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The LDS Church in Taiwan: The First Three Years

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Introduction¹

Located approximately one hundred miles east of continental Asia, the island of Taiwan has a rich and complicated history.² The history of Taiwan intersected with the history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) when LDS military personnel were stationed there in 1955. This led to the celebrated date of June 4, 1956,³ when the ship

1. At the outset of this article I express appreciation to the many people in Taiwan and throughout the world who contributed to this research. Dozens of people have provided extensive help in preparing this manuscript. Although space does not permit me to express gratitude to each of them, I would like to acknowledge the generous assistance provided by Liang Shih Wei and his associates in Taiwan. The efforts of my research assistant Jaron Hansen and Ardis Kay Smith at the LDS Church History Library were also extremely helpful.

2. Several aspects of the history of Taiwan are disputed for political reasons. These issues are beyond the scope of this article; for a more comprehensive history of Taiwan, see Jonathan Manthorpe, *Forbidden Nation: A History of Taiwan* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

3. There have been some small discrepancies in the literature about this important date. Some have reported that the missionaries arrived on June 2, 1956. This is based on a statement from H. Grant Heaton, Southern Far East Mission Historical Report, June 1956, 2 (hereafter cited as SFEM), which says, "June 2, 1956. Four missionaries left Hong Kong aboard the SS Szechuen enroute to Formosa [Taiwan] where they will begin work there on that Nationalist Island." However, the travel to Taiwan took two days; the missionaries arrived in June 4, 1956 (SFEM, September 30, 1958, 18). Melvin Fish lists their arrival date as June 3, 1956. Melvin C. Fish, *Missionary Experiences of Melvin C. Fish* (Cedar City, Utah: Melvin C. Fish, 2006), 41; however, he later stated that it was on June 4, 1956. Personal communication, December 5, 2014. Weldon Kitchen's 2013 published account of

SS Szechuen⁴ carried among its passengers four LDS missionaries.⁵ While this would be the first time LDS missionaries would begin proselyting efforts in Taiwan, Christian missionaries had sailed into Taiwan's harbor centuries previously. The purpose of the present study is to provide glimpses into the efforts of early LDS missionaries in establishing the LDS church in Taiwan between the time of their arrival on June 4, 1956, and the dedication of the island by Elder Mark E. Peterson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles on June 1, 1959. I will first provide a brief background of initial Christian proselyting efforts, as well as an overview of contemporary issues in Taiwan during the decade prior to the arrival of the LDS missionaries.

The precise date of the first Christian missionaries arriving in Taiwan is unclear; however, it is likely they came with early Dutch explorers who arrived in Taiwan in 1624.⁶ In 1626, Spanish missionaries entered the Keelung harbor (the same harbor entered by the LDS missionaries 330 years later) and began proselyting initiatives.⁷ Although efforts were made to convert native Taiwanese to Protestantism or Catholicism, little progress occurred and ultimately the Europeans were driven out of Taiwan by military forces from China.⁸

his experiences in Taiwan also lists the arrival date as June 3; however, upon consulting his June 1956 journal entries, he found that the arrival date was in fact June 4, 1956, and he had three separate journal entries for June 2, 3, and 4, with the arrival to Taiwan clearly occurring on June 4. See Weldon Kitchen, *The Taiwan Experiences of Weldon Kitchen* (American Fork, Utah: Weldon Kitchen, 2013), 7–8; and Weldon Kitchen, journal, June 2–4, 1956; copy in possession of author.

4. This is the spelling used in The Southern Far East Mission Historical Report, June 30, 1956, 2. The document has a variant spelling of “SS Szechuan.” While there are different forms of Romanized Chinese writing, in this article I generally follow the spelling of the cited sources. In addition, in Chinese, names are usually presented with the last name appearing first. I utilize this convention in this paper.

5. For additional general context see Feng Xi, *A History of Mormon-Chinese Relations: 1849–1993* (PhD diss., Brigham Young University, 1994); and Lanier R. Britsch, *From the East* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1998). Their work on the church history in Taiwan was foundational to this present study.

