warren’s *Paradise Found: The Cradle of the Human Race at the North Pole* is perhaps the most famous example. Warren the President of Boston University. The other, ironically, was Charles H. Eden’s *Frozen Asia; Together With an Account of the Native Tribes Inhabiting That Region.* Importantly, Mackay read and thought highly of both works. “Thought much about the Theory that the Garden of Eden was at the North-pole. Subject of great interest, wonderful,” Mackay writes. “I took up Man in Eden, where it was and the ‘cradle’ of mankind.”

A work of comparative mythology and religion in the main, Warren takes issue with Darwinian geography and thus Africa as the birthplace of the human race. “Though less positive, Darwin and Lyell seem favorable to the same location or to one in the adjoining portion of Africa.” Warren goes on to argue:

Most of the recent maps of the progressive dispersion of the race over the globe have been constructed in accordance with this theory. . . . But while biological speculation, especially in the hands of Darwinists, has strongly inclined toward the chief habitat of the ape tribes in its attempts to find

---

46 Sacred geography was an important part of this. “And a river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it was parted, and became into four heads. The name of the first is Pison: that is it which compasseth the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; And the gold of that land is good: there is bdellium and the onyx stone. And the name of the second river is Gihon: the same is it that compasseth the whole land of Ethiopia. And the name of the third river is Hiddekel: that is it which goeth toward the east of Assyria. And the fourth river is Euphrates.” (Genesis 2:10-14 KJV). Josephus claimed that Eden was “watered by one river, which ran around the whole earth, and was parted into four parts, and Phison, which denotes a Multitude, running from India, makes its exit into the sea, and is by the Greeks called Ganges. Euphrates also, as well as Tigris, goes into the Red Sea . . . and Geon runs through Egypt, and denotes what arises from the East, which the Greeks call Nile” (Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities*, Book I:1:3). Cf. Mackay, *Mackay’s Diaries*, 24 Sept. 1885. Perhaps the most famous contemporary advocate of the Arctic origins argument was the Russian scientist, Vilary Deymen.


48 (New York: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1879).


50 Ibid, 6-7 Oct. 1888.
man’s primitive point of departure, comparative philologists, mythologists, and archæological ethnographers have of late very strongly tended to place the cradle of mankind on the lofty plateau of Pamir in Central Asia. . . . The cradle of the human race, the Eden of primitive tradition, was situated at the North Pole, in a country submerged at the time of the deluge. 51

What Warren calls “Homos Darwinius,”

descended from a hairy quadruped, furnished with a tail and pointed ears, probably arboreal in his habits, and an inhabitant of the Old World . . . a blackish, woolly-haired, prognathous, ape-like being, with a long, narrow head. His body was entirely covered with hair, and he was unable to speak. 52

Warren’s theories enjoyed the support of such anti-Darwinian luminaries as McGill University Principal John W. Dawson who is quoted as saying:

We must now be prepared to admit that God can plant an Eden even in Spitzbergen; that the present state of the world is by no means the best possible in relation to climate and vegetation; that there have been and might be again conditions which could convert the ice-clad Arctic regions into blooming Paradises. 53

The famous arctic explorer Baron Nordenskjöld is cited to lend support to the notion that “an extensive continent occupied this portion of the globe when these strata were deposited . . . [an] ancient polar continent as something already accepted and universally understood among scientific men.” 54

Charles Eden’s no less important Frozen Asia chronicles the Arctic exploits of Scandinavian explorers, and Johannessen’s and Nordenskjöld’s search for a North-East Passage from Europe to the Pacific in particular, as proof of “regular sea-communication between Siberia and Northern Europe” along the “great rivers of Northern Asia and [Western] Europe.” 55

According to Eden, “America is not distinct from the Old World,” Arctic trade and polar traffic in goods and persons as old as time itself. 56 For that

52 Ibid, 102.
54 Warren, Paradise Found, 78.
55 Eden, Frozen Asia, 290, 281.
56 Ibid, 252.
reason, the Woodland Indians descend from Norse invaders and adventurers who remained behind.\textsuperscript{57}

William Speers, ethnologist, missionary to China, author of \textit{The Oldest and the Newest Empire: China and the United States}, and another evangelical author that Mackay read also believed in the theory of the Nordic origin of the American Indians, adding that Mongols, Turks, Chinese, and Japanese had crossed the Atlantic by land and sea into the New World:

\begin{quote}
It should be remarked here that the Indians of the New World have sprung from several sources. From the Northwest there descended, probably from a period many centuries before the Christian era, the Turanian tribes [Mongolian/ Turkic], of which we have spoken, who crossed at Behring’s Straits, and formed the bulk of those which dispersed themselves in time over North and South America. And another distinct element is to be recognized in the cultivated Toltecs, Otomis and Aztecs of Mexico, who were certainly Buddhists, and came, at least in part, from Chinese and Japanese stock.\textsuperscript{58}
\end{quote}

Indeed, Alexander von Humboldt had drawn a straight line, connecting Toltecs and Aztecs to the Huns of northern Siberia.\textsuperscript{59}

In Mackay’s case, we have only a few clues to his true mind on the matter, odd comments here and there for the most part, but consistent with such Nordic theorizing and a tendency to blur the line dividing West and East. For example, in \textit{From Far Formosa}, he writes: “the Chinese, like the Anglo-Saxons, are gregarious.”\textsuperscript{60} His discussion of the great variety of native dialects in Formosa also employs various Nordic parallels: “Scandinavians in Caithness, Finland, Orkney, and Iceland speak dialects or languages quite different from their kinsmen in Norway and Sweden,” adding that a similar phenomenon exists in “the Highland settlements of Canada.”\textsuperscript{61} “Germans seem more like Americans than like English men. A Britain has more reserve. But religion and science make all nations akin.—success to the Ethnologist.”\textsuperscript{62} While on furlough in Canada (1893), he

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid, 43.
\textsuperscript{58} William Speers, \textit{The Oldest and the Newest Empire: China and the United States} (Chicago, Ill.: Jones/Junkin & Co., 1870), 43-45.
\textsuperscript{60} Mackay, \textit{From Far Formosa}, 113.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid, 97-98.
\textsuperscript{62} Mackay, \textit{Mackay’s Diaries}, 18 Feb. 1892.
\end{flushleft}
writes: “Formosa like Vancouver.” Alas, precisely the sort of trans-Pacific speculation one might expect from a believer in Nordic origins. The aforementioned is also consistent with a missiology of racial concord/assimilation and international cooperation/colonization. That said, Mackay is a curious mixture of both pro-Western and pro-Eastern sensitivity.

