

Article

Thirty Years of Mission in Taiwan: The Case of Presbyterian Missionary George Leslie Mackay

Magdaléna Rychetská 

Asia Studies Centre, Department of Chinese Studies, Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University,
602 00 Brno, Czech Republic; magdalena.rychetska@gmail.com

Abstract: The aims of this paper are to analyze the missionary endeavors of the first Canadian Presbyterian missionary in Taiwan, George Leslie Mackay (1844–1901), as described in *From Far Formosa: The Islands, Its People and Missions*, and to explore how Christian theology was established among and adapted to the Taiwanese people: the approaches that Mackay used and the missionary strategies that he implemented, as well as the difficulties that he faced. Given that Mackay’s missionary strategy was clearly highly successful—within 30 years, he had built 60 churches and made approximately 2000 converts—the question of how he achieved these results is certainly worth considering. Furthermore, from the outset, Mackay was perceived and received very positively in Taiwan and is considered something of a folk hero in the country even today. In the present-day narrative of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, Mackay is seen as someone whose efforts to establish an independent church with native local leadership helped to introduce democracy to Taiwan. However, in some of the scholarship, missionaries such as Mackay are portrayed as profit seekers. This paper seeks to give a voice to Mackay himself and thereby to provide a more symmetrical approach to mission history.



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1. Introduction

The aims of this paper are to analyze the missionary endeavors of the first Canadian Presbyterian missionary in Taiwan, George Leslie Mackay (1844–1901),¹ as described in *From Far Formosa: The Islands, Its People and Missions*,² and to explore how Christianity was established among and adapted to the Taiwanese people: the approaches that Mackay used and the missionary strategies that he implemented, as well as the difficulties that he faced. Given that Mackay’s missionary strategy was clearly highly successful—within 30 years, he had built 60 churches and made more than 2000 converts (Peng 2012)³—the question of how he achieved these results is certainly worth considering. Furthermore, from the outset, Mackay was perceived and received very positively in Taiwan and is considered something of a folk hero in the country even today. Many Taiwanese, especially members of the Presbyterian church, appreciate Mackay’s contributions to and support for local people (Lin 2017). More recently, his activities have been reinterpreted in light of homeland theology and theologies of liberation. His life is celebrated by advocates of a distinct Taiwanese identity, who consider Mackay a unique defender of the local population against Japanese and Chinese foreign oppressors. This narrative is purposive and not based on the historical situation. Mackay was part of the colonial world, and as a Christian missionary, his activities were protected by the imperial powers. However, he was shaped by his

¹ Known in Chinese as Xie Ruili 偕理 or Maxie 馬偕. He is also known as the “black-bearded barbarian,” Hei Xiufan 黑須番.

² *Formosa* is the name Europeans first gave to Taiwan. The word comes from the Portuguese for “beautiful” and is an abbreviation of “Ilha Formosa” or “Beautiful Island.”

³ We do not have an exact number for the population at that time, but during the first census by the Japanese government in 1905, the total Taiwanese population was 2,890,485. Mackay converted approximately 3000 people (Rohrer 2005, p. 9).

mission activities in Taiwan as much as by his origins and cultural background, and he developed a successful theology for local people. Converting people was not his only achievement. It seems that even more outstanding was his endeavor to foster interest in mission within Canada (Ion 2006). Thanks to his approach and his book, foreign audiences supported not only Mackay's mission but also that of other missionaries in Asia.

As in other parts of Asia, one of the main challenges faced by foreign missionaries in northern Taiwan was to understand the local culture, traditions, and religion (Chen 2003). Equally, there were problems for converts, as accepting a foreign religious system violated the norms of Taiwanese family life and often had a negative impact on relations with other members of the family. The practices of filial piety and ancestor worship, central pillars of Taiwanese society, were both rejected by the Protestant church. Mackay also promoted the destruction of ancestral tablets and other non-Christian artefacts (Mackay 1895, p. 231; Munsterhjelm 2014). The influence of the family on the possibility of conversion was and is strong. A person who is interested in Christianity but does not have the support of the family can soon find themselves abandoning the church (Masláková 2016, p. 18). The desire to join the church must therefore be much stronger than the fear of losing the support of the family. We should remember, however, that the message of the Gospel was not the only important factor in conversion (Swanson 1986, pp. 151–52). Missionaries often sought to meet other needs of Christians and future converts and used a variety of strategies to achieve their aims. This paper explores the strategies of one such missionary, George Leslie Mackay, who despite facing many challenges enjoyed no small degree of success.

To illustrate the unique qualities of Mackay's mission, this paper compares his strategies with those of the mission undertaken by British missionaries in southern Taiwan during the same period. The main difference between the two missions was not the national origin of the missionaries but the communities that they worked with. For reasons of geographical convenience, both missions focused initially on the more accessible ethnic groups of the Han (汉), namely the Hoklo (Heluoren 河洛人) and the Hakka (Kejia 客家). Mackay, however, also reached out to the indigenous inhabitants, the Yuanzhumin (原住民), whose religious beliefs appeared to make them more open to the Christian message than the Hakka and Hoklo (Rubinstein 1991b, p. 91). A different audience for the Christian message meant different problems and different strategies. Unlike the British mission in southern Taiwan, Mackay's mission was almost fully independent of outside assistance. From the very beginning of his missionary efforts, Mackay refused external help and control, and this greater level of autonomy allowed him to implement methods that were less conventional and more controversial, such as delegating responsibility to native ministers.

To tackle the main puzzle, which is to use a critical analysis of *From Far Formosa* to reconstruct the ways in which Mackay carried out his missionary work, the research will be framed by secondary literature which further explains and reflects the historical and cultural context of the primary sources. Texts and data were divided according to an analysis of their similarities and differences. The data were then given conceptual labels such as medical mission, education, native ministry, patterns, examination, aborigines, and Chinese mandarins, all of which were based exclusively on textual data. Analogous concepts were researched in all primary sources and categorized. The next step was to select the most frequently used categories (Corbin and Strauss 1990); only the most important received further analysis. The next task was to find connections and relations between these categories, all the while keeping in mind their unique context. The chosen categories were thus linked to each other so that the phenomenon under analysis—that is, Mackay's missionary strategy—could be observed with due regard to its relations, interactions, and causes, the context in which it occurs, and its strategies and results. Finally, Mackay's missionary strategies were compared with those of the British mission in southern Taiwan.

2. Hero or Villain?

In the present-day narrative of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT; *Taiwan jidū zhanglao jiaohui* 台灣基督長老教會), Mackay is seen as someone whose attempts to establish

an independent church with native local leadership helped to introduce democracy to Taiwan (Rohrer 2010, p. 220). The PCT has the longest tradition of any Protestant denomination in Taiwan. There has been a Presbyterian mission in Taiwan for over 150 years and the church was built on two separate missions—the southern mission started by James Laidlaw Maxwell of the Presbyterian Church of England, and the northern mission instigated by the Presbyterian Church in Canada and established by the main protagonist of this paper, George Leslie Mackay. As one of the founding fathers, Mackay is an important figure for the church. The success of his mission and his positive approach to local people is often recalled as part of the church’s narrative.⁴ Mackay is considered a spiritual father of Taiwan Theological Seminar and of medical mission, and a promotor of local identity. Church members praise his devotion to aboriginal tribes and associate him with the promotion of aboriginal identity and local languages (*Taiwan Church News* 2017).

Contemporary scholarship tends to be split between those who laud Mackay for his missionary successes and those who right him off as a Western imperialist. Several scholars depict Mackay as one of the most influential Westerners in Taiwan (Peng 2012; Forsberg 2012a; Gardella [2007] 2015): someone who brought a commitment to social justice, improved the lives of Taiwanese, and promoted equality for women (Meynell 2012, p. 148). Some even see him as a defender of the indigenous inhabitants and a pioneer of Taiwanese democracy and independence (Stainton 2012). Rohrer (2005, pp. 23–25), however, sees Mackay as a charismatic and authoritarian leader whose movement was based more on that authority than on Christian doctrine, and whose approach was little different from that of those Chinese religious leaders who promoted their own divine authority. Some voices (Lee 2006; Munsterhjelm 2014) question the claim that Mackay supported indigenous culture. Munsterhjelm criticizes the narrative that promotes Mackay as a national hero who brought modernization and salvation to aborigines. He correctly points out that Mackay was part of the colonial world and in part used the colonial machinery to fulfil his mission; the contemporary narrative often consciously neglects this point. Munsterhjelm calls this the “heroes-rescue-Aborigines” narrative, a discourse in which the dominant colonial agent is depicted as the one who rescues, and the oppressed original inhabitants are those who need to be rescued. At the end of such stories, the colonizer is glorified as a hero who civilizes the uncivilized. The rescue narrative is used to ideologically conceptualize and perform new social relations within the society (Munsterhjelm 2014, p. 85). Mackay is one representative of such a narrative, which Munsterhjelm rightly criticizes, noting that rather than saving local inhabitants, missionaries often forced their faith and culture on their target group. As part of his “religious duty,” Mackay destroyed numerous religious objects of converted aborigines. He was also ethnocentric in his description of Taiwan’s inhabitants. Missionaries on “a divinely inspired mission” were highly motivated to promote their religion, and an essential part of this mission was indoctrination and the burning of religious idols (da Silva 1994, p. 48).⁵ Angela Hao-Chun Lee is less critical and reminds us that Western missionaries “were operating within the established practices of their time” (Lee 2006, p. 209).⁶ I propose, therefore, that we analyze the historical circumstances without judging according to our modern-day morals. Frykenberg⁷ suggests that the term *colonialism* is often used not as an analytical category but as a shaming one:

⁴ For example, in a report about a gift of masks during the COVID-19 pandemic, Mackay’s legacy is associated with medical progress in Taiwan (see Gamble 2020).