6. Hollington Kong Tong, *Christianity in Taiwan: A History* (Taipei: China Post, 1961).

7. José Eugenio Borao, “The Dominican Missionaries in Taiwan (1626–1642),” in *Missionary Approaches and Linguistics in Mainland China and Taiwan* (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2001), 101–32.

8. This is a simplification of an outgrowth of a conflict between the Ming and Qing dynasties. For additional details, see Murray A. Rubinstein, “Taiwanese Protestantism in Time and Space, 1865–1988,” in *Taiwan: Economy, Society and History*, ed. E.K.Y. Chen, Jack F. Williams, and Joseph Wong (Hong Kong: Centre of Asian Studies, 1991).

In 1858, treaties stemming from the Second Opium War allowed for missionaries to enter portions of China, including Taiwan. The following century was marked with multiple proselyting efforts, particularly by the Presbyterians and Catholics.⁹ This time period was also one of difficulty in Taiwan, as it was ceded to Japan as an outgrowth of the First Sino-Japanese war in 1895. The Japanese initially allowed missionary work to continue, although they restricted non-Presbyterian Protestant religions from proselyting, believing that denominational differences could cause difficulties. This policy was later relaxed in the 1920s as additional Protestant denominations were allowed to establish congregations in Taiwan.¹⁰

In the latter part of the 1930s and early years of the 1940s Japan utilized Taiwan as a launching pad for armed conflict in World War II. At the end of the war, Allied forces agreed that China would govern Taiwan. While not all Taiwanese were ready for a new government, “overall the Taiwanese masses, war-weary, eager for the normality of peacetime, and hoping for better economic conditions, generally accepted the change in administration and prepared to greet their fellow Han Chinese.”¹¹ However, peace was not immediately forthcoming. China itself was in a civil war between the Kuomintang party and the Communist Party of China. Ultimately, the Communist Party of China won this war, and approximately two million Kuomintang leaders, soldiers, supporters, and refugees fled to Taiwan. The Kuomintang leaders made Taiwan their relocated capital of what they referred to as the Republic of China, while the Communist party established the People's Republic of China on mainland China. The time period between 1945 and 1955 was a challenging one as native Taiwanese (most of whom did not speak Mandarin, the most common language of the Kuomintang) dealt with additional changes and also faced the threat of war from the People's Republic of China. However, in 1954 the United States signed a mutual defense treaty with Taiwan, and the fear of war began to subside.

So far as can be determined, the first member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to live in Taiwan was Captain Stanley C. Simiskey, an American military officer who arrived in 1955. Simiskey joined the United States Army Air Corps in 1943. He and his wife Julia had been married for slightly more than three years at the time. Simiskey served in

9. Tong, *Christianity in Taiwan*, 33.

10. Rubinstein, “Taiwanese Protestantism in Time and Space.”

11. Gary Marvin Davison, *A Short History of Taiwan* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2003), 76.

several different locations, including Guam, where he was baptized in 1947. In 1955, Simiskey was again assigned internationally, this time to Taiwan. Although his family would later join him, Simiskey initially traveled to Taiwan alone. En route to Taiwan, Simiskey spent a month at the Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines.¹²

In July 1955, Simiskey met Joseph Fielding Smith, who was traveling to Hong Kong to establish the Southern Far East Mission. Simiskey recorded, “The Apostle’s wife was with him as well as H. Grant Heaton and his wife. Brother Heaton was to be President of the Southern Far East Mission. They set me apart to be the Group Leader in Taiwan when I got there.”¹³

Nearly one year later Heaton would write Simiskey a letter informing him that Heaton was about to send four missionaries to serve in Taiwan. He asked Simiskey to “rent an apartment on the 1st of June so they can move in it [when they arrive on June 4]. . . . Make the rent month by month and do not make any commitment longer than one month. We may want to buy there after we have been there for awhile.”¹⁴ Simiskey followed these instructions and eagerly anticipated the arrival of the first four missionaries to Taiwan.