**Biblical Prophecy and the Alleged Hebraic Origins of the Chinese**

Based on what Mackay read, another unitary theory for the races that enjoyed a brief shelf life in conservative missionary circles, the Hebraic origin of the Chinese, bears repeating. As Justus Doolittle explains in his *Social Life of the Chinese: with some account of their Religious, Governmental, Educational, and Business Customs and Origins*, and which Mackay read:

> The question has long ago been stated whether the Chinese are not the descendants of the ten lost tribes of Israel? An American missionary in China, several years ago, stoutly advocated the opinion that the Chinese were the posterity of Abraham through Keturah. There does not seem sufficient evidence to lead to the adoption of the former or the latter opinion. There are, however, many customs prevalent among this people which bear a very striking resemblance, in some of their most important features, to customs which are mentioned or referred to in the sacred Scriptures.

Related to this, another Christian ethnology that Mackay read, S. Wells Williams’ *The Middle Kingdom: A Survey of the Geography, Government, Literature, Social Life, Arts, and History of the Chinese Empire and Its Inhabitants*, states categorically that the Chinese were originally “God’s people . . . from the land of Sinim” in the Bible. W.L.G. Smith’s *Observations on China and the Chinese*, which Mackay read, takes for granted that China is “that country spoken of in the sacred records of the

---

63 Ibid, 1 Oct. 1893.  
64 (London: Sampson Low, Son, & Marston, 1866). See Mackay, *Mackay’s Diaries*, 7 Nov. 1871.  
67 Williams, *The Middle Kingdom*, xvi-xv.  
68 (New York: Carleton Publisher, 1863).  
69 Mackay, *Mackay’s Diaries*, 6 Nov. 1871.
Old Testament as the land of Tsin or Sinim. Accordingly, the Chinese had simply wondered east of Eden; and if the Chinese were not direct descendants of the legendary Lost Ten Tribes, the existence of a Chinese-Jewish community, the Qiang People of northern Sichuan, was reason for pause.

Biblical prophecy, many believed, was not silent on the matter of the Orient—an obscure passage in the 49th chapter of Isaiah concerning “the land of Sinim” a veiled reference to the Qin dynasty (221 B.C.). The prophets had foretold of a day when all the children of Adam—which included Buddhists, Taoists, and Confucians—would providentially find their way back to the Christian fold. In his diary, Mackay writes: “How people in the west remain ignorant of the real worth of some Chinamen, Poor China! Let God arise and all His enemies be scattered, and let ‘Sinim’ get great light.” In From Far Formosa, he writes in a similar vein: “The Isles shall wait for His law! That Old Testament prophecy has been an inspiration in my life. I have seen it fulfilled in Formosa.”

The popular American understanding of “Sinim” in the Bible as an allusion to the Chinese—and by implication the Taiwanese—lumped them together with the descendants of Ham and Canaan, their posterity falling

---

70 Smith, Observations on China and the Chinese, 14.
71 S. Wells Williams, The Middle Kingdom: A Survey of the Geography, Government, Literature, Social Life, Arts, and History of the Chinese Empire and Its Inhabitants (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, revised version, 1882). “The promise of that Spirit will fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah, delivered before the era of Confucius, and God’s people will come from the land of Sinim and join in the anthem of praise with every tribe under the sun” (Ibid, xv-xv) and W.L.G. Smith, Observations on China and the Chinese (New York: Carleton Publisher, 1863) where China is said to be “that country spoken of in the sacred records of the Old Testament as the land of Tsin or Sinim” (Ibid, 14).
72 See Doolittle, Social Life of the Chinese, Vol. II, p. 363: “The question has long ago been started whether the Chinese are not the descendants of the ten tribes of Israel? An American missionary in China, several years ago, stoutly advocated the opinion that the Chinese were the posterity of Abraham through Keturah. There does not seem sufficient evidence to lead to the adoption of the former or the latter opinion. There are, however, many customs prevalent among this people which bear a very striking resemblance, in some of their most important features, to customs which are mentioned or referred to in the sacred Scriptures.” Cf. the 20th-century evangelical defense of the Hebraic origin of the Chinese made famous by Rev. R.F. Torrance, China’s first missionaries: Ancient Israelites (1937) and Ernest L. Hartin, “China in Prophecy,” A.S.K. Associates for Scriptural Knowledge (1 July 1995), askelm.com/prophecy/p950701.htm
73 Mackay, Mackay’s Diaries, 5 Nov. 1885.
74 Mackay, From Far Formosa, 182.
under the same curse of interminable servitude as Africans, or the progeny of Japhet and Arabian in origin, but not less problematic from a Christian point of view. As Speers explains in *The Oldest and the Newest Empire*:

Sinim . . . is found in the Hebrew of Isaiah . . . in a prophecy of the conversion of the distant East to Christ; “Behold, there shall come from far (the south), and lo! These from the north and from the west; and these from the land of Sinim [or the east] . . . by whom they no doubt mean the patriarch Shem, it is barely possible, may be the source of it. Yet the opinion of scholars lean more toward placing the Chinese among the descendants of Ham, one of the advocates of which view is Sir William Jones, or among those of Japhet. The Mohammedan writers hand us down an old legend of Persia and Arabia, that Japhet had eleven sons, of whom Gin or Chin was the eldest; that as such his father sent him for his portion to the fertile countries of the far East, and that his descendants early became distinguished for painting, carving and the cultivation of silk.  

---

75 Speers, *The Oldest and the Newest Empire*, 39-40. “H.R. Schoolcraft, in his numerous and valuable works on Indian antiquities,” Speer writes, “often takes occasion to speak of the Oriental origin of the language, legends, religions and customs of our aborigines” (Ibid, 448). Also see W.L.G. Smith, *Observations on China and the Chinese* (New York: Carleton Publisher, 1863). Importantly, the vastly important discovery of Jones that English and Sanskrit were related, gave us “Indo-European” which was an evolutionary theory for the origin of both vastly different languages and races. See in this connection, Frederich Von Schlegel, *The Esthetic and Miscellaneous Works of Friedrich von Schlegel*, trans. E. J. Millington (London: George Bell and Sons, 1889). “Theories concerning the race of the Noachidae, and the true situation of Paradise, do indeed revolve in rapid succession and countless numbers. . . . It tells us that man was created in the image of God, but that by his own sin he voluntarily debased that divine image, and fell from the pure light of happiness in which he had first rejoiced . . . sin and superstition wrapt [sic] the world around, to guide the chosen few into the divinely appointed way of light and salvation. Thus the Indian records reveal the first growth of error and superstition, which, when the simplicity of divine faith and knowledge had once been abandoned, became continually more false and exaggerated, yet ever retained, even in its darkest gloom, some feeble beams of celestial and glorious light. . . . The divinely appointed prophet of the Hebrews has frequently been reproached with intolerance in so severely rejecting other families or people, and keeping the Hebrew nation and doctrines so completely separate from every other nation in the world. . . . Let them remember, that although the wisest and most civilized nations of antiquity inherited some few lingering gleams of sacred light, yet all were distorted and confused, and frequently, among both Persians, and Indians, the noblest and purest truths had become polluted springs of fatal error and groveling superstition. . . . (Ibid, 515-517).
Accordingly, a great migration ensued, originating in Central Asia and fanning out in opposite directions: “Some of the ancient legends of Persia assert that Tsin, or Gin,” Speers goes on to explain,