⁵ As part of the effort to bring people to Christ, objects from local religious traditions were often destroyed by missionaries. Missionaries knew that converts lived in a particular cultural and religious context; burning and destroying material religious culture seemed to them a good way of “saving heathens.” Converts often took a flexible approach, however, and kept old religious habits alongside the new faith introduced by Christian missionaries (Webster 2002, p. 98). Missionaries tried to dissuade their followers from doing this.

⁶ Munsterhjelm’s criticism was softened by several scholars. For example, Forsberg goes as far as condemning Munsterhjelm’s approach as an attempt “to pin a charge of cultural genocide on Mackay’s lapel for his role in the destruction of Chinese idols and ancestor tablets” (Forsberg 2012a, p. 4).

⁷ It may be a surprise to see many references to scholars studying Christian mission in India. These works are quoted as they present a more theoretical approach to the colonial history of Christian missionaries in the Asian context. Although set geographically within India, they can easily be applied to the Chinese experience.

“Colonialism” is a modern concept . . . it is now far removed from the original root term used in ancient times within the context of Roman imperial history. As it is now commonly used, and in many ways misused, as also neatly simplified within the Marxian lexicon, and as then spread within the secular academy . . . the term itself has become a synonym for coercion, domination, and exploitation, especially and often specially, of peoples everywhere by peoples and institutions of the West. It also denotes oppression by any “alien” and “foreign” forces or rulers (again, especially by Western: European and American oppressors) . . . Colonialism, in short, is more of a rhetorical device than a precise, scientific tool. It is part of a technology for denigrating, shaming, and shunning. It applies to anything that is perceived to be politically incorrect . . . The term, obviously, has become a convenient device for labeling, demonizing, or assigning collective guilt. (Frykenberg 2003, pp. 6–7)

Post-colonial criticism is important, therefore, but it is not the whole picture. While the story of cultural imperialism is dominant, we can articulate a more “sophisticated approach” (Karlsson 2002). In the context of Christian mission in Asia, historiography should not dismiss Christian mission as simply part of the dominant colonial culture. Rather, it should take it as a serious component of local general history (Frykenberg 2003, p. 8). Rather than promoting the dominance-oppression model, we might look at Christian mission history using a conversational model. Christian missionaries, while connected to the dominant colonial structure, were communicating their message to local inhabitants, and communication is never a one-way process—it is more complex. During the social process of the intentional transmission of a system of ideas and values from one culture to another, missionaries adopted activities and theological constructs which were constantly deconstructed and shaped and re-shaped.

While I agree that a more critical analysis of the discourse and interpretation of history (by both academics and non-academics) is essential, I argue that we should not dismiss George Leslie Mackay altogether. The study of past missionaries to Asia is inevitably affected by our current expectations and understandings, but we should keep in mind that the missionaries were a product of the society they lived in and their ideas and values were inseparably connected to their socio-political context (Van Die 2012, p. 41). Knowledge is contextual, and Mackay was indeed influenced by the historical and social context of his time:

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 threatened to undermine belief in the supernatural origin of the universe, 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 inferior, “less solid and stable” in his view. (Forsberg 2012b, pp. 113–14)

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Christianization went hand in hand with colonialism.⁸ In Chinese societies, Christianity is often deemed a foreign religious system brought to China by colonial rulers.⁹ However, Christian missionaries were not only agents of the dominant external culture. They also provided their converts access to more prestigious circles of colonial administration and foreign trade. Some intellectuals

⁸ Mungello notes a critical issue regarding the contemporary historiography of mission in the Chinese context: “While the role of Western imperialism is commonly recognized, the role played by the objectivity of historians is more difficult to analyze. Strong degrees of sympathy or antipathy to Christianity have distorted our view of the church in China. Though historians have been highly sensitive to the distortions produced by pro-Christian attitudes, less has been said about the distortions of anti-Christian views among academics” (Mungello 2012, p. 535).

⁹ Even today, some Chinese refer to Christianity as yangjiao 洋教, a “foreign religion.” While the term “yang” stands for Western things, during the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) it was often used as a pejorative label for Christian groups. Christians were called yangguizi 洋鬼子, “foreign/Western devils” (Klain 2014).

also converted to Christianity as a response to modernization—Christianity provided them with a better position for negotiation with larger political forces, and missionaries could become their tools for resistance against colonial powers (Robert 2009, pp. 49–50). Missionaries played many different roles, as Young concludes: “little can be said that cannot be contradicted: for each who was forbearing and tolerant, another was overbearing and intolerant” (Young 2002, p. 37).

We should not forget, furthermore, that Christianity is a non-Western religion by origin, and, thanks to extensive evangelization outside Europe and North America, it is also now non-Western in its contemporary context as there are more Christians in non-Western countries than there are in the West (Frykenberg 2003, p. 1). Instead of imagining Christianity as a monolithic (Western) religion with a single set of unchanging goals and challenges, we might do better to consider it a *glocal* phenomenon (see Robert 2002; Beyer 2003), a methodological shift which sees Christianity as a global phenomenon based on countless unique local manifestations and particularities. Referring to Christianity as *glocal* implies that the various Christian groups in China and Taiwan each have their specificities. Place of origin, the cultural setting of the mission, denominational differences, authority structures—all these profoundly affected Christian missionaries exposed to mission in Asia (Brown 2002).

In his specific context, Mackay pioneered the establishment of local, indigenous congregations. He learned the local Taiwanese dialect, and along with the Gospel he brought social service and modern Western medicine to the natives (Rubinstein 1991a; Gardella [2007] 2015). With the help of other Canadian missionaries, he linked religious change to social change. Missionaries, in general, were recognized as those who introduced modernization to Taiwan. They often used contemporary Western education and medical care to make the first contact with unchurched people. They had better financial resources and knowledge and could therefore build modern schools and hospitals. Mackay also used this as a vehicle for evangelization and established schools and a medical mission in Danshui, his de facto mission center (Rubinstein 1991a, p. 73).

Although formed within his social, religious, and cultural framework, Mackay’s mission and general attitude were nonetheless unique for his time. His promotion of local leadership was controversial, however, and some of his peers were decidedly skeptical of such an approach. He also promoted a greater role for women in the church, publicly opposed “The Chinese Immigration Act of 1885,” and married a local Taiwanese woman (Forsberg 2012b; Meynell 2012), all of which shows Mackay in something of a different light. Rohrer (2005) believes that Mackay promoted local ministry unhindered by foreign interference so that he alone would have control over the mission, and sees him as an “insecure dictator, jealous to maintain his absolute control over his converts” (Rohrer 2005, p. 30). Although we can only guess at the inner motivations for Mackay’s missionary strategies, we can nonetheless analyze their outcome and influence.

The assessment of the historical events described in this paper does not seek to promote a narrative of Mackay as “hero or villain” or to impute conscious motivations to him, but rather to locate him in the historical context in which he functioned and to understand the trends and structures that influenced him.

3. George Leslie Mackay

George Leslie Mackay was born in the Township of Zorra in Oxford County in what is now Ontario, Canada, in March 1844. He was the youngest child of a pious couple, George and Helen Mackay. George Sr was a ruling elder in the Presbyterian Church for 25 years. George Jr decided he wanted to be a missionary at the age of 10. From 1864 to 1867, George attended Knox College in Toronto, where he was introduced to the concept of drawing connections between scientific knowledge and the Bible as the source of the only Truth. Later, he would apply this approach to evangelization in his missionary work. He attended Princeton Seminary from 1867 to 1870 and on graduating submitted a proposal to become a missionary abroad. In 1871, he received notice of his acceptance by the Committee on

Missions in Canada. He was duly ordained, and the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Canada gave him the task of establishing a new mission in China. Mackay was allowed to choose the particular field for his mission himself (Rohrer 2010, pp. 221–22).

