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Voice of the Saints in Taiwan

By Po Nien (Felipe) Chou and Mei Wah Sin (Petra) Chou

Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2017

Reviewed by Richard B. Stamps

In writing this book, the Chous had no ax to grind, no theory to prove or defend. Their purpose was simply to create a record of the history of the Church in Taiwan by collecting information from the people who lived it. Their book comprises a timeline of events concerning the Church in Taiwan, centered on the faith-promoting experiences of the Latter-day Saints who live there.

The book begins with a quick review of early Church efforts to penetrate the Chinese realm, from the work of Hosea Stout, one of the first missionaries to China in 1853, to the apostolic visit of David O. McKay in 1921, to the establishment of missions in China and Southeast Asia in 1955. The main focus of the Chous' work, however, starts with the arrival of the first four missionaries to Taiwan in 1956 (25). At the time, Taiwan was part of the Southern Far East Mission, which extended south from Okinawa, Japan, and included Taiwan, Hong Kong, the Philippines, all of Southeast Asia, India, and Pakistan, in addition to all of mainland China. The book includes the stories of the first waves of missionaries and their successes and details the expansion of Church branches and districts (25). Between 1959 and 1965, the Church in Taiwan matured, with Apostle Mark E. Petersen dedicating the land for the preaching of the gospel and the Book of Mormon being translated into Chinese. In their discussion of the Book of Mormon translation, the authors do a comprehensive job of detailing the challenges and controversies, especially the disagreements that arose between the Chinese translator and the American working on the translation—a subject not frequently addressed publicly (77–95). The book then walks through the Church's purchase of property in Taiwan, the official registration of the Church, and the building of Taiwan's first chapels—all told through the words of people who were personally involved in the events.

The 1970s saw several more milestones in the Church's growth, the most notable perhaps being the creation of the Taiwan Mission in 1971. Between 1970 and 1975, regional Church representatives provided more training to local leaders, service missionaries were called to teach community members about hygiene and health, and the Church Educational System was introduced in Taiwan. Efforts were made to aid missionaries in their service by teaching them the local culture and customs. A key event during this time was the translation of the Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price into Chinese. As the Church matured, more and more Church leaders from Salt Lake City visited Taiwan. Most notably, Church President Spencer W. Kimball and his wife, Camilla, came in August 1975. *Voice of the Saints in Taiwan* includes touching memories of Church members' experiences as they planned for and hosted these visitors from Church headquarters (180–86).

During the period from 1975 to 1985, stakes and wards were organized. Membership increased, which justified the building of a temple for the Latter-day Saints. As reported by the interviews in the book, this event was a spiritual boost for all involved. Around the same time, the Church acquired a building across from the temple and another building that became the Chin Hua Chieh Stake Center chapel. This seven-story structure became the Church Administrative Building, which housed the translation office and the mission office and served as a residence for the mission and temple presidents and their families. Consolidating these spaces into one location created a sense of community and convenience for the Church members there—they could go to one location to have meetings, attend the temple, and buy Church-related materials. At the end of the decade, in 1989, a joint project between the Church and local libraries to microfilm family histories was completed. This expanding of genealogical research and resource gathering was critical in supporting future genealogical work in Taiwan and mainland China.

In 1996, a celebration was held to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of missionaries coming to Taiwan. This was the first celebration of its kind in the area, and events included firesides, poetry and art contests, a large exhibit in the Taipei Stake Center, and the publication of a book called *The Taiwan Saints*. The book was the first of its kind in the Church; instead of being a translation from English, it was written in Chinese, by Chinese, and for the Chinese. This celebration set the stage for later fiftieth and sixtieth anniversary celebrations. Another important event was a major earthquake that hit Taiwan on September 21, 1999, after which members and missionaries teamed up in the

rescue efforts. Just months before the earthquake, Church leaders had emphasized self-reliance and instructed Church members to prepare seventy-two-hour kits. According to the Chou's research, many saw the timing of the leaders' instruction as being divinely inspired, which strengthened many testimonies and resulted in a doubling of baptisms in the Taichung Mission (303–5).