was not the eldest son of Japhet, but that older than he was another, named Turk, who gave his name to the countless and widely-dispersed Turanian or Turkish tribes. In the Sanskrit of India also is found the name Turushka, applied to the same race. They were followed by Aryans, who pushed them to the extremities of the great peninsulas, to the large islands upon the coast of Asia, up into the mountain tracks, and out into the deserts. . . . The Aryans, who, as had been said, pressed forward the Turanians, and occupied the best lands of Southern Asia, and who gave us the inexhaustible literature of the Sanskrit, sent members of their race into the West. They are the Indo-European family to which we belong.76

He speculates that “in the Indian wars of the New World, after a lapse of more than three thousand years, the renewal of the same transactions . . . occurred in Central Asia—the descendants of the more civilized Aryan race dispossessing and exterminating those of the earlier and barbarous Turanian.”77

The mission to China gave impetus to a variety of Bible-based, unitary theories of the races, giving with one hand but taking with the other and, as such, a mediation between the Enlightenment or environmental understanding known as monogenesis and a more virulent strain of scientific racism known as polygenesis. For example, Robert Brown’s Peoples of the World, which Mackay claimed to read, emphasizes the biological similarities of black and white and was certainly revolutionary in a way:

The skin of a Negro is, moreover, of exactly the same structure anatomically as that of a flaxen-haired Norseman. The ‘wool’ of the negro, the lanky horse-tail locks of the North American Indian, and the fine silky hair of the Caucasian races have each some peculiarities. Links connecting them are not difficult to find. . . . Nor is there any ground for believing, as has been argued from imperfect premises, that . . . hybrid nationalities become in time incapable of increase, a fact which goes far to prove that the different families of men are ‘races’ of the same species.78

Importantly, Brown rejects the racism inherent to the Enlightenment understanding that “savage races are only degraded specimens of a people

76 Speers, The Oldest and the Newest Empire, 41-42.
77 Ibid, 43.
who have fallen from a higher grade of civilization,” about which he says “there is nothing to support this view.” Likewise, polygenesis, or the argument for separate creations and/or Adam and Eve for each of the five so-called stock races, is ridiculed as a “Topsy-like hypothesis,” the notion that peoples of the world “spring into existence just where they are” simply hard to fathom. Brown even casts aspersion on Hebraic origins as little more than a “charming Semitic hypothesis,” enjoying the slender support of “some semi-Jewish customs” and the fruit of Mormon credulity.

And yet, Brown really has little good to say about African character and destiny by the end. Indeed, one must ask whether Mackay agreed with everything he may have read, too:

The Negro character is lethargic, dull, and flabby. . . . Accordingly, corporeal punishments do not give his dull insensitive body the same torture as they would a man whose nervous system was more delicately strung. Whatever may be said of individual instances and they are sufficiently few[,] no unprejudiced observer can deny that his intellectual abilities are not high; while the average “facial angle,” or angle at which the forehead retreats from a line drawn perpendicular to it, is about 76.1, in the Negro it is to 63, and in the orang-outang 45. The brain is small, and has few convolutions, and is 78 especially small in front, where the intellectual in contradistinction to the animal faculty are usually believed to have their seat. In disposition he is childish and fickle, affectionate, and easily affected by kindness or ill treatment. Like many savages, his powers of mimicry soon enable him to attain a certain degree of superficial civilization by aping the manners and conversation of those around him, but if left to himself, like a wild plant brought into cultivation, he is apt again to relapse into barbarism, in the same way as the Bush Negroes of Guinea.

---

79 Ibid, 3.
81 Ibid, 297-298. Brown concludes with a quote from the so-called “White Pasha,” Sir Samuel Baker, and thus a rather negative assessment of Africans after years of extensive travel in the region by the same:

[T]he black man . . . is a curious anomaly, the good and bad points of human nature bursting forth without any arrangement, like the flowers and thorns of his own wilderness. A creature of impulse, seldom actuated by reflection, the black man astounds by his complete obtuseness, and as suddenly confounds you by an unexpected exhibition of sympathy. . . . So long as it is generally considered that the Negro and the white man are to be governed by the same laws and guided by the same management, so long will the former remain a thorn in the side of every community to which he may unhappily belong (Ibid, 299).
Brown puts little stock in racial equality in the social, economic, or political sense, suggesting that the abolition of slavery in England and America was a "grand error . . . equalising that which is unequal . . . lower[ing] the Negro character and [making] the black man a reproach. Like a horse without harness, he runs wild, but, if harnessed, no animal is more useful." 82 Brown’s anti-African prejudice may have been symptomatic of an overweening confidence in the British colonial system:

The English insist upon their own weights and measures as the scales for human excellence, and it has been decreed by the multitude, inexperienced in the Negro personally, that he has been a badly-treated brother; that he is a worthy member of the human family, placed in an inferior position through the prejudice and ignorance of the white man, with whom he should be upon equality. . . . However severely we may condemn the horrible system of slavery, the results of emancipation have proved that the Negro does not appreciate the blessings of freedom, nor does he show the slightest feeling of gratitude to the hand that broke the rivets of his fetters. . . . Now as the Negro was originally imported as a labourer, but now refuses to work, it is self-evident that he is a lamentable failure. Either he must be compelled to work by some stringent law against vagrancy, or those beautiful countries that prospered under the conditions of Negro forced industry must yield to ruin under Negro freedom and independence. 83

To be clear, a few derogatory comments can be found in Mackay’s diaries concerning Africans, but they are extremely mild by comparison. “I spoke on Jeremiah 13:23,” Mackay writes; “‘Can the Ethiopian etc. He can’t change. Nor can the Leopard. Man [a] diversity of gifts. Can’t change. Can change moral nature.” 84 In fact, Mackay defends Africans as capable of moral uplift, taking issue with Brown in effect. Another diary entry, written in Hong Kong while on route to Canada in 1880, is slightly problematic, but not in any sense malicious. He simply notes that “Negroes” are called “Seedy boys” by the Chinese. 85