When Taiwan reopened to foreigners, Mackay decided to begin his work there (Gardella [2007] 2015, p. 165). The Rev Dr George Leslie Mackay, the first missionary sent by the Canadian Presbyterian Mission, decided to conduct his mission in the northern region of the island (Alford 2015, pp. 498–500). He arrived in Taiwan in 1871, and in March 1872 settled in the city of Danshui (淡水). He was 28 years old.

Almost immediately, he began to assert his independence and freedom from external control. He did not want the Committee on Missions in Canada or the General Assembly to dictate his missionary methods. As a result, he was often criticized by church leaders in Canada, but he also quickly became something of a missionary hero back home because of his missionary successes (Rohrer 2010, pp. 223–24). He “gained more converts than any other single Protestant missionary in the China field, leaving at his death in 1901 sixty churches and a community of more than two thousand baptized communicants, with a much larger pool of non-baptized enquirers” (Rohrer 2008, p. 228). Although he worked within the colonial framework, Mackay was a fierce critic of social injustice and an outspoken opponent of colonialism. He therefore sought to establish an independent church with native Taiwanese leaders. He even, somewhat controversially, married a native Taiwanese woman, Minnie Mackay, in 1878 (Forsberg 2012a, pp. 6–8); his daughters also married native Taiwanese ministers. Mackay spent most of the rest of his life in Taiwan. In 1901, he was diagnosed with an aggressive type of cancer and died suddenly at the age of 57 (Rohrer 2008, pp. 223–25).

4. Taiwan in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

In the nineteenth century, Taiwan was officially part of Fujian province in the Qing empire. The Qing administration’s overriding concern at the time was the Inner Asian frontier, so it had little interest in the island until the middle of the century when Western incursions prompted the Chinese court to reorient itself on the maritime world, which included Taiwan (Fairbank and Liu 2008, p. 146).

After the Opium Wars (1839–1860), several anti-Christian activities and uprisings broke out in mainland China and in Taiwan. Wealthy traditional families saw Christianity as a heterodox faith (*xiejiao* 邪教) that endangered traditional systems and Confucianism (Fairbank and Liu 2008, p. 78). Although the modernizing activities of the missionaries might have been welcomed, their religious message was often rejected as they were perceived as foreign invaders (Robert 2009, p. 49).

Taiwan’s governor Liu Mingchuan 劉銘傳 (1836–1896) implemented several changes inspired by the Western system and built a modern business centre in Danshui. For the reforms, however, he needed financial capital, which was not forthcoming from the Qing empire, so to meet his demands he increased taxes. In the late nineteenth century, most Taiwanese were illiterate and suffered from poor living conditions; malaria and many other tropical diseases were rife. Northern Taiwan was in a worse state than southern regions (Ion 2006).¹⁰

Shortly after Western weaponry had demonstrated its superiority in the Opium Wars, the first Presbyterian missionaries reached the coast of Taiwan. The Second Opium War (1856–1860) led to the signing of several treaties in Tianjin and Beijing and the re-opening to foreigners of the Taiwanese ports of Danshui 淡水 and Taiwanfu 臺灣府 (now Tainan) after almost two centuries of closure. The Qing dynasty also guaranteed protection for all Christian missionaries (Rubinstein 2003, p. 207). The Presbyterian mission to Taiwan could begin. In 1865, Dr James L. Maxwell (1836–1921), a doctor and senior member of the Presbyterian church in Birmingham, England, arrived with his medical mission. Maxwell settled in what is now Tainan 台南 and the southern region of Taiwan became the centre of

¹⁰ For example, missionaries in the south suffered less from tropical diseases than did their northern counterparts.

the British mission. Rev Dr George L. Mackay (1844–1901) arrived in Taiwan a few years later (Amae 2012, p. 47).

After the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895), Taiwan became part of Japan under a treaty signed in Shimonoseki in 1895. Chinese leaders in Taiwan and Taiwanese inhabitants opposed Japanese control and during the peace treaties the independent republic of Taiwan—the very first republic in Asia—was created on 23 March 1895; Taiwan’s governor Shao Youlian 邵友濂 (1840–1901) was declared president. Barely a week elapsed before the Japanese army landed at Jilong 基隆, on 29 March. Japanese troops suppressed the revolt, and Taiwan became part of the Japanese empire in October the same year (Fairbank and Liu 2008, p. 108). Presbyterian missionaries chose a strategy of cooperation with the Japanese imperial government (1895–1945), which perceived the Presbyterians as valuable assistants in the civilization of the population and the modernization of society. Mackay also supported Japanese rule.¹¹

To create a sustainable church, the missionaries needed native converts and partners, so aimed to establish regional presbyteries with local representation (Robert 2009, p. 49). The very first presbytery, which united 23 parishes, was founded in 1896 in the south of the island. Foreign missionaries had the right to vote as they were the founders of the presbytery (Amae 2012, p. 54), but they gradually sought to delegate responsibility for running the presbytery to local ordained pastors. The Western missionaries brought financial resources and the new technologies of Western medicine. They also set up schools to give ordinary Taiwanese the opportunity to receive higher education. Taiwan’s oldest existing Western-type school—the Theological Seminar in Tainan, which aimed to raise a new generation of local pastors—was founded in 1876, just eleven years after the first Presbyterian missionaries landed in the country. Four years later, missionaries built a hospital providing Western-style medical care in northern Taiwan.¹² Such hospitals often provided a space for initial contact between missionaries and the people of Taiwan. If a patient was hospitalized in a hospital established by the mission, a local pastor would often visit and introduce the patient to Christian teaching (Peng 2012, p. 308). Students in Christian schools were likewise introduced to the Christian faith. In the first decade of Presbyterian missionary work (1865–1875), most of those who became acquainted with Christianity through a stay in or visit to a hospital became converts. Christianity also spread because Western medicine was more successful than traditional folk healing practices. The Christian God was often, therefore, considered stronger than local deities and this provided a solid reason for some people to abandon local cults (Gernet 1985, p. 75).

Although today the PCT is a unified church, it was originally two separate missions. The Presbyterian missionaries from the United Kingdom and Canada built different ecclesiastical structures and worked in different parts of Taiwan. They also had slightly different mission strategies, focused on different target audiences, and were divided in their opinions as to how responsibility should be shared between foreign missionaries and local pastors. Missionaries from the UK focused mainly on the Hoklo community, one of the four Taiwanese ethnicities; Canadian missionaries focused on the island’s original inhabitants (*yuanzhumin* 原住民).¹³ The most influential missionaries in the south of the island were Thomas Barclay (1849–1935), William Campbell (1841–1921), and, later, Edward Band (1886–1971).

Some of the Presbyterian missionaries from the UK had already worked in the nearby Chinese province of Fujian 福建. This was an advantage for them as many of the ethnic Hoklo in Taiwan spoke the same dialect of Hokkien (*minnanhua* / *minnanyu* 閩南話 / 閩南

¹¹ Mackay died in 1901 so did not live through the 1930s, when strong militarization began, and all foreign missionaries were expelled from Taiwan.

¹² This was the Mackay Memorial Hospital, which is still in operation today, as is the Theological Seminar in Tainan.

¹³ The ethnic composition of Taiwan is diverse and distinct. Four groups can be distinguished: The Hoklo; the Hakka; mainland Chinese; and indigenous people—*yuanzhumin*. Of these, only three (the Hoklo [70%], the Hakka [18%] and mainlanders [10%]) are found in mainland China, where they are perceived only as language groups, not ethnic groups, as they are part of the most prominent ethnic group of the Han. The Hoklo came to Taiwan from Fujian Province in China in ancient times; the Hakka emigrated from inland China; mainlanders migrated to Taiwan after 1949 with the arrival of the Guomindang. Indigenous Taiwanese have different ethnic roots from these three groups. They are of Austronesian origin and currently represent only approximately 2% of the population.

語). Missionaries were also able to use the existing Romanized transcript of the Bible in Hokkien and so knowledge of the language became the first step in helping to spread the Christian faith among the local population. Such pioneering work in Taiwan was nonetheless still perilous, and missionaries encountered stern resistance. Many of their churches and hospitals were destroyed, and on numerous occasions, local people tried to stone them (Mackay 1895, pp. 222–23). Under pressure from the British government, however, the Qing dynasty guaranteed religious tolerance and repressed riots and attacks on Christian missionaries.