Early Labors in the Southern Far East Mission

These four missionaries, Elders Duane W. Degn, Melvin C. Fish, Weldon J. Kitchen, and Keith A. Madsen, had already been serving in Hong Kong for a period of several months prior to their arrival in Taiwan. They had all been called to serve in the Southern Far East Mission, a mission which opened in 1955.¹⁵ Elders Degn and Madsen had been two of the first eight missionaries to arrive in the Southern Far East Mission, with Elders Fish and Kitchen following six weeks later. Heaton, their twenty-six-year-old mission president, assigned these four elders to begin learning Mandarin, so they could eventually go to Taiwan and commence the work on that island.

In Hong Kong most people spoke Cantonese, making learning Mandarin very challenging for these missionaries. Missionaries from other

12. Stanley C. Simiskey, “My Story,” personal recollection, July 20, 1999; copy in possession of author.

13. Simiskey, “My Story,” 22.

14. H. Grant Heaton, letter to Stanley Simiskey, May 8, 1956; copy in possession of author.

15. For an overview of the Southern Far East Mission more generally, see Britsch, *From the East*.

denominations also struggled with language issues in Taiwan.¹⁶ In fact, while traveling from the United States to Hong Kong the LDS missionaries received discouraging words about the daunting task that lay before them. Fish recounts, “[While on the voyage to Hong Kong] I had become acquainted with a Catholic priest. When he heard that we were going to Hong Kong where we would be teaching the Chinese people and that we would only be there for three years he laughed and said, ‘There is no way you can be effective at all. I have studied Chinese for six years and I still have trouble carrying on a conversation. How do you expect to learn enough Chinese before you go home to be able to teach anything?’ I responded by saying, ‘We believe in the gift of tongues.’”¹⁷

While the Lord would bless the missionaries with the gift of tongues, they also worked diligently to learn the language. Fish reported on their approach:

For the first month and a half we had full-time Language teachers. We hired a man and his wife who had been English Professors in a major University in China. . . . The husband taught Elder Degn and Elder Madsen for a half a day while his wife was teaching Elder Kitchen and I, then the other half of the day we would switch. That way we were able to hear the language spoken by more than one person. Our routine was to alternate our time spent with the teacher. Each one would spend one hour with the teacher, one on one, then one hour studying alone, and then back with the teacher again. This routine was kept up for ten hours each day. In addition to the language study, we were expected to spend at least three hours a day in studying the gospel.¹⁸

Initial Missionary Efforts in Taipei

After eight months of language learning (the time period was prolonged due to difficulties in obtaining visas), they were ready to go to Taiwan. The missionaries were greeted by Simiskey and his family; they were, in the words of Kitchen, “a godsend to us elders. Our own parents could not have shown more love and concern for our welfare than what was shown to us by the Simiskeys. Before our arrival they had already rented a two-bedroom

16. Christine Louise Lin, “The Presbyterian Church in Taiwan and the Advocacy of Local Autonomy,” *Sino-Platonic Papers* 92 (January 1999), 58.

17. Fish, *Missionary Experiences*, 12.

18. Fish, *Missionary Experiences*, 16.

house for us to live in. They had it completely furnished with bunk beds, dressers, dining table, and chairs.”¹⁹ Thus Simiskey and his family provided critical support to the nascent church in Taiwan.²⁰

In a 1958 mission report, Kitchen reflected on the early weeks of their missionary labors:

Arrangements had been made for us to hold our Sunday services at the Taipei American School. For the first while all meetings were conducted in English. Our tracting work began, but the work went slow at first as our language was still very poor. The people were very kind and courteous and would listen patiently as we were sweating blood trying to speak Chinese. The studying that we had done in Hong Kong seemed to have been useless. Several [people] allowed us to return but showed no interest in the gospel. To make matters worse, we had no literature to leave with them. It wasn’t until the latter end of the summer that we received four copies of the Joseph Smith Story in Chinese.²¹