Proof that Mackay did not imbibe the anti-Chinese prejudices of his American Evangelical counterparts, Mackay rejected the notion that the

---

82 Ibid.
83 Ibid, 299-301.
85 Mackay, Mackay’s Diaries, 14 Jan. 1880.
Taiwanese were the cursed offspring of Ham in the Bible. “It is contended by some,” he writes in *From Far Formosa*,

that the aboriginal inhabitants of Formosa were of the negro race, and that they were driven back into the mountains by the Malayans. I cannot admit the contention, as I have failed to find the slightest trace of the negrito element, nor is the presence within the mountains of such a people suspected by any known tribe. . . . They were all positive that there were not woolly-headed races within the mountains or anywhere else in the island.\textsuperscript{86}

Importantly, when Mackay wrote, the so-called “Negrito” of South East Asia were lumped together with African pygmies, the assumption being that “Negrito Andamanese” were African because of their dark complexion and wooly hair.\textsuperscript{87} That said, there is not nearly enough corroborating evidence to support a charge of racism, Mackay’s anti-Africanism incidental and in no sense vituperative.

**Phrenology, Craniometry, and Mackay**

Given the virulent nature of the racial alternatives Mackay had to chose from, polygenesis in particular, his attitudes and practices can be seen as quite daring. Polygenesis had outlived its usefulness, more or less undone by Darwin’s theory of natural selection by this time. However, polygenesis had enjoyed the support of such luminaries of Enlightenment racial theorizing as Atkins, Voltaire, Hume, Meiners, Foster, Virey, Pinkerton, Kames, White, and the darling of American science, Louis Agassiz at Harvard.\textsuperscript{88} Samuel G. Morton’s influential *Crana Egyptica; or, Observations on Egyptian Ethnography, Derived from Anatomy, History and the Monuments*, and his extensive collection of human crania all catalogued according to their race, size, and facial angle, was considered proof in the minds of many of inherent Anglo-Saxon superiority.\textsuperscript{89}

\textsuperscript{86} Mackay, *From Far Formosa*, 95-96.


\textsuperscript{89} (Philadelphia, 1844), 1-3, 8, 15; 6, 81-82.
Closely related to this, Phrenology (also known as Anthropometry) supported Morgan’s essentially racist agenda which enjoyed the respect of such early nineteenth-century ethnologists as Laveter, Camper, Blumenbach, Edwards, Quetelet, Tiedemann, Gall, Spurzheim, and Combe. The influential Phrenological Journal to which this school of thought contributed so much called Edinburgh home. Phrenology operated according to six basic rules or conditions:

1. Physical shape of the head rather than skin color.
2. Facial angle: the sharper the angle the less intelligent.
4. “Temperaments” based on the shape of head, bumps, etc.
5. Genetic inheritance not environment.
6. Growth: possibility of development, with exercise, but limited by the “original cerebral organization” or race, Caucasians credited with the greatest capacity for intellectual growth.\textsuperscript{90}

An evolutionary theory at bottom, Phrenology excluded people of color for allegedly not possessing the intellectual nitty-gritty for advancement.

Mackay’s diaries suggest a passing interest in Phrenology, but adapted to his own purposes and against the secular, ethnological, and racist mainstream: “Read largely of Hartman. Can’t see all his points. Much prefer Darwinism and Phrenology. But all their writings only strengthen my belief in a personal God.”\textsuperscript{91} In fact, he employs Phrenology to defend Chinese and Asian craniometry as round and thus similar to that of Europeans, the Taiwanese and Malaysia “belonging to the lower races” but also round in the main. “It is contended by some,” he writes in From Far Formosa, that

\textit{[t]he Chinese in Formosa are round-headed, the aborigines medium between long and broad. The sutures or lines where the bones of the skill are united, I find in the skulls of the young to be only slightly traced; the skull has the appearance of a round ball or bone. This is characteristic of the islanders belonging to the lower races. So, too, prognathism or projection of the jaws—“mixillary angle,” “facial angle”—points to kinship with the islanders of the Malay type. The hair is round, thus showing that in its possessor there is no trace of the woolly-headed race.}\textsuperscript{92}

\textsuperscript{90} Horsman, Race and Manifest Destiny, 54-59.
\textsuperscript{91} Mackay, Mackay’s Diaries, 16 Oct. 1885.
\textsuperscript{92} Mackay, From Far Formosa, 95-98.
In this instance, Mackay appears to employ the evolutionary discourse of his times to combat racism in the secular academy, but also as a rejoinder to the racist belief in some American missionary circles that Asians are the cursed descendants of Ham and Canaan in the Bible.

**Eugenics, Mackay, and Interracial Marriage**

Eugenics was the brainchild of Darwin’s half-cousin, in fact, Sir Francis Galton (1883). Early advocates include Margaret Sanger, founder of the American Birth Control League, the British feminist and defender of contraception Marie Stopes, and the father of American vegetarianism and Adventist John Harvey Kellogg to name a few. For Galton, a social and economic conservative, the issue was not race but class. In an article published in 1865, entitled “Hereditary Talent and Character,” he attributes genius to heredity, the British aristocracy in his view “a highly gifted race of men by judicious marriages during several consecutive generations,” whereas the working classes are said to be libidinous and thus a threat to England as a society by, for, and of the better sort. He proffers a two pronged strategy to protect British culture from being overrun by the lower classes: (i) increased fertility among the upper classes and (ii) enforced contraception and sterilization if need be of the lower classes. It is perhaps telling that Mackay makes no reference

---

93 Francis Galton, *Inquiries into Human Faculty and its Development* (London: Macmillan, 1883), 199.
98 In 1869, Galton published *Hereditary Genius* and then a second such tome in 1883, entitled *Inquiries into Human Faculty and Its Development* (London, Macmillan, 1883) where the term “eugenics” first appears (Ibid, 17, fn1). Also see Galton, "Eugenics: Its definition, scope, and aims," *The American Journal of Sociology* 10:1 (July 1904).
whatever to Galton’s published works or heredity for that matter. In fact, it does not appear that he read Galton, or at least cared to.

A restriction on Chinese and Japanese immigration to the United States and Canada, beginning in the 1880s, was a direct result of Eugenics. In Canada, “The Chinese Immigration Act of 1885,” which Mackay attacked vociferously from the pulpit, only went as far as a mandatory poll tax of $50 and meant only to discourage China’s poor from entering the country; but when this proved ineffectual, it was increased ten-fold in 1903 to $500. Twenty years later, Canada would adhere more closely to the American pattern. “The Chinese Immigration Act of 1923” denied Chinese immigrants, rich and poor, entrance and solely on the basis of their race.