Mackay and his Canadian assistants attended more to the indigenous peoples as their religious ideas were considered less complex than the system of beliefs and practices of the majority population, and this, they felt, made indigenous peoples more open to accepting the Christian Gospel (Rubinstein 1991b, p. 18). Converting the Hoklo and Hakka was seen as more challenging as they had brought with them from mainland China the Confucian system (*rujiao* 儒教)—a highly family-bound ancestral cult—many diverse local cults, and various forms of Daoism (*daojiao* 道教) and Buddhism (*fojiao* 佛教). These beliefs represented more complex and elaborate religious systems and thus presented a problem to the spread of Christianity among their followers. The missionaries felt they were able to provide a sense of inclusion to many indigenous peoples,¹⁴ whose religious ideas had helped them shape their own identity as an alternative to the majority Han population (Yang 2008, pp. 52–53). The “colonized” indigenous population was also more open to conversion because missionaries provided them with gifts and economic support, offered them jobs in Christian institutions, and even supplied new converts with food, giving rise to the term “rice/wheat Christians”:¹⁵ people who converted because the mission supported them with food.¹⁶ When the social and economic conditions of such converts improved, it was not unusual for them to return to their previous religions and eventually leave the Christian church (Rubinstein 1991b; Heylen and Sommers 2010). Christian churches were nonetheless able to offer their members economic, emotional, and psychological support during difficult times.

5. From Far Formosa

From Far Formosa: The Islands, Its People and Missions (1895), the book at the centre of this research, is generally assumed to have been written by Mackay himself but his authorship is in some doubt. Rohrer suggests Mackay’s authorship is improbable as Mackay’s early diaries were reviewed by Rev William S. McTavish, and the manuscript was later edited by Rev J. A. McDonald. The book was finally published in 1895. Mackay’s authorship was not questioned until after his death in 1901, when McDonald announced himself to be the author (Rohrer 2005, p. 11; Forsberg 2012a, p. 3). Although the process of publishing the book was undoubtedly complex, Mackay very definitely considered himself to be its author, so we can assume he was happy with the information it contained. Accordingly, this study will also consider him to be the author.

The book provides an important source of information about Taiwan, its geography, nature, population, and governance. It also represents an important missionary ethnography of Taiwan. The book chronicles Mackay’s life, his missionary activity in Taiwan between 1871 and 1895, and the origins and development of the local Christian mission. The focus of this current analysis is Mackay’s missionary activity. The book is divided into 6 parts and 36 chapters. The first part, “Introductory,” describes Mackay’s life in

¹⁴ I refer to those indigenous tribes which did not reside in mountainous areas but lived close to the Han population. Those tribes that lived deep in the mountains were relatively difficult to reach, and although missionaries tried repeatedly to reach them, it was a long time before evangelization among them achieved its first successes. Mackay began these expeditions and explained the difficulty of such a mission (Mackay 1895, p. 265).

¹⁵ The term appeared for the first time in literature written by missionaries and European travelers who were critical of conversions that took place for materialistic reasons alone. Later, the term “rice Christians” would be used in the classification of Christians based on commitment to the Christian faith (see, for example, Tiedemann 2000, p. 10).

¹⁶ Such a missionary strategy was also widespread elsewhere. Missionaries were often financially gifted converts. In the context of mainland China, this topic is addressed by, for example, Lutz (2001).

Canada and his arrival in Taiwan. The second part, “The Island,” contains information about the nature, geography, zoology, geology, botany, and ethnography of Taiwan. The next three parts, “Among the Chinese,” “The Conquered Aborigines,” and “The Mountain Savages”¹⁷ chronicle Mackay’s mission in Taiwan in many different narratives. The final part, “The Headquarters,” represents the author’s concluding remarks about the success of his missionary efforts. Only those parts of the book which contain information about Mackay’s missionary strategies and problems and the conversion of the Taiwanese people have been included in this analysis.

The target of the research is to clearly determine the book’s primary audience and Mackay’s main strategies, which are also compared to the strategies used in the southern mission conducted by British Presbyterian missionaries. Some sources that describe the southern mission are therefore included in the analysis. These include the writings of some of the missionaries themselves, such as William Campbell (1841–1921, in Taiwan from 1871) and Thomas Barclay (1849–1935, in Taiwan from June 1875). Mackay’s *From Far Formosa* was written for a similar purpose and audience. The two sets of writings therefore provide a good source for comparison. Other documents used include the writings of James Laidlaw Maxwell (1836–1921, in Taiwan from 1865), Hugh Ritchie (1839–1879, in Taiwan from 1867), and Matthew Dickson (in Taiwan from 1871). Although different from the books mentioned above, these documents also provide important information regarding the missionary efforts in Taiwan, always bearing in mind the different anticipated readership and aims of the texts. Highlighting the differences and similarities between the two missions will help with an understanding of the uniqueness of Mackay’s missionary approach.

It is important to remember that *From Far Formosa* was written with a particular purpose in mind. The mission committee in Toronto decided that to encourage more people to read it and to increase its influence, the book needed to be inspirational and heroic. It is difficult, therefore, to consider the book purely an historical source, and necessary, consequently, to think about the problem of historicity during any attempt to interpret it.

The text can be regarded as a locus of interaction between the author and the intended reader. The author is not solely publishing his own ideas. The text is not purely a mirror of a particular historical reality, neither is it a reflection of the author’s inner thoughts. Štochl suggests that during text analysis, we should try not to reconstruct the inner meaning of the author, but rather to focus solely on the text, its structures and language mechanisms: “The search for the circumstances of the origin of the work and the author’s personality is actually almost as perverse as the attempts to reconstruct the author’s intention . . . The author is simply not in the writing” (Štochl 2005, p. 59). Based on the available historical documents, we can reconstruct the actions of historical figures, how they were perceived by their associates and followers, and what discourse this person created within written sources. We should not, however, deliberately contemplate his true inner motivations and desires. What we can do is to analyze the discourse and the intended audience—the author always knows who he is writing for. In Mackay’s case, *From Far Formosa* is written in English and was intended to be read in Canada—and was later distributed there. Three distinct groups of readers are in view: zealous young missionaries, other members of Presbyterian congregations, and other readers interested in foreign countries. Any of these groups could have modeled the outcome of the book. I believe that the second group was especially important as it contained potential financial supporters of the mission.

6. Missionary Strategies

Missionaries in Taiwan had to face the challenge of Taiwan’s pre-existing religious culture and traditions. In *From Far Formosa*, Mackay describes the strongly rooted practice of ancestral worship: “The worship of idols is first given up; but it may be months—

¹⁷ In *From Far Formosa*, the term “savages” is used to label those indigenous inhabitants who are not “civilized.” They live in distinct mountain villages and do not trade with other islanders. Several of these “savage” tribes are “head-hunters,” and—importantly for Mackay—it is extremely difficult to evangelize them (Mackay 1895, pp. 265–66).

perhaps a year—before the tablet can be forsaken . . . the worship of ancestors is indeed the most stubborn obstacle Christianity has to face” (Mackay 1895, pp. 133–34). Ancestral worship and Chinese folk religions were among the reasons Mackay considered it easier to convert indigenous inhabitants (Rubinstein 1991b, p. 91). Religious beliefs were not the only issue, however. Like their counterparts in mainland China, Han intellectuals in Taiwan disliked Westerners. Chinese gentry frequently assembled anti-missionary mobs—claiming Christian missionaries and converts were immoral and even perverted as they dishonored their ancestors’ traditional worldview (Fairbank and Liu 2008, pp. 78–79)—and handed out threatening leaflets which discouraged local people from attending church (*The Messenger and Missionary Record [1876]* 2015), all of which created yet another obstacle to the propagation of Mackay’s message (Ion 2006, p. 80). Violent disputes and the killing of converts and missionaries were not rare (Mackay 1895, p. 193).

The Christianity brought by the missionaries was also challenged by local family values and beliefs. An analysis of missionary strategies may help us understand how the missions faced these challenges. To attract potential converts and believers, evangelization was carried out in a variety of ways. Proclaiming the message of the Gospel was not the only method, and certainly not the most important one (Swanson 1986).

Missionary activity was protected by colonial political and military powers. Typically, special privileges that came with the foreign powers (and missionaries) could lead to the conversion of the lower classes in society, who otherwise had no part in higher circles and no control over political forces. For them, the Christian message provided not only divine meaning but also material resources (Robert 2009, p. 49): conversion established for them a new position within the social structure (da Silva and Robinson 1994, pp. 61–63). Mackay himself had great difficulty appealing to members of the higher echelons, who were critical and suspicious of his activities and often directly opposed the promotion of Christianity.

From Far Formosa reveals three strategies that appear to have been the most effective: medical mission and its part in the conversion of the unchurched; the establishment of native ministers as part of the local mission; and regular visits to already established congregations alongside tours to new areas for potential evangelization. Although the three strategies often overlap in the book, such as when native ministers carry out minor medical procedures, each focuses on a different aspect of the missionary endeavor: conversion (medical mission), creating a local church (local ministry), and the control of existing churches (ministry tours). Mackay also describes other strategies, such as the singing of Christian hymns, but these three are those most frequently mentioned and are therefore seen to be the most important for the purposes of this research—and indeed by Mackay himself.