In addition to the difficulties with the language, missionaries in the Southern Far East Mission, which encompasses Hong Kong, Taiwan, and other locations, found it somewhat difficult to teach investigators everything they needed to learn in the few lessons typically prescribed for missionaries to teach. As a result, President Heaton created a rigorous teaching program that included seventeen lessons to be taught before baptism, followed by an additional twenty lessons taught after baptism. Thus if the missionaries taught an individual once a week, it would take at least four months to prepare that person for baptism, followed by an additional four to five months of post-baptismal instruction.²²

19. Kitchen, *The Taiwan Experiences*, 7–8.

20. When Simiskey was transferred in May of 1957, Lyle Simonson, another serviceman, took his place as branch president. SFEM, June 30, 1957, 1. Following Simonson, Weldon Kitchen was called as branch president. SFEM, June 30, 1958.

21. SFEM, September 30, 1958, 18.

22. H. Grant Heaton and Luana C. Heaton, comps., *A Documentary History of the Chinese Mission 1949–1953, Southern Far East Mission 1955–1959* (Salt Lake City: N.p., 1999), 32, 35–36. Outlines of these lesson plans are as follows: 1. Joseph Smith Story, 2. Book of Mormon, 3. Godhead, 4. Sin and Atonement, 5. Teachings of Christ, 6. Church of God, 7. Apostasy, 8. Restoration of Authority, 9. Restoration of Principles, 10. Baptism, 11. Holy Ghost, 12. Call to Repentance, 13. Introduction to Plan of Salvation, 14. Pre-Existence, 15. Death to Resurrection, 16. Millennium, 17. Judgment. Following baptism, the convert next received the following twenty lessons: 1. Pre-Existence, 2. Creation, 3. Fall of Adam, 4.

It was felt that these lessons were necessary, particularly when teaching individuals with a limited understanding of Christianity. As one of the first missionaries wrote, “Many non-Christians [in Taiwan] don’t think much of Christians. We have to prove we are not just like the others. . . . It’s rather hard to use the Bible as proof when people do not accept the Bible.”²³ In order to enhance the effectiveness of their teaching, missionaries would use flannel board cutouts in order to help people visualize their message.

One interesting phenomenon that the missionaries encountered soon after their arrival was that their movements were tracked by the Taiwanese government. Melvin Fish recorded the following regarding one Eva Wang: “She was a member of the Chinese secret police. She was assigned to keep track of the Mormon Elders. She invited us to an elaborate meal and entertainment about twice a year. It was always a pleasant event. She would ask us a lot of questions. We knew that it was time for her to make her semi-annual report on us. We had nothing to hide so we told her everything she wanted to know. That made it easy for her and we looked forward to our dinner appointments.”²⁴

Another challenge the early missionaries faced was keeping their home secure. Kitchen recalled, “Although each house was protected with an eight foot stone wall around it with broken glass embedded on the top to keep out any intruders, [a] person figured out a way to get over the fence and break into the house. When we returned home, we found the house in complete disarray. Everything was thrown about in search for these items. I had not yet bought a camera and fortunately only had ten American dollars in my dresser drawer, so my loss was rather minimal. However the others lost

Adam to Moses, 5. Children of Israel, 6. Moses to Christ, 7. Birth and Boyhood of Christ, 8. Ministry of Christ, 9. Death and Resurrection of Christ, 10. Christ visits the American Continent, 11. Church of Christ and the Apostles, 1 Peter, 12. Church of Christ and the Apostles II—Paul, 13. Church of Christ and the Apostles III—John, 14. Apostasy—Historical, 15. Apostasy—Doctrinal, 16. Restoration Reformation, 17. Restoration: Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon, 18. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: Revelation, 19. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: Organization, 20. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: Recognized by God.

23. Bernard Knapp, undated letter home. Based on its placement in his mother’s record of his letters, it was likely written in April 1958.