Mackay’s marriage to Chhang-miâ located him completely opposite the Eugenics movement, interracial marriage tantamount to race suicide for many at the time. Exercising their very considerable moral suasion if not power, Suffragists lobbied against foreigners taking British names lest they disappear into the Canadian woodwork. Both the WFMS and WCTU lobbied for Eugenics and what Bernard Semmet has called “social imperialism.” Had Mackay lived longer, it is doubtful that he would have jumped on the Eugenics bandwagon, his marriage to Minnie and defense of Taiwanese as equals, if not European in origin, militating against this. Also, what he meant precisely in From Far Formosa by “placing of the right man in the right place . . . an earnest Chinese preacher whose wife was a Pe-pohoan . . . brought up from childhood, and who received careful Christian instruction” is far from clear. If uplift through intermarriage is meant, then Mackay was clearly kicking against the pricks. Importantly, he was a dentist not an abortionist.

A sore point for many back in Canada, especially married missionary couples, but single women eager to come to Formosa and do their part.

---

102 Ibid, 224.
Mackay had no use for Canadian female missionaries, married or no.\textsuperscript{103} “Natives can live in a climate and under conditions where any foreigner would die,” he writes in \textit{From Far Formosa}, “happy where I would tremble with chills and fever. And the cost of a native preacher and his family is so much less.”\textsuperscript{104} Mackay’s modus operandi was clear enough and repeated \textit{ad nausia}: “native workers for native women.”\textsuperscript{105} Native Bible women like Chhang-miâ (Tsung Ze) were best equipped in his view to “bridge the chasm that exists between Caucasian and Mongolian . . . reaching women to whom the customs, ways, and ideas of their Western sisters are altogether incomprehensible, and in many cases ludicrous and absurd?”\textsuperscript{106} And lest any in the Women’s Missionary Society should misunderstand:

The foreign lady, in the simple act of going out on foot into their streets, offends against their ideas of propriety . . . and why foreign ladies bind their waists and not their feet. . . . At the end of the fourth or fifth year of faithful study and effort, compared with the little Chinese woman at her side, she is still almost helpless in teaching. This native Bible-woman is thoroughly familiar with the language and customs of her own people, and has been trained in the Holy Scriptures so that she can quote and explain with aptness and effect, while her foreign sister struggles with the idioms of the language, and is in perpetual danger of violating one of the thousand rules of Chinese society.\textsuperscript{107}

Had Mackay come to civilize in the name of Western Christianity, then surely he would have chosen a wife from among the Presbyterian female missionaries and arch-civilizers back in Canada. And perhaps just to rub it in, he adds: “Chinese girls and women are not in need of foreign ladies to teach them sewing, dressmaking, and embroidery . . . they are experts in the art.”\textsuperscript{108}

Praised for his courage and vision, taking a local wife and agreeing to be assimilated through marriage, let it be said that his behavior and Christian good works, if not everything he read, put him in a class by

\textsuperscript{103} See in this connection, Ruth Compton Brouwer, \textit{New Women for God: Canadian Presbyterian Women and India Missions, 1876–1914} (Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press, 1990).
\textsuperscript{104} Mackay, \textit{From Far Formosa}, 286-287.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid, 307.
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid, 297.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid, 301-302.
\textsuperscript{108} Mackay, \textit{From Far Formosa}, 305.
himself as a late-Victorian man of faith and science with a mind and mission both very much his own.
PROLEGOMENA TO MISSIOLOGY: REFLECTION ON RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL DIFFERENCES

HUGO A. MEYNELL
PROFESSOR EMERITUS, UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY, FELLOW OF THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF CANADA

George Leslie Mackay
I want to raise two big questions which bear on missionary activity—the relation of Christianity to the other religions; and the relation of Christianity, and of religion in general, to the social and political good. Generalities can be tedious, vacuous or platitudinous; I hope to persuade the reader that not all need be so. What, in the most general terms, were George Leslie Mackay, and thousands like him, up to in devoting their lives to the propagation of the Christian faith? And what benefits, if any, might they be supposed to have been conferring on the recipients?

Anthony Bloom, who later became an archbishop in the Greek Orthodox Church, was brought up as a good Russian Marxist, with the belief that religion was something that was soon to wither away, and that while it lasted it could only be a force for obscurantism and reaction. During his adolescence, he attended a kind of holiday camp, at which he met a man who struck him simply for his outstanding human goodness. This set him to wondering what the man’s secret could be; he turned out to be an Orthodox priest. Reading From Far Formosa, I was rather similarly struck by the figure of Mackay. He devoted his life not merely to proclaiming the Gospel, but also in so doing to improving the moral and social life of the people of north Taiwan. One aspect of this was persuading his hearers to treat women with greater consideration and dignity than they had been used to do. We have all of us as it were an inbuilt notion of the moral, social and political good; it is a function of religion in general, and Christianity in particular, to clarify and enhance this. The Dalai Lama is another person who impresses the sense and sensibility of the ordinary decent person as essentially and deeply good; the official spokesperson of a government which I will not name, who denounced the Dalai Lama as ‘a wolf in a monk’s clothing,’ merely branded as ridiculous himself and those whom he represented.

When one dares to flout fashion so far as to speak of missionaries bringing moral, social, or political benefits, the specter of value-relativism raises its ugly head. So I will state roundly my opinion that a culture which encourages clitoridectomy or footbinding is to that degree and in that respect absolutely worse than one which does not. It is worse in that or because these practices are unfair on those who have to undergo them, and cause far more suffering than happiness. I am prepared to defend this view at length, but have no time to do so here and now. This is not to deny that the cultures in question may have other positive features from which those who do not share them may have something to learn. Modern missionaries, I imagine, would be more sensitive on this point than would be usual for Mackay’s and his contemporaries. I was moved and impressed by recent recognition on the part of Chinese authorities, mentioned by Alvyn Austin
in *Saving China*, of genuine love of China among at least some of the missionaries. And so we proceed to our main topics.

On the relation of Christianity to other religions, or, more generally, the relation of the religions to one another, we have Karl Barth at one extreme, John Hick at the other. Barth, of course, was a Protestant Christian, and how; but it’s easy to generalize his position, which I now proceed to do, as follows. ‘My own religious (or irreligious) position is true; all others are false. There is no argument about it; the basic principles of my religion are either accepted in faith, or rejected in sin. (Similar moves, one should observe, may be made by Freudians or Marxists—‘You only fail to agree with us because your potty-training went wrong, because you’re a petty-bourgeois rentier.’) Other religions are a matter of human self-assertion against acceptance of divine grace. In fact, such is the uniqueness of my faith that it should not count as a ‘religion’ at all, as though its rivals were in any way comparable. To suppose that our reasoning powers are in principle capable of dealing with the issue is sheer illusion, fallen beings as we are; faith cannot argue with unbelief, it can only preach to it.’ You might do just the same for Islam as Barth did for (his particular form of) Protestant Christianity. King Abdullah of Jordan received death threats when he proposed, in my view very commendably, to host a meeting of leaders and thinkers of different faiths. It is easy to discern the underlying assumption—it is not the business of the good Muslim to discuss matters of faith with infidels, but to convert them.