6.1. Medical Mission

The first missionary efforts were directed towards improvements in health care and education (Lin 1999). With financial support from abroad, Presbyterian missionaries built new modern hospitals. Patients in missionary hospitals were often treated by missionaries who were both pastors and physicians. In the Taiwanese context, providing better medical treatment gave the missionaries an advantage (Chen 2003, p. 109). Western medicine was more effective than traditional Chinese medicine or folk healing techniques, and the Taiwanese often interpreted this as evidence that the Christian God was more powerful than their local deities. Christianity expanded as a result. In Chinese society, it was not uncommon for people to remove or replace an ineffective deity. If sacrifices were judged to be ineffective and the deity did not provide the necessary help, the temple built in honor of that deity would be destroyed and the cult abandoned (Gernet 1985, pp. 81–83). Mackay very clearly used medical work to spread the Christian faith (Peng 2012, p. 307)—he was both a missionary and a physician. He was not a trained doctor, but he had undergone some elementary training and considered himself a competent physician (Rohrer 2010). He was able to perform minor medical procedures such as dentistry—the extraction of teeth was quick and simple to perform and highly effective; he claimed to have extracted

40,000 teeth during his mission in Taiwan, sometimes as many as “a hundred teeth in less than an hour” (Mackay 1895, p. 316)—but also more complex treatments such as setting broken bones (Rohrer 2005, p. 24).

The effectiveness of medical mission is a common thread throughout *From Far Formosa* (Mackay 1895, pp. 155, 170, 179, 183, 223, 308, 315), especially the use of dentistry in evangelization. He notes that local people were more open to the Gospel and more likely to convert after he had helped to rid them of bodily suffering. He was convinced that his treatments were able to change a previously negative attitude among local people:

The savages prowled around and occasionally threw stones and other missiles. While there I cut out of a man’s thigh an iron arrow-head that had been shot from the bow of a savage . . . I had surgical instruments with me, and, after two hours, succeeded in performing the operation . . . He was at that time a heathen, but he listened to the message of a Savior . . . he was led to forsake idolatry and worship the living and true God. (Mackay 1895, pp. 222–23)

Medical mission was a popular tool among Western missionaries. Medical training and healing abilities helped many missionaries to succeed in attracting non-Christian patients to the church (Lin 1999, p. 10). The southern Presbyterian mission in Taiwan was no different. Campbell remarks that, “Hundreds of people crowded round them from day to day, to whom medicines were dispensed, and the words of eternal life declared with all earnestness and sympathy” (Campbell 1889, p. 42). Dickson ([1873] 2015) also mentioned the same effect of medical care on potential converts during one of his evangelistic tours. Medical mission was therefore equally a part of the northern and southern missions. Missionaries both provided and improved medical treatments and built modern hospitals staffed by doctors and researchers (Bays 2012, p. 69). The Mackay Memorial Hospital at Danshui opened in 1880. At the very end of his book, Mackay concludes that, “No part of my preparatory training proved more practically helpful than the medical studies pursued in Toronto and New York” (Mackay 1895, p. 308). The strategy was not new, however. In the nineteenth century, it was implemented as a means of conversion in various parts of Asia (Ion 2006, p. 81).

Nonetheless, some missionaries feared that medical mission was not always fulfilling its aim. Maxwell ([1876] 2015), for example, was concerned not to forget mission during medical treatment:

It is a great deal easier to prescribe for bodily ailments than to care earnestly and persistently for the planting of the World of Life in the heart; . . . there is a strong temptation to the physician to be content with this, and to forget that there is nothing missionary in it unless it be earnestly used as the vantage ground for pressing home the gospel. (Maxwell [1876] 2015, p. 299)

Mackay was not so worried about this difficulty. He never mentions any problems associated with the use of medical mission or the misuse of healing work. His narrative focuses rather on the targeted outcome of whichever medical treatment was being implemented.

The pattern of conversion is clearly distinguishable throughout the book. Mackay repeatedly faced opposition to his teaching—sometimes violent opposition. However, by using certain missionary approaches, often medical treatments, the person who had been abusing him “miraculously” converted to Christianity. Sometimes, later on, the new convert became active in evangelization. Similar stories are narrated by other missionaries but usually in less dramatic fashion than they are by Mackay, who all but glorifies medical mission, particularly dentistry. As many missionaries considered his use of itinerant dentistry in mission work “peculiar” (Austin 2003),¹⁸ we can gather that the stories were used to show the success of Mackay’s mission. Even in the face of extremely unfavorable reactions to Christian teaching, Mackay always succeeds in winning souls for Christianity

¹⁸ Alwyn Austin even describes Mackay as “the strangest character nineteenth-century Canada ever produced” (Austin 1986, p. 30).

(the only exception being the “savages”). Although generally considered “successful,” Mackay’s missionary endeavor still converted only approximately 0.1% of the population. He therefore had to face mass rejection of his message, but this aspect of the narrative is marginalized in his writing. As Rohrer concludes:

Missionaries like Mackay were quite consciously writing for home constituencies who could influence for good or ill their work in the field. Thus, they carefully chose what to report—and what not to report—and weighed their words with an eye toward their political impact. (Rohrer 2005, p. 13)

Positive results clearly made for a better story. Mackay was, after all, responsible to the Presbyterian Church of Canada, and while seeking to be as independent as possible, he still needed financial help to run his mission. It is no surprise, then, that when writing for his Canadian audience, he depicted his mission in such a way as to appeal to his home denomination—graphically describing the exotic and unfamiliar country and glorifying his missionary endeavors. This is not to say that Mackay and other missionaries who wrote in similar ways were lying exactly—rather they were “selecting” and “editing” the information they chose to feature (Van Die 2012). Furthermore, by promoting his strategies in the book, Mackay could influence other (aspiring) missionaries not only to join the mission, but also to implement his strategies—which he always depicts as extremely useful (Mackay 1895, p. 316). Missionary biographies clearly had an inspirational as well as a didactic purpose: would-be missionaries were encouraged to follow Mackay’s example of noble self-denial and persistent effort (Potter 2002), and potential donors were convinced by the successful pattern of conversion and the faith of converts. It is highly likely that while writing his book, Mackay kept in mind this latter group of readers. Describing his own missionary successes, he suggests that, “If people in Hamburg saw what I have seen, they would contribute for foreign mission” (Mackay 1895, p. 225). Goodwin notes that Mackay’s book contains “numerous appeals both for money and for greater sympathy and understanding from the home audience . . . ” (Goodwin 2012, p. 78). Finding financial support was key to the success of Mackay’s mission, which appears to have been more costly than many other missions in China (Rohrer 2005). While rejecting external supervision or help from other foreign missionaries, Mackay obviously felt the need to explain and justify the financial demands of his mission, and the best possible means of doing this was to demonstrate his missionary successes, which were, it must be said, astonishing. He persisted, however, in stubbornly refusing help or control from Canada, an approach which often ignited conflicts between him and church leaders at home. It was even more incumbent upon him, therefore, to present the outstanding outcomes of his efforts and the fruit of donors’ financial investments.

Mackay’s possible use of hyperbole in his stories of conversions does not change the fact that by linking healing and preaching, he was responding to the needs of the local society, which was going through a time of social, cultural, political, and religious change. Many other preachers combined medical practice with religious teaching. Rohrer argues that, “. . . like Chinese sects, Mackay’s movement offered to converts the promise of eternal life in a future paradise as well as health and security in the present . . . he played the role of physician and medicine dispenser, thus combining the functions of religious prophet, teacher, and healer in a manner similar to Chinese sectarian leaders” (Rohrer 2005, pp. 23–24). Mackay was indeed influenced not only by his upbringing but also by the Taiwanese context.