24. Fish, *Missionary Experiences*, 67. The LDS missionaries were not alone in being monitored by the government. Lillian Dickson, a Christian missionary who served among the mountain people of Taiwan, wrote regarding other Christians being monitored by the government. See Lillian Dickson, *These my People: Serving Christ among the Mountain People of Formosa* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1958).

much more. Upon hearing about this incident, one of the American Church members brought us a watchdog.”²⁵ Speaking of this watchdog, early missionary Michael Walker added that her name “was ‘Pandy.’ She was black and white, about 20 to 30 pounds, and a very well-behaved dog. She saved us more than once. . . . Pandy warned us a couple of times, barking in the middle of the night. Both times, as I looked out the front window, I saw someone going back over the fence.”²⁶

The First Baptisms

The first person to be baptized in Taiwan was Robert H. Hinkley Jr., who received this ordinance prior to the missionaries arriving in Taiwan. Hinkley, an active-duty serviceman, had been born in Burley, Idaho, and was stationed in Taiwan. His sister began sending him issues of the *Improvement Era*, and Hinkley grew interested in the church. Hinkley arrived in Taiwan before Simiskey, so he needed to wait until Simiskey was stationed in Taiwan to be baptized. When Simiskey arrived, Hinkley was baptized in the Tam Sui River in April of 1956.²⁷

On July 22, 1956, the second LDS baptism was performed in Taiwan.²⁸ Thomas Kintaro, a member of the military was baptized by President Simiskey and confirmed by Elder Degn. Kintaro’s wife had been an active member of the church and “through association with the missionaries and Branch activities and members, Brother Kintaro grew sufficiently in the gospel to be baptized and eventually ordained to the office of an Elder before departure from [Taiwan].”²⁹

Shortly thereafter, Chin Mu Tsung³⁰ became the first Taiwanese individual to be baptized. Kitchen recounts:

25. Kitchen, *The Taiwan Experiences*, 8–9. See also, SFEM, September 1956, 6.

26. Michael Walker, personal history; copy in possession of author.

27. See “Hinkley, Robert H. Jr.,” obituary posted on KMVT.com, January 25, 2016, <http://www.kmvt.com/content/obituaries/366434451.html>; and Lisa Hansen, “Eulogy of Robert H. Hinkley Jr.”; copy in possession of author.

28. SFEM, September 1956, 6.

29. SFEM, December 1957, 12.

30. The earliest mission records, such as SFEM, December 1956, 3; and SFEM June 30, 1957, 9, refer to this individual as “Richard Chin.” However, another entry refers to “Chin Mu Tsung (Richard)” receiving the Melchizedek priesthood. See SFEM, September 1960, 25. I have assumed this is the same individual as the first Taiwanese individual to be baptized.

[Hinkley] became excited over the missionary spirit and began teaching a Chinese soldier who was assigned to work in his department. This young Chinese soldier had been sent to America for a year to learn some special military strategy in conjunction with his military assignment. With this experience, he had developed a rather good command of the English language. He took on the English name of Richard. The Book of Mormon had not yet been translated into Chinese, but with his English background, he was able to read the Book of Mormon. That, along with what Bob taught him, gave him a testimony of the gospel, which led to his baptism [performed by Brother Hinkley.]³¹



Robert Hinkley baptizing Richard Chin, ca 1956. Photograph courtesy of Weldon Kitchen.

On October 15, 1956, four additional missionaries arrived in Taiwan. They were Lewis F. Wiser, R. Michael Walker, Gary S. Williams, and Mark K. Freebairn.³² Michael Walker reminisced about his first day in Taiwan: “Elders Fish and Madsen had a cottage meeting there that night. I thought it was quite interesting, although I didn’t understand a word of it.”³³ With the

31. Kitchen, *The Taiwan Experiences*, 11.

32. SFEM, December 1956, 1–2.

33. Michael Walker, oral history, telephone interview by author, October 29, 2013.

arrival of four more missionaries, new living quarters were found, with four missionaries living in each home, which also doubled as meeting places.³⁴ As a result, the missionaries began holding church meetings in two separate locations, known as the “Ta An Branch” and the “Chung Shan Branch.”³⁵