It tells rather heavily against Barth’s position that there does, at least at first sight, appear to be much in common between the great religions, and not just the theistic ones. They speak of a supreme being, or at least a supreme state, to gain which, or to gain fellowship with which, is highest possible bliss and the ultimate aim of human life. There is somehow an ideal order in things to which we are aware of more or less corresponding or, more usually, failing to correspond. Though in one sense this supreme being or state is infinitely distant, in another sense she or it is intimately close to us, closer than our very selves. The way to this being or state is through love of her or it, and this includes love of one’s neighbor; furthermore, it involves sacrifice and renunciation. ¹

A kind of generalized Barthism is very common nowadays, and is often argued as follows. No-one can really argue their position as it were from the ground up; some premises have to be basic, just plumped for.

---

¹ This view is argued strongly, and with a great deal of corroborative detail, by F. Heiler, “The History of Religion as a Preparation for the Cooperation of Religions,” in M. Eliade and J. Kitagawa (eds.), *The History of Religions* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1959).
Otherwise one is involved inevitably in infinite regress; with any proposed foundations, one can ask, ‘What are the foundations for those?’ and so on forever. Attempted foundations for knowledge or justified belief have all broken down; one may take logical positivism as a fairly recent and notorious instance of this. The foundations proposed by the logical positivists self-destructed. All meaningful statements, they said, are either true by definition, or such that they are in principle verifiable or falsifiable by sense-experience. The trouble is that this statement itself is apparently neither true by definition, nor such that you can verify it or falsify it by sense experience. Rudolf Carnap heroically proposed that it might be the one important kind of nonsense which stopped you from asserting any other kind of nonsense; but most people thought, really, at this rate one had to go back to the philosophical drawing-board. Once the search for foundations is abandoned, theists can thus propose that ‘God exists’ is a ‘properly basic statement’, to employ Alvin Plantinga’s useful expression. The trouble with this view is that everyone can take what is essentially the same line about their own religious (or irreligious) position: ‘These are my basic statements, for which I do not have to argue.’ So each religion and denomination has a splendid excuse for retreating into its own intellectual ghetto. Opponents can be shrugged off over differences deemed trivial; where they are not deemed trivial the only possible resort is to the guns and the thumbscrews.

The antithesis of Barth’s view is that represented by John Hick. For Hick, all the great religions are saying what amounts to the same thing each from its own social, cultural, and linguistic point of view. In a memorable analogy, he compares the relation of his own view to that which generally prevailed earlier on the one hand, with that of the geocentric Ptolemaic cosmology to the heliocentric Copernican one on the other. God, and not one’s own religion, is at the centre of the universe of faiths; different religions are reflecting the same God each from its own social, cultural and linguistic point of view. In later formulations of his position, Hick was inclined to speak of ‘Reality’ rather than ‘God’—a modification which is of some significance, as we shall see.

When I met John Hick, I had a question to put to him. What would he do with the Buddhists, who do not believe in a God at all? He gave me what I thought was a rather foxy look, and suggested that they worshipped the impersonal side or aspect of God, while Christian and Muslims worshipped the personal. Now it happens that I have a friend and former colleague who is a committed and learned Buddhist; and at the first

---

2 I find him, by the way, an extremely nice man, as well as a brilliant one.
opportunity I asked him, do you worship the impersonal aspect of God? He answered, as I thought he would, ‘No, I don’t believe in God at all.’ And what about the non-religious or anti-religious? Are they too right in their way, on Hick’s view? If not, why should their views be excluded \textit{a priori}? If so, if there is no real cognitive difference between religious assertion, however vague (say, ‘There is a spiritual realm’), and denial of such assertion, then religious belief does not seem to amount to anything at all.

Against Hick—to whose view, I may say, I am much more sympathetic than I am to Barth’s—I would urge that there are at least four obvious differences in religious belief, or perhaps rather beliefs about matters relevant to religion, which won’t go away in the inter-cultural wash, unless indeed one is to abandon Aristotle’s principle of non-contradiction. And if you deny that, you have to content yourself, if you are to be consistent, with never really making or implying any judgment at all, but just indulging in groans, gurgles and whistles. (How can one really make any statement about anything, if one admits that its strict contradictory is equally true?).

Here are the four: (1) For weal or woe, we, or at least some of us, are to expect some kind of life after death (in the form of survival of the soul, or reincarnation, or bodily resurrection, or some combination of these); that it is somehow not the case that, as they say, ‘when you’re dead you’re dead.’ (2) That there is a real distinction between good and evil; that this is not a matter that individuals or societies must decide by fiat; (3) That to commit oneself to evil is to rebel against something like a God (who may be conceived in a range of ways); (4) that this God has communicated the divine nature and purposes for humankind through some kind of special revelation, through a body of writings, a community, a combination of the two, or in some other way. On (1), most religious believers differ from most secularists (one could, in principle, believe in life after death and be a secularist; but I take this to be unusual). When it comes to (2), I think secularists are apt to be divided against one another as well as against religious believers; many secularists, though by no means all, would feel qualms at the attitude expressed in the title of J. L. Mackie’s book, \textit{Ethics. Inventing Right and Wrong}. As to (3), to be worth calling ‘God’, a Being has not only to have ‘aseity’, to exist independently of anything else; and to be analogous to a person or conscious subject (to believe that there is a ‘matter-energy on which all else depends, but is not itself dependent on anything, is not to believe that there is a God).

But how are we to make up our minds between these alternatives, an issue which can hardly be claimed by any sane person to be unimportant?
It seems boring to say it, but reason is the only honest broker we have, if we are not just to shout one another down or resort to more sinister methods of persuasion. As the great Islamic theologian Al-Ghazzali said, reason is God’s scale on earth. Arguments for or against God’s existence may be broadly categorized as metaphysical; there are no strictly speaking scientific arguments confirming or refuting God’s existence. Some people may infer atheistic or fideistic conclusions from this—that there is no God, or that God’s existence is to be accepted or rejected by sheer act of faith, without the support of reason either way. On behalf of rational theism, on the other hand, it might be urged that the very success of science at once presupposes and confirms that we live in an intelligible universe, one shaped to our investigating minds; and that this is best accounted for, in the last analysis, by something like a mind on which the universe is dependent.