Although Mackay combined medical care and religious teaching, he always distinguished between his religious faith and medicine as a science. Mackay believed that science could be used to further both his medical mission and his evangelization, as this extract from the book illustrates:

On our way toward the sea the first man to greet us was one who had been blind, but whose sight was restored. He had been treated some time previously, but when he caught sight of me that day, he rushed up, his eyes wide open,

and exclaimed, “God did it; God did it! I can see now, God did it without medicine.” . . . “God did it,” was his testimony, which, indeed, was true; but means were suited to ends, as must always be done if we would be blessed of God. (Mackay 1895, pp. 178–79)

Mackay denied the possibility of miraculous (divine) healing and maintained a wholly rational outlook that was rare among missionaries. At the same time, he believed that science and the Christian God corroborated each other. Rather than seeing God as miraculously intervening in the healing process, Mackay believed in the “intelligent design” created by the Christian God (Meynell 2012, p. 144). His own understanding of his medical work therefore differed from the way other missionaries viewed it. Thomas Barclay, a missionary working in southern Taiwan, describes a similar story to the one above but clearly believed that the power of God had been at work (Band 1936, pp. 51–52): “. . . Goan-chhun told him that God could cure his asthma if he prayed. As there was no medicine at hand, they filled a small cup with clear water, and prayed, after which the sick man drank the water. Several days then passed without the usual recurrence of the disease, and he was accordingly encouraged to put his idols away and worship God . . . So he prayed again, and he got relief, and from that day to this he has never suffered from it again . . . ”

Mackay could have used the same strategy in his mission, but clearly had a different perception of how his mission worked. While ministering to potential converts, he applied his medical training but never sought to combine medicine with mysterious powers of spiritual healing. He simply used medicine to gain people’s trust, and afterwards introduced them to the Christian Gospel (Peng 2012, p. 308). This was an understandable strategy. Christianity was a foreign religious system with a comparatively complex theological foundation. The Taiwanese might not have been willing to listen to this new ideology, and given that the missionaries often focused their efforts on those of lower status, it is possible that the people would not have understood complex abstract doctrine. Mackay brought people to faith by showing them that Christian missionaries, representatives of the Christian faith, can heal their bodies. Further down the line, the people would be taught that Jesus Christ can also heal their eternal souls. The common people did not distinguish between the dogmas of various religions. Sometimes, they did not care about religious doctrine at all. For them, what was most important was to follow an effective religion (Gernet 1985, p. 75). If a Western missionary doctor provided more adequate and effective treatment than local religious healers, the person cured would be more easily converted to Christianity.

Mackay used the same strategy in the training of native ministers. He combined science and theology when preparing his students for preaching and in so doing further developed his concept of “intelligent design.” He taught his disciples botany to show them how the Christian God created the world, and zoology and anatomy to convince them that behind the design there is an intelligent creator-God (Mackay 1895). As Darwin’s theory on the origin of species (1859) was already prominent, a significant number of Mackay’s peers shared his understanding of evolution. Mackay was influenced by natural theology, which interpreted the design in nature—its laws and regularities—as evidence of an intelligent transcendent creator: for them, evolution was an argument for the existence of God (Berger 1983). Furthermore, in this cultural climate, missionaries often considered “civilization” as a similar goal to “conversion.” Missionaries introduced not only religious faith but also Western education and science, and sought to culturally influence local peoples, something that was sometimes seen as being more worthy even than conversion (Frykenberg 2003, p. 20).

6.2. Delegating Responsibility to Native Ministry

Throughout his missionary career, Mackay insisted on delegating as much responsibility as possible to native ministers. From the moment of converting the very first believer, Giam Chheng Hoa, known as A Hoa (Mackay 1895, p. 139), Mackay started to train him for the ministry. In *From Far Formosa*, Mackay repeatedly praises A Hoa and his help for

the mission. The story continues with A Hoa helping to convert the second native, Go Ek Ju, who started out as a painter hired by Mackay but was later trained up and put in charge of a chapel (Mackay 1895, p. 140). *From Far Formosa* mentions some native ministers and elders by name, chiefly at the end of the book, where 60 native preachers trained by Mackay for church leadership roles are listed.¹⁹ In the narrative, A Hoa is held up as a representative of successful native ministry and is therefore mentioned the most. The book devotes more space to cities than to people—who are known by manifold terms such as “minister,” “catechist,” “teacher,” or “helper”—but this does not alter the fact that native ministers were extremely significant: “There has never been a single major movement of genuine Christian conversion . . . in which a pivotal role of leadership was not played by an extremely influential, and often very gifted, native agent” (Frykenberg 2003, p. 25). Local ministers became buffers and bridges between local people and Christian foreign missions (Robert 2009, p. 49; Webster 2002, p. 100).

Native helpers were also part of the southern mission. The best known is Gaw Bun-sui, an elder who worked alongside James Maxwell (Band 1936, p. 107; Alsford 2015, p. 15). Mackay’s goal was different, nonetheless. He had recognized the importance of creating a native ministry while still in Canada (Mackay 1895, p. 142), and his ultimate aim was to establish local Christian communities fully independent of outside support. He wanted a self-sufficient, self-governing, and self-propagating native church:

What I understand by a self-supporting mission is one in which all the work is carried on and all the agents supported by those in the mission itself. The church in North Formosa will be self-supporting when its college, school, hospital, chapels, and all other departments, with all laborers, whether native or foreign, will be supported by the members and adherents of the native church. (Mackay 1895, p. 336)

He was dedicated to this idea, but it was not without controversy among other missionaries at the time. The approach did not fit the idea of dominant colonial culture, and the notion of self-supporting, spiritually independent Christian churches grew in importance only later (Webster 2002, p. 111).²⁰ This is one aspect of Mackay’s mission which today is considered the most valuable for the later development of the church.

In Mackay’s system, native ministers soon began to oversee local communities: “Will-ing hands soon completed a building, and a native preacher was left in charge of the work, as another had been in the first village” (Mackay 1895, p. 220). Native elders were made leaders of newly established chapels and of the people who attended them. Mackay did not want these communities to be under the supervision of foreigners—other than him. He considered decisions regarding who would lead the various chapels an important job. If the mission committee in Canada decided to send a foreign missionary to assist Mackay’s mission, Mackay “made it clear that these newcomers would be required to serve under the supervision of native Christians” (Rohrer 2010, p. 225). He believed that only native ministry could accomplish his ideal of an independent church in Taiwan. Mackay understood the greater effectiveness of native preachers, who were more closely connected to the local population. Western missionaries were unable to cover as large an area as native preachers, who were cheaper and more numerous. They were also devoted to Mackay as their missionary leader. Furthermore, language can be a huge obstacle to evangelization,

¹⁹ The native leaders mentioned are: Tam He, Tan Leng, Go Ek Ju (the painter), Tan Theng, Chhoa Seng (A Hoa), Lim Giet, Tsun Sim, Siau Tien, Li Kui, Lau Chheng, Tan Ho, Tan Ban, Keh Tsu, Tan Eng, Eng Goan, Tan Siah, A Lok, Iap Tsun, Thien Sang, Lau Tsai, Tan Kui, Eng Jong, And An, Thong Su, Jim Sui, A Hai, Pat Po, Jit Sin, Chin Giok, Ki Siong, Pa Kin, Hok Eng, In Lien, Hong Lien, Kai Loah, Sam Ki, Keng Tien, A Seng, Gong A, Tong San, Tsui Eng, Chheng He, Chhun Bok, Tiu Thiam, Bio Sien, Eng Seng, Chhong Lim, Teng Chiu, Beng Tsu, Tek Beng, Tu Iau, Li Iau, Tsan Un, Tan Sam, Li Sun, Eng Chhung, Tsui Seng, Kho Goan, Lim Ban, and Bun Seng (Mackay 1895, p. 336).

²⁰ In Taiwan, church self-governance became an important part of the larger Presbyterian effort 50 years after the publication of *From Far Formosa*. In 1940 the Japanese government evicted all foreign missionaries from Taiwan, and all missionary schools and hospitals came under local control. The expulsion of foreign missionaries had some unexpected and positive consequences, however, as the Presbyterian mission survived and thrived under the leadership of native Taiwanese pastors. A church in which most of the leadership had originally been foreign-born now became, as a matter of necessity, a domestic church with local leaders: in 1943, a Northern Synod was formed with no foreign leader; a separate Southern Synod, born out of the original British mission, was formed two years later. Mackay’s efforts had paid off.

but the native preachers were native speakers of the local languages. They also understood the cultural boundaries and were often better and more easily accepted by Taiwanese people. Mackay taught the local ministers some of the basics of Western medicine and they accompanied him while he performed medical procedures and administered treatments. They were even allowed to perform minor surgical procedures themselves. As a result, some of these native evangelists joined the medical and commercial elite of the day (Amae 2008, p. 174).

Enabling native ministry was a first step towards emphasizing the agency of local Christians within communities under a Western power. While conversion to Christianity often meant a change in the social status of natives, they were not only passive participants in the dominance-oppression relations.²¹ Taiwanese Christians were also a force within social circles—especially when their position was strengthened by Mackay’s approach of making them leaders.