While tracting was a primary approach for meeting new investigators, the missionaries also devised more creative ways of making contacts. One of these was sponsoring basketball games so that they could meet people in a less formal setting. The Taiwan Elders reported in a mission newsletter that “The missionaries scheduled a basketball game between themselves and a group of Chinese army officers. They all learned that six months is a long time to be away from the basketball court. The people said that we tied with them but they were probably just being gracious toward us. It was a good way to make friends with the people and may bring contacts to the missionaries.”³⁶

The Death of Keith Madsen

On December 31, 1956, just eleven days after the mission published that cheerful statement about basketball, tragedy struck. Kitchen recorded that while en route to a basketball game with some investigators, “Elder Madsen was carrying the basketball in one hand. . . . We were strung out over a hundred yard span on the road. I was closest to him, maybe ten yards in front of him. As I happened to look back, I saw his front wheel jackknife, throwing Elder Madsen up over the handle bars, causing him to come head first down on the concrete road.”³⁷

Elder Madsen was knocked out and never regained consciousness. Two days later he passed away. President Heaton immediately came to the island, held a funeral service, and made arrangements to take Elder Madsen’s body back to Hong Kong, as no embalming services were available in Taiwan.

President Heaton recounted:

I was devastated by Elder Madsen’s death. When word came of his accident, we immediately offered prayers on his behalf. I felt comforted, and was given some assurance that everything would be alright.

34. SFEM, December 31, 1956, 2.

35. SFEM, December 20, 1956, 6.

36. Ibid.

37. Kitchen, *The Taiwan Experiences*, 13.

When I saw Elder Madsen in the hospital, I still had this feeling of confidence that he would recover. I felt certain that the Lord would bless him to full recovery.

When Elder Williams informed me that Elder Madsen had passed away, the shock was almost more than I could withstand. I could not weep, nor talk. I was helpless and hopeless. For several hours I had to walk by myself to try and recover my senses. When the weeping finally came, it helped to cleanse my soul, but it did not comfort my spirit. . . . I became angry with the Lord for letting this happen. I was angry with myself for not being able to provide better medical treatment for Elder Madsen.

Finally, just prior to shipping the body to the United States, a dream came to me in which I was arguing with the Lord about Elder Madsen. I demanded to know why He would let such a thing happen to a young man serving a mission? The answer I received was a rebuke from the Lord. He seemed to say to me, “*Why are you so concerned about Elder Madsen. He has been called to another calling and you do not have any responsibility over him. Why should you be angry if I have called him for My own purposes.*” This was not a vision, it was only a dream, but I awakened with a sweet calming spirit which took away all the anger, and the doubt, but not the remorse. I did surely wish the Lord had a better method of calling people He needed, and I doubted if He needed Elder Madsen as much as we did, at that time.³⁸

One week later President Heaton returned to Taiwan to hold an important meeting with the seven remaining missionaries. Kitchen wrote that at that meeting,

President Heaton . . . was not only down in heart over the loss of Elder Madsen, but he was also discouraged over the lack of success we were having with our missionary efforts. The missionaries in Hong Kong were having great success at this time, and President Heaton was considering pulling us out of Taiwan and returning us to Hong Kong, where our efforts would be a lot more rewarding. We had at this time

38. H. Grant Heaton, in Heaton and Heaton, *A Documentary History of the Chinese Mission*, 523, emphasis in the original. Kitchen later stated, “We received a tape of the funeral from his parents. Joseph Fielding Smith gave a talk at the funeral and stated that the Lord had a more important mission for him in opening up the missionary work for millions of Chinese in the spirit world.” Heaton and Heaton, *A Documentary History*, 497–98.

been in Taiwan for seven months and had really fallen in love with the place. Our hearts were very heavy, and we despaired over the thought of leaving Taiwan. We pleaded with President Heaton and begged for a little more time before making this decision. He finally conceded and told us he would wait four months before making the decision. With additional energy we engulfed ourselves in the missionary work. We pushed ourselves to the very limit.”³⁹