Mackay had a robust conviction, wholly justified so far as I am concerned, that science and Christian belief in God corroborate one another. In the form of what is called ‘intelligent design’, the underlying argument is perhaps dubious; in our post-Darwinian times, we may have reason to suppose that presently-inexplicable adaptation of means to ends within the universe may eventually be amenable to scientific explanation. But in the more general form to the effect that the intelligibility of the universe, at once presupposed and confirmed by science, demands something like an intelligent will underlying it, the argument seems to me in as good working-order as ever.3

Are there any reasons to suppose that this being, assuming that she or he exists, has made a revelation of the divine nature and purposes for humankind? Arguments on this matter, I think, must be of a moral and historical nature. Does the alleged revelation tend to reinforce or go counter to our best autonomous reasonings on moral matters; and does the most objective possible historical investigation tend to confirm or impugn that an institution, or group of writings, or both, which are the divine means or instruments of this revelation, really exist?

In the next few decades, I should hope that the various religions and irreligions would regard it as a main duty to listen to rather than just preach at one another. Each party should be ready to admit its own faults; and running-down one’s opponents in order to feel smug should not be countenanced. In listening we should always expect to have something positive to learn. A Muslim or a Christian, for instance, can take to heart

the typical secularist gibe, that it will not do to be preoccupied with heavenly things in such a way that one leaves earthly affairs to go to perdition.\footnote{This is no new complaint; one finds medieval Confucians making it against the Buddhists. The Buddhists were always harping on what preceded birth and came after death; whereas what ought to concern us, say the Confucians, is what happens between birth and death.}

One can insist that there is something useful to be learned from every religious and irreligious point of view, without abandoning the principle of non-contradiction. If one believes in an infinite transcendent God, it would be blasphemous to presume that one’s statements exhaust the truth about the divine being, even if they are true so far as they go. Those who insist that there is no real contradiction between the religions are apt to cite the Hindu parable of the blind men and the elephant. When one man has grasped the tail, and another the trunk, their statements are bound to seem contradictory, without really being so. There is an important truth there. But ‘this is definitely a leg’, ‘this is definitely not a leg’, can’t both be right, when the same limb is in question. The common Advaita Vedanta position, for all its exemplary tolerance, reminds me a bit of that of the pigs in Animal Farm, who amended the slogan ‘All animals are equal’ by adding, ‘but some animals are more equal than others.’ Similarly, ‘All religions are aiming at the truth in their way, but the truth they’re aiming at is what is proclaimed by the Advaita Vedanta.’ It is fairly obvious that all religions can play at that game.

Where morals, society and politics are concerned, we have a basic intuition of what’s bad and what’s good, just as we do of factual truth and falsity; it may be useful to spell it out more than people usually bother to do. In virtually every Old-Stone-Age human community, people must have recognized the difference between selfish indulgence of immediate impulses of greed, lust or anger on the one hand, and restraint for the good of the group or the long-term good of the individual on the other. Societies would hardly have survived unless the former kind of behavior evoked general censure, whereas the latter was approved and encouraged. If members of a tribe described the former kind of behavior as ‘swooth’, the latter as ‘bikki’, we would recognize the equivalents of our ‘bad’ and ‘wrong’, ‘good’ and right’. Whatever the huge variety of human customs, here we have moral absolutes, roughly articulated by the four ancient Greek ‘cardinal virtues’ of prudence, courage, temperance and justice. Someone who acted on the beliefs that it was in general ‘good’ to hurt other people, ‘bad’ to increase their happiness and decrease their misery or pain, would not so much have an unusual or eccentric set of moral values,
as be morally insane at worst, at best failing to understand the meaning of moral terms.

I believe that it is of the first importance to distinguish between the kind of religion which encourages us to pursue intellectual and moral autonomy, and that which tends to discourage or replace them. It would be a great mistake to regard the former attitude as apt to render religion trivial or superfluous; we need all the encouragement we can get to think hard about what is really morally and politically good and bad, and to act in accordance with the result of our thoughts. Perhaps one might put it that the role of religion is not to give us a detailed moral and political map; but rather to motivate us to think objectively about these matters, in spite of all the prejudices due to our individual situation or social and economic class, and to act accordingly. If it is really true, for example, that our way of life is wrecking the earth for our descendants, it is our duty before God not to find excuses for deluding ourselves on the matter. Someone remarked that it would need three Earths to support the standard of living enjoyed by the average Canadian, if this was extended to the whole population of the Earth. The thought is sobering.

The essence of the social, political and social good, I should say, is that the happiness and fulfillment of human beings (and surely other sentient beings) should be maximized, without fairness being impugned. One might expect every society to have ideas and institutions which are worth preserving and encouraging to promote the social and political good in this sense; but also to harbor ideas and institutions which tend to frustrate and hinder it. Confucianism, and the ‘right’, seems representative of one extreme; Maoism, and the ‘left’, of the other. There is a splendid quotation from the work of the late Chairman Mao; I wish I could reproduce it accurately, or give you the reference. But I am sure of its general drift. The revolution, says Mao in effect, will not be achieved politely, decorously, with consideration for everyone’s feelings, or in deference to the hallowed precepts and traditions of our ancestors. He is deliberately citing Confucian values. In the nineteen-twenties, the general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party noted the enormous liberation he experienced as a result of the materialist doctrine to the effect that, as Democritus put it, there was nothing but atoms and the void; it seemed that the throttling hold of traditions and values could immediately be swept away on the basis of that slogan. On the other hand, it would generally be agreed now that ‘the cultural revolution’ and the ‘great leap forward’ sponsored by Mao were a mistake, and underestimated, in what might be regarded as typical Marxist fashion, what good there was in the permanent ideals, habits and human tendencies fostered by tradition. Deng Xiao
Ping—in deliberate contrast with Mao—has compared efforts towards social advancement with feeling for one’s foothold while fording a river.

We all know, however many footnotes have to be added, that it is by and large good to make people happy, bad to make them miserable; the other important basic moral intuition is, that it is bad to be unfair. Marxism trades on our sense of fairness and unfairness; it is not fair that the vast majority of people should do nearly all the burdensome labor, with only just enough remuneration to get by; while a few others live off the fat of the land, but have to do very little work for it. Capitalism, on the other hand, plays on another of our basic intuitions, that those who work harder than others for the benefit of their fellows deserve some privilege, typically financial, over those who are as lazy as the average or more so. But how much should the ordinarily lazy or inefficient, let alone those who are exceptionally so, be penalized in comparison with the industrious and successful? We have a basic intuition that people should be able to do good for their children; but if this includes purchasing them a better education than others, don’t you soon get an unjust class-system? Marxism and liberal capitalism have curiously similar ideals, the existence of happy, free, creative, cooperating people; their main difference is in how you bring this about. Marx thought that, in most societies, force would be necessary; the owners of the means of production would be unlikely to give up their privileges without a struggle. But occasionally he suggested that, in comparatively enlightened bourgeois societies like Britain, Holland, and the USA, revolution might be achieved with relative smoothness. Too much violence was for him a sign, not so much of revolutionary zeal, as of incompetence.