Many scholars of mission now view the delegation of responsibility to native ministers as the most effective strategy for gaining converts (Frykenberg 2003). At the time, however, Mackay’s attitude toward native ministry was frowned upon by overseas mission boards, and it was highly unusual for foreign missionaries to be placed under the supervision of native elders. The southern, British mission did not delegate such responsibility to locals, who remained subordinate to the visiting missionaries, as Thomas Barclay describes: “The chapel was provided with a preacher-in-charge, but all these preaching stations required to be supervised by the missionary . . . ” (Band 1936, p. 49). By contrast, Mackay often refused assistance from Canada, and even if foreign helpers were sent to him, he would grant them little influence or power. His approach drew much criticism from church leaders back in Canada (Rohrer 2010, p. 223), but Mackay was eager to explain why his methods were suitable and those of others were not:

Mission work in North Formosa is dominated by the idea of a native ministry. The purpose is to evangelize the people . . . What would succeed in Europe or America would fail in Asia. China is not India, and Formosa is not China. The man or the mission that supposes that a good theory must be capable of universal application, and that social forces, hereditary customs, or even climatic influences need not be taken into account, makes a grievous mistake . . . One reason for a native ministry that will be appreciated by all practical and genuine friends of missions is that it is by far the most economical, both as to men and money. Natives can live in a climate and under conditions where any foreigner would die . . . And the cost of a native preacher and his family is so much less, that the contributions of the churches can be made to support a very much larger staff than if foreigners alone were employed. (Mackay 1895, pp. 285–86)

Church leaders in Canada remained suspicious of Mackay’s refusal to submit to external control. He was dependent on financial resources from Canada but insisted that only he should have the authority to select native ministers for the work in Taiwan. Mackay’s remark about native ministry being less financially demanding is not without context. His conflict with the church leadership was mostly about the money that he needed and the strategies that he used in his mission. From 1875, the united Presbyterian Church in Canada adopted a centralized approach to managing its overseas missionaries. Its directives resembled those issued by secular businesses, and in such a model, there was no space for individualism. Mackay was therefore in a precarious position and had a permanent love-hate relationship with his sending institution. Despite his rejection of

²¹ Typically, local people had little access to the machinery of power. Some converts consciously decided to join the church to empower themselves in local politics. Sometimes, this self-empowerment and the resources provided by the Presbyterian Church provided good reasons to convert—it was not always a matter of inner faith (Lee 2003). This is not to say that all converts had little belief in the Gospel and lacked commitment to the church. They nonetheless lived in particular cultural circumstances and were affected by local traditions.

external help, the church kept sending him new missionaries,²² partly in a desire to control and oversee his activities. Foreign missionary colleagues often brought Mackay more discomfort than assistance. According to many of his compatriots, he was tricky to deal with, but interestingly, Mackay's visits to Canada were largely free from confrontation with the church hierarchy. Aside from bureaucratic difficulties, Mackay was highly respected in Canada. During his first furlough, in 1880, he was awarded an honorary degree by Queen's University, and in 1894, he was elected as Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Canada (Van Die 2012, pp. 39–40). Afterwards, Mackay travelled across the country visiting presbyteries and lecturing about his mission in Taiwan. Many of the stories he told at these meetings were later included in his book. The tours gave him an opportunity to promote and explain his strategy, gain recognition from the presbyteries, and raise sponsorship for his mission in Taiwan (Mackay 1895, pp. 291–92). It was a highly successful strategy for garnering support from the mission committee in Canada.

6.3. Regular Tours and Supervision

From Far Formosa also reveals the importance of regular visits to established churches, especially in the vicinity of Danshui, which had been the base for Mackay's mission (Mackay 1895, p. 172). Indeed, the book portrays such visits as the single most important aspect of a missionary's work. Mission, the propagation of the Christian faith, clearly involves visiting new places. It can be centralized within the so-called Christian world, but in most cases, it involves the process of spreading the Christian Gospel outside its borders. It is one of the means adopted by the church for passing Christian values and ideas onto a non-Western society. In the nineteenth century, mission was focused on Asia and Africa. A missionary going to unevangelized places was just doing his duty. Nevertheless, mission is not solely about expanding the church but also about helping and supervising newly established Christian groups. The strategy was common among other missionaries in Taiwan, including the missionaries working in southern Taiwan, who also went on tours to observe the situation at various stations (Campbell 1889, p. 33).

Mackay saw the strategy of visits and supervision as both necessary and useful: "These periodical visits are encouraging to the preachers and stimulating to the members" (Mackay 1895, p. 172). It was a strategy that clearly helped to ensure the success of the mission. Mackay made a point of visiting every Christian group he had established. During such visits, he would preach and offer medical care to patients and believers. At the same time, he would supervise and control the group. Adverse climatic and other geographical conditions prevented Mackay from making frequent tours, so the chapels—and the believers united under them—were led by local ministers. To maintain at least some control over the believers, Mackay kept in touch through these native preachers, who gave him regular reports on the congregations.

Some scholars suggest that Mackay enjoyed these tours rather too much, at the expense in fact of focusing on his mission. Some even classify him as a "madman" who spent his time running around the country acting more like a soldier than a missionary (Forsberg 2012a, p. 4). Others see Mackay's nervous disposition as the reason for his "adventures" (Ion 2006, p. 82). Whether or not this was the case, the tours were highly effective in helping to gain new believers, in supporting the communities growing up around the newly established chapels, and in offering supervision and direction. The tours also had an educational purpose as Mackay always took his students and other native preachers with him (Mackay 1895, p. 172). While visiting different places in northern Taiwan, he taught his disciples not only Christian doctrine but also how to practice medicine. He spent time

²² Rev J. B. Fraser came to Taiwan in 1875 and stayed with Mackay only three years. He left after his wife died in October 1877. After him, Rev K. F. Junor arrived in 1878 and stayed for four years. He left in 1882 for reasons of ill health. Mackay's third foreign companion, John Jamieson, lasted for eight years but died in service. Mackay is known to have had misunderstandings with Jamieson's wife. Church papers contain reports of the "Jamieson Affair." In 1892, the mission committee sent William Gauld. His relationship with Mackay was good and he stayed for many years (Ion 2006; Mackay 1895). Mackay briefly mentioned all his Canadian helpers in *From Far Formosa*, but it was only Gauld who received praise for his abilities and good nature (Mackay 1895, p. 332).

explaining other fields and sciences such as “geology, zoology, anatomy, and botany as an essential component of their evangelistic work” (Rohrer 2005, p. 25). He might indeed have enjoyed the tours, but he was able to make full use of the benefits they provided. Rohrer suggests that the tours were the true center of Mackay’s mission: “The heart of the church in North Taiwan was not in Tamsui, but in the expanding network of chapels in the interior, and these were the exclusive preserves of the Taiwanese preachers who were trained in the early years by Mackay alone” (Rohrer 2005, p. 28).

The tours helped Mackay combine all three of the strategies that he considered the most effective in his missionary effort: he offered health care to patients, believers and potential converts; he used the practical experience to teach his students to become competent and loyal local ministers; and he helped to supervise the local communities. Mackay was certainly not a madman without a coherent or sophisticated plan for his mission. In *From Far Formosa*, we see that he understood very well the needs of his missionary field—and of his Canadian supporters—and adapted his strategies accordingly. He thought long and hard about what he wanted to achieve through his mission, and the strategies that he put in place were those he saw as having the greatest potential to be effective.

Mackay’s descriptions of his tours also offer insights into the discourse on other ethnicities. Mackay married a native woman but did not consider Taiwanese inhabitants to be the equals of Westerners. He did not live in a vacuum and was strongly influenced by the contemporary Darwinian discourse and the colonial setting. In *From Far Formosa*, Mackay introduces three stages of social evolution: savages, the half-civilized, and the dominant race. Mackay saw no conflict between native leadership of local churches and the ideas of the white man’s burden and social classification based on origin. As explained by da Silva (1994, p. 51), many prejudices were born of feelings of superiority, and while conversion to Christianity brought benefits, it did not necessarily bring equality.

Based on a foundation of cultural hegemony, Mackay constructed savages as indigent mountain-dwelling inhabitants who had not been colonized and therefore remained uncivilized and impossible to convert:

As yet our missionary work among the savages is little more than skirmishing. Occasional tours to their villages may do something—have, indeed, done something—for their benighted souls. But we do not call that mission work, and at present it seems difficult to do more. (Mackay 1895, p. 265)

At times, Mackay portrays a romanticized image of savages who although uncivilized are nonetheless pure as they are strangers to gambling, opium-smoking, polygamy, and murder (except for head-hunting). All these indiscretions, however, could be found in other more “civilized” people in Taiwan, some of whom were members of the church (Mackay 1895, p. 258). But undoubtedly, in bringing Christianity to the “savages,” the missionaries brought not only faith but also “civilization” and a “moral code.” Converts were considered people of progress (Frykenberg 2003) and the civilization project went hand in hand with Christianization. The colonizers also supported missionary endeavors as the goals of Christianity matched their own.²³ The three-fold classification was developed in accordance with political and social development in Asia (Andersen and Foss 2003, p. 313).