The Baptism of Chiu Hung Hsiung and Tseng I Chang⁴⁰

These additional efforts led to the first two individuals being baptized by the missionaries; the previous individuals baptized in Taiwan had been taught and baptized by the branch members. On April 27, 1957, the missionaries performed their first baptism in Taiwan, in a location up Wu Lai Canyon.⁴¹ The first of the two individuals who were baptized that day was Chiu Hung Hsiung (Richard), baptized by Elder Degn.⁴²

Chiu had been one of the individuals with whom the missionaries were going to play basketball with on the day of Madsen’s fatal accident, and he was instrumental in helping the missionaries contact other investigators given his language skills. Chiu recounted, “The missionaries were, initially, quite dependent on people who could speak both languages. . . . They were not able to express themselves adequately . . . so whenever I was available I would translate [and] teach.”⁴³ Kitchen provided an additional description of how important Chiu was to the initial efforts of the church in Taiwan:

Dick [Richard Chiu] had a pretty good understanding of English, and thus became a big asset to our work. The Book of Mormon had not yet been translated into Chinese, so it became necessary to do some onsite, local translating to convey some of our messages. Dick became a vital link in this regard. Dick Chiu expressed his desire to be baptized. He displayed a strong testimony in the Church—being faithful in every

39. Kitchen, *The Taiwan Experiences*, 13–14. See also, personal record of Michael Walker, May 6, 1957; copy in possession of author.

40. There are variant spellings of the name “Tseng I Chang” in various SFEM entries. See SFEM, June 1957, 5; June 1958, 3, 14.

41. For a more complete account regarding this site, see Trent Toone, “Weldon Kitchen and the Baptismal Waters of Taiwan’s Wu-lai Canyon,” *Deseret News*, Thursday, January 9, 2014.

42. SFEM, June 30, 1957, 5.

43. Chiu Hung Hsiung, oral history, telephone interview by author, November 22, 2013.

regard. He was willing to sacrifice anything for the Church. He even offered to give up his bike, his only earthly possession, if that was what the Lord wanted. Another time he showed up for Church right in the middle of a typhoon, with wind gales up to about 100 mph. His faith was certainly not waning.⁴⁴

An understanding of the gospel came naturally to Chiu. Reflecting on his experiences in learning from the missionaries, Chiu said, “I believe in the church as they explained it to me. . . . The missionaries found it easy to communicate with me and I believed everything they told me, from Joseph Smith story on. . . . The church is very natural to me.”⁴⁵ Speaking of the day he was baptized he said, “I had the sense that this is where I belonged.”⁴⁶

The second person to be baptized that day was Tseng I Chang. He was baptized by Elder Kitchen who recorded the experience of how they first met:

It was during a morning tracting session, November 21, 1956, that Elder Wisner and I rang a doorbell and were greeted by a lovely woman with two small children standing by her side. We introduced ourselves as missionaries from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. She acted very excited and invited us in for a drink of water. As she served us, we told her that we had a special message that we wanted to share with her regarding a modern prophet who had been visited by God. She seemed very interested, but expressed her desire of having her husband also hear this message. . . . [W]e returned at the appointed hour. We were very graciously invited into their very tiny house. The spirit was strong as I told the Joseph Smith story. They both listened very intently, and at the conclusion of the discussion Brother Tseng bore his testimony that the story was true and the church that was created as its result was indeed God’s true church.⁴⁷

As the missionaries continued to instruct Tseng, they were nervous to teach him about the commandments such as the Word of Wisdom and

44. Kitchen, *The Taiwan Experiences*, 14.

45. Chiu Hung Hsiung, oral history.

46. *Ibid.*

47. Kitchen, *The Taiwan Experiences*, 12. An interesting side note to this story is that the woman herself was already Christian; she did not convert to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, preferring her own denomination. However, she was happy to support her husband in learning more about the church.

tithing. Although Tseng did not drink alcohol or smoke, he did, like most Taiwanese, drink tea. On April 3, 1957, Michael Walker recorded in his journal, “Tonight we gave Mr. Tseng the call to repentance. We asked him about baptism and he said he would like to be baptized. He also said he would obey all the commandments. He wondered about tea but said if God said no tea that was good enough for him. Tea is very hard for the Chinese to give up.”⁴⁸