It is said that, when the communists were in power in East Germany, there were three parties in the German Lutheran Church. The first two were legal, the third illegal. Of the first two, one accepted and applauded whatever the government said or did as a matter of course, while the other opposed it. The former evidently were no problem; the latter could be conveniently dismissed as a bunch of reactionary and counter-revolutionary bourgeois capitalists. The third was much more awkward and unpredictable; it sometimes commended the government, sometimes criticized it, in accordance with how far its acts seemed to promote or impugn the true social and political good. I would like to put in a good word, in this connection, for the present Pope’s splendid recent encyclical *Veritas in caritate*, which is addressed, by the way, not only to Roman Catholics, but to all people of good will. To ask, ‘Is he commending socialism or capitalism?’, is to show oneself a slave of the very sort of binary-opposition thinking which is one of the things that the Pope is criticizing.
(In his work in north Taiwan, Mackay conceived of himself as not just converting people to Christianity, but of bringing into their lives a force which would improve the social situation with respect to both happiness and fairness—for example, with regard to the treatment of women by men.)

Margaret Thatcher, quoting Winston Churchill as I understand it, said that every society needed nets and ladders; the ladders so that the entrepreneurs could be motivated to better themselves and their dependents, the nets so that the foolish, the feckless, and those who just had bad luck (it is essential to entrepreneurship that one takes risks) should not fall too far or too fatally. (When I was subject to suicidal depression some years ago, due partly to long-standing mental illness, but mainly to persecution by the ineffable administration of the university which had employed me, I was very glad of the nets.) To go too far to the left is to emphasize the nets at the expense of the ladders; to go too far to the right, the ladders at the expense of the nets. Some years ago, the NDP government in Ontario, under Bob Rae, was succeeded by a conservative government under Mike Harris. The former were all for the expansion of the social services, at the expense of what is called ‘fiscal responsibility’; the latter all for fiscal responsibility at the expense of such publicly-paid services as education, hospitals and the police. I asked a political philosopher, who I imagined would be sympathetic to Rae, what she thought of the change; and she remarked that her son was on the dole under Rae, but got a job under Harris. On the other hand, to quote the title of a book by Susan George, perhaps there is A Fate Worse than Debt.5

Some months ago I heard an eloquent and persuasive talk on how urgent it was that the Alberta government should provide more funding for women’s shelters. This is certainly a very worthwhile cause; but, given people’s frequently-expressed objections to increase of the tax burden, I wondered which existing services the speaker thought should be cut. In a recent issue of the New York Review of Books, Tony Judt claimed that, according to many surveys, U. S. citizens are very apt to confess that much is wrong with their society, like the prevalence of crime and drugs, and inadequate provision for health. When told that things are better in these respects in such countries as Sweden or the Netherlands, but at the expense of higher tax and more interference by the State in the running of people’s lives, they are inclined to protest, ‘But that would be socialism!’, and align themselves firmly with the traditional American suspicion of ‘big government’. The really significant question to ask, I think, is what

5 If anyone thinks that every able-bodied person would really rather work than scrounge, they should read The Glass Castle, by Jeannette Walls (New York: Scribner’s, 2005).
government is big enough, and why. When it comes to the choice between pure socialism and pure capitalism, it is hard not to sympathize with the view of Nicholas Berdyaev, that someone who seriously thought that laissez-faire capitalism was more in accordance with Christianity than was socialism needed his head looking into.

Judt remarked that, with the swing towards the right which has been such a conspicuous feature of Western society since the 1980s, and the general discrediting of Marxism, there was a danger that many of the real and hard-won gains of the earlier twentieth century, especially those associated with the welfare state, would be lost. What with the concern for the poor which seems to everyone but the ‘religious right’ to be rather central to the Christian gospel, not to mention the compassion which is such a magnificent feature of the Buddha’s teaching, one would have thought that the matter ought to be of some concern to religious people. The religious ought to set examples to everyone in trying clearly to conceive, and then to implement, what J. K. Galbraith bluntly calls ‘the good society.’ The essence of this good society, so far as I can judge, is to strike the balance between freedom and fairness, and so in effect between capitalism and socialism.

One could wish that members of opposed political parties, whether of the left or the right, were not so inclined to treat one another as knaves or fools. Some people are not inclined to value the disposition to say of one’s opponents, ‘what they are getting at is this’; yet to promote the habit, I believe, is one of the main proper aims of a humane education. It was an agreed principle in medieval scholastic disputation, that one should be able to put one’s opponents’ views in terms which they themselves would accept.

Suppose one is a theist, and accepts a divine revelation; and the revelation appears, at least at first sight, to contain rather detailed instruction about the right political arrangements. There are then rather obvious practical inferences to be drawn; as one Egyptian Muslim academic said to an American journalist with rather a free-wheeling attachment to Judaism, once the Islamic state is put in place, everything will be all right. Others, including myself and many others who believe in God, have objected that it is not God who actually rules in a theocracy, but a bunch of dunderheads or scoundrels who invoke divine authority for their blunders or their self-serving tyranny.

Marxism seems to underestimate the inherited element in dispositions to human behaviour, and correspondingly to exaggerate the degree to which that behavior is malleable by the environment. Marx thinks that unfettered reason tends to show that the cupidity, aggressiveness and
radical selfishness of the old Adam are merely due to the class-system which goes with early industrial and previous forms of society, and will be abolished in time after the socialist revolution. In the circumstances of late industrial society, and consequently under communism, he considers that there will be no grounds for radical human conflict either within or between societies; so we will need no army, and no police. In the light of what we know now about the inherited aspect of human behavior (and that of other animals), this is clearly too sanguine. But I think a soft form of Marx’s doctrine can be affirmed; at least the more we learn of the nature of human beings, the more we are in a position to set things up in such a way that benign behavioral tendencies are encouraged, undesirable ones counteracted. The Buddhist, Christian or Jew, or the kind of Muslim represented by the late Benazir Bhutto or Queen Noor, may use theistic or other religion both to envisage likely conditions of the just and happy society with intellectual rigour, and to strive, one might say by the proper kind of jihad, to promote them. It may be added that in fairness to our descendants, we ought not to be content to leave them starving on heaps of filth. The reckless manner in which the oilsands of north Alberta are considered by some to be being exploited for the short-term benefit of Albertans should give us pause in this connection.