6.4. Strategies Excluded from Mackay’s Book

Some of the strategies and methods referred to by the British missionaries in southern Taiwan are rarely mentioned in Mackay’s book; some are completely absent from it. The southern missionaries saw them as a vital part of the missionary endeavor. Education and examination were two such strategies. Mackay adopted the Western education model in Taiwan, establishing Oxford College in 1882 and the Girls’ School two years later (Peng 2012, p. 312). Oxford College was a school for training men in Christian ministry; the Girls’ School was established to do the same for women. There is little emphasis

²³ This was also the case in other parts of Asia (Young 2002, p. 45).

on education in *From Far Formosa*, except for a few isolated remarks: “Let it be clearly understood that the mission stands for a trained ministry” (Mackay 1895, p. 286); “as a college was needed to train men for the ministry . . . ” (p. 304); “the Girls’ School was established. Bible-women are there trained for service at every station in the mission” (p. 306).

Education was central to Mackay’s mission, but according to the book, it was a method for training future preachers and “Bible-women,” not a strategy for gaining new believers. Missionary schools were, however, a place to meet potential converts. It was missionaries who built the first schools for girls, who remained largely uneducated in traditional Chinese society. British missionaries mentioned education more than did Mackay, but they too referred to it as a means of training ministers (Band 1936, p. 32).

Today, scholars are mostly unanimous in defining education as one of the most crucial missionary tools. Through a schooling system provided by missionaries, local people come into regular contact with missionaries and come to hear the Christian Gospel. Missionary education also established a new educated elite who identified with Western ideas (Lindenfeld 2005, pp. 347–48). And while Huan-Sheng Peng (2012) rightly linked Mackay’s missionary success with education, Mackay himself did not emphasize education strategies. The reason might have been that the intended readership was not interested in such a gradual method of conversion. As a missionary tool, education has a long-term trajectory, and unlike medical mission, it did not bring huge communities to Christian faith. *From Far Formosa* was written for a Canadian audience hungry for adventurous, exciting, miraculous stories. As a missionary biography it is akin to popular literature or hagiography. The genre had educational purposes. It did not offer a detailed description of the actual development of the mission but reflected the tastes of the readers and focused on contemporary missionary ideals and values with the aim of influencing missionary policy (Wild-Wood 2010, p. 275).

Another missionary method almost entirely absent from Mackay’s book was regular “examination” for baptism. During examination, potential converts were tested on their knowledge of basic Christian doctrine. This method of establishing “deep church” was mentioned only twice in *From Far Formosa*: “Children were examined, three were baptized, and sixty-five sat down around the Lord’s table” (Mackay 1895, p. 233); “children, young men and women, were examined in the presence of all on subjects previously assigned, and other subjects to be studied were selected” (p. 235).

This would not be so surprising if the topic were not mentioned so often in the writings of other missionaries at the time. Thomas Barclay, William Campbell, and Hugh Ritchie all complained about a lack of preparedness in candidates for baptism. Their reports show that sometimes the main obstacle to conversion was not a hostile local environment but the missionaries themselves, who did not want to baptize and bring into the church those who were poorly prepared:

I was very sorry for one aged brother who wished to be received, but whose knowledge of spiritual things was most painfully defective. He appeared to have no conception of the Scriptural meaning of sin, and of his need of pardon through the merits of Another . . . when the people do show anything like sustained attention, their puzzled expression shows plainly that they have failed to catch our meaning. (Campbell 1889, pp. 26, 52)

Mackay, on the other hand, never criticized believers and converts for a lack of faith. *From Far Formosa* contains almost no negative critique or comment regarding the real situation in the church. It appears that Mackay placed little emphasis on examination and therefore that he laid equally little stress on a convert’s knowledge of doctrine. On analyzing Mackay’s private diaries, Rohrer (2010, p. 222) noticed that “even in his private journals he rarely engaged in theological reflection . . . ” But just because it is not mentioned in the book, it does not follow that Mackay did not examine believers or care about their knowledge of Scripture, and from historical materials, we know this was indeed not the case. According to a letter published in (*The Messenger and Missionary Record* 1874),

Mackay examined candidates for baptism, as did Ritchie and Dr Dickson from the southern mission, but admitted only a small number of them. Given his family background and educational training—Mackay’s family had a long religious history and he himself went through theological training—it is likely that Mackay was indeed interested in building a stable and deeply rooted church with well-educated believers who knew their doctrine. I propose a different explanation: Mackay did not give so much significance to examination because his book had another purpose and another readership in mind. Aiming primarily to show the success of his mission, he would be unlikely to highlight any great difficulties. Rather, he would narrate a story of success and consistent progress, and this would mean including some strategies and excluding others.

7. Conclusions

Of the pioneer Canadian missionaries . . . Mackay stands out, because he alone created the mission in north Taiwan. This is not to denigrate the efforts of those who for a short time helped him, but without Mackay there would very probably have been nothing. (Ion 2006, p. 82)

The aim of this paper was to analyze the missionary endeavors and strategies of the first Canadian Presbyterian missionary in Taiwan, George Leslie Mackay, as we find in the book *From Far Formosa: The Islands, Its People and Missions*. Mackay’s mission was arguably more successful than other missionary efforts in Taiwan, so it is important to explore his methods and gain insights into how his mission was carried out. Reconstructing a real historical part of the life of the church is not entirely possible, but based on *From Far Formosa*, we can reconstruct the aims and strategies the author himself highlighted.

This paper sought to provide a fresh interpretation of Mackay’s contribution to Christian mission in Taiwan. It is indeed necessary in contemporary scholarship to observe historical cross-cultural interactions and to consider them in new ways. In the traditional interpretation, missionaries are often seen as profit seekers, and Mackay has sometimes been interpreted in a similar manner (for example by Rohrer). But, in this paper, the aim was to give a voice to Mackay’s publication and to provide a more symmetrical approach to mission history.

The analysis revealed that Mackay most often mentioned three particular missionary strategies, which were therefore considered the most important to the research. These strategies were medical mission, the establishment of native ministers, and regular visits to already established congregations alongside tours to new areas for potential evangelization. The strategies obviously overlapped. Medicine was used to diagnose and heal patients, and at the same time to earn their trust and convert them to Christianity. Many missionaries adopted the strategy of using medical care to guide people towards the Christian faith, that is, to bring them to faith by showing them that Christianity offers tools that can heal their bodies. Another crucial part of Mackay’s mission was visiting churches outside Danshui, the city which formed the base for his mission. As well as assisting with the expansion of the church, such visits enabled Mackay to supervise and encourage newly established Christian groups. Medical mission and ministry tours to already established groups of believers were less controversial than the other arm of Mackay’s strategy, namely delegating power and responsibility to native ministers. Mackay’s dream was to establish a self-sufficient, self-governing, and self-propagating native church. He therefore wanted to be the only foreign missionary supervising the mission in northern Taiwan and insisted on being the only person with the authority to select native ministers for the work.

Combining the three missionary strategies, Mackay trained native ministers to be able to perform at least some medical treatments and his students also joined him on his tours. By such means, Mackay nurtured and supported a model of sustainable ministry so that the mission would continue to thrive long beyond his lifetime, which indeed it did. The Presbyterian Church in Taiwan is based on the foundation provided by Mackay; his legacy lives on within the church’s narrative and he is also remembered in broader society.

Mackay described other missionary methods. Some are barely mentioned in *From Far Formosa* but do appear in the writings of other missionaries working in Taiwan at the time. Most notable among these are education and the examination of potential converts. Mackay's northern mission used different means from those of the mission in southern Taiwan. Some researchers suggest that the first missionary efforts took place through modernization, improving health services, and education. Mackay never mentioned education as a conversion strategy, however, and always connected it with the training of ministers, which is somewhat different. Neither did Mackay appear to place any great emphasis on the "examination" of believers. I suggest that this was not because he did not believe in increasing his converts' knowledge of doctrine, but because he was writing his book for a particular audience. Mackay's (auto)biography was written in almost hagiographical form. In this genre of literature, it was not uncommon to place little emphasis on detailed reports but rather to focus on contemporary missionary ideals and exotic imagery. His goal was not to describe the real situation of the church or to highlight any difficulties but to narrate the success and progress of his mission and thereby encourage more support for it back home. Mackay was a focused individual. He no doubt put much time and effort into researching and thinking about his missionary aims and what he wanted to achieve through the writing of the book. Just as his book had a specific aim, so did his mission, namely, to adopt strategies which had the potential to be the most beneficial for his missionary effort.

This paper focused on a relatively small area of interest so there is plenty of scope for extending the research; the memoir *From Far Formosa* certainly has more to reveal about the issues faced by the first missionary in northern Taiwan. A text is always written for some specific purpose, and the purpose itself in turn reveals the situation "behind the text." A similar method of research can be used for answering further questions and for exploring the work of other missionaries, so that a more detailed picture of the story of the first mission in Taiwan can be revealed.

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