As the world entered a new millennium, the Church in Taiwan continued to grow and develop. In the years between 2000 and 2004, early-morning seminary and *Preach My Gospel* were introduced. The name of the Church in the Chinese language was also retranslated. This had been a subject of discussion among Church members and leaders for many years. The former translation for “Latter-day Saints,” *moshi shengtū*, had a heavy apocalyptic and doomsday feel that frightened people. Indeed, the term *moshi* in some dictionaries meant “doomsday.” The new translation replaced the term with *houqi*—creating *houqi shengtū*, or “latter times” (228–40). The period from 2004 to 2016 was period of great expansion and activity. A large, multipurpose Church office building was built and dedicated in 2005, which gave the Church more of a physical presence in Taiwan. In 2016, the fiftieth anniversary was celebrated, and the translation of scriptures and key Church terminology were updated. As the Church was growing in strength, leaders could see the need and benefit of having leaders who were from local Taiwanese communities, and several Taiwanese were called to be Seventies and to other leadership positions to move the Church forward.

The book concludes with an upbeat, positive, and optimistic view of the future. An epilogue, titled “Hastening the Work of Salvation and Facing the Future with Faith,” reflects that strength gained from past generations can help members look forward to a bright future for Taiwan (429–52).

Although this book was not written by professional historians, every effort was made to document the source of each entry. The story told in this book is well documented and supported by data and personal interviews, yet it would not be classified as strictly academic. The authors, who have spent much of their lives serving in Church education roles, are active members of the Church and do not hide their faithful perspective. The book is written for members of the Church and is largely meant to be faith promoting. As such, the book may overlook some of the more challenging issues the Church in Taiwan faced over the years. For instance, the book does not address the issue of low Church activity rates among members, which, based on my experience in Taiwan as a mission president,

was especially common among the second generation, whose convert parents had spent so much time at Church and Church-related activities that the children were not as well grounded in the gospel. Another issue I observed was a number of converts joining the Church, not out of deep personal conviction, but as a stepping stone to immigrate to America. There is also the complicated issue of American Church members marrying Taiwanese Latter-day Saints (as a result of interactions on missions or at Church schools, like BYU–Hawaii), which removed many strong Taiwanese Saints from their homeland. The book is also lacking a comprehensive bibliography of all sources.

While these omissions may bother an academic researcher, most Church members will find this an inspirational read. This book is a personal labor of love for the authors, which is seen in their romanticizing language and use of Chinese characters for people's names. The reader benefits from the inclusion of tidbits that only true insiders would know—like the discussion of “stems and branches” used to record days and years in Chinese culture (429) and the fact that some Taiwan missionaries attended the MTC in the Philippines. The book features several historical photos, many of which were previously unpublished. The twelve appendices—which include a chronology of Church events, the text of dedicatory prayers given in the area, and lists of Taiwanese Church units, seminaries and institutes, Church leaders, and more—will become a one-stop shop of data for years to come (455–516).

This book will be of great interest to those with a connection to Taiwan, including current, past, and future missionaries. Those who are interested in the history of missionary work throughout the globe, and particularly its successes, may also find the book valuable. Although the focus of this book is on Taiwan, the book at times provides a larger picture of the Church in the East and thus may also appeal to a broader audience interested in the history of the Church in the Chinese realm. I highly recommend the read for people looking for an overview of the story of the Church in Taiwan.

Richard B. Stamps, emeritus professor at Oakland University in Rochester, Michigan, received his BA and MA in anthropology, archaeology, and Asian studies from BYU and a PhD from Michigan State University. He served as a young missionary in Taiwan (1962–1965), conducted graduate research there (1972–1973), and served as president of the Taiwan Taipei Mission (1994–1997). His experience in Taiwan was published in “The Cultural Impact of Mormon Missionaries on Taiwan,” *BYU Studies* 41, no. 4 (2002): 103–14.