However, the missionaries had saved the most difficult invitation for last. They knew the Tseng family was not wealthy, and they worried that the requirement to give ten percent of their income to the church would cause them to lose interest in conversion. Kitchen recounts:

I took a deep breath and presented the law of tithing, supporting the law by reading the scripture in Malachi 3:8–10. When I finished, Brother Tseng didn’t say a word. I decided in my anxiety about the presentation, my Chinese was so poor that he didn’t understand a word I had said. I decided to go through it again, making sure I was saying the words correctly. At the conclusion, Brother Tseng still did not say a word. In desperation, I decided to go through the presentation one more time, making VERY SURE I said every word perfect. When I finished, Brother Tseng looked at me and asked me a question. “What is the problem, Elder Kitchen, don’t you believe it?” I was completely humbled. He had understood everything the first time through and had accepted all.⁴⁹

The next Sunday, Tseng paid his tithing. Approximately one year later, on April 20, 1958, Tseng would become the first Taiwanese individual to receive the Melchizedek priesthood.⁵⁰ Speaking about these individuals and other investigators with whom the missionaries were working, President Bringhurst (counselor in the mission presidency) observed, “It is my impression that those people the Elders have contacted and are holding meetings with are some of the finest in the world. It was my privilege . . . to interview two of their contacts for baptism [Chiu and Tseng]. It was a thrill to see how fully they understand the Gospel and hear the testimonies they have of it. It was my feeling that the Elders have some contacts, who when baptized,

48. Personal history of Michael Walker, April 3, 1957; copy in possession of author.

49. Kitchen, *The Taiwan Experiences*, 14.

50. SFEM, June 30, 1958, 3.

will establish a strong foundation and from then on the work will progress very rapidly.”⁵¹



The first baptism performed by the missionaries, April 27, 1957. From left to right, Elder Wiser, Elder Kitchen, Richard Chiu, Elder Freebairn, Elder Degn, Tseng I Chang, Elder Walker, Photograph courtesy of Weldon Kitchen.

In a mission report dated June 30, 1957, Elder Gary Williams similarly sounded an optimistic note, writing, “The church now has nine members and it will soon double and re-double that number. The Chinese members are working in the organization. They are fine workers with strong faith.”⁵²

Challenges to the Work

Although missionary work began to progress more quickly after the baptisms of Chiu and Tseng, there were still difficulties. One of these was a series of anti-American riots that took place in the spring of 1957. In a report written by the Taiwan missionaries, they stated:

During the past month doubtless the most noteworthy bit of news is the riot we had here. . . . The riot had its beginning in the court martial

51. SFEM, March 31, 1957, 2.

52. SFEM, June 30, 1957, 9.

of an American soldier who killed a Chinese man. The American was ruled innocent on self-defense, but the Chinese didn't see it that way. . . .

They stormed the Embassy and sacked it. All American persons were told to go home and stay. This included us [the missionaries.] About 6:00 PM the Simiskeys came and got us and took us to their house which is in the US section. The Chinese government sent many troops to this section to guard it. All was quite safe; nevertheless we took turns sitting up and doing guard duty.⁵³

Because of difficulties such as the one just described, the church created "a worldwide emergency evacuation plan in the event of civil or military disorders anywhere in the world."⁵⁴ The code phrase to prepare for evacuation was "Prepare Books for Shipment." President Heaton recounted the events surrounding a trial run of the emergency system.

After several weeks of discussion with the missionaries, we devised a plan to send cables to each of the Branch and District Presidents to "Prepare Books for Shipment. . . ." We put President Bringhurst on a plane for a one hour trip to Taipei, and waited for one and a half hours, and then sent the messages. Unfortunately, due to weather problems, President Bringhurst's flight could not land for some time, and so the missionaries, when they received the message were on their own. Two of the missionaries sent cables to their parents that they were being evacuated. This had been one of the most important 'do not do' items in the plan, but they did it. One kindhearted missionary gave all his clothes away, and was ready to leave by the time President Bringhurst arrived at the Taiwan Mission home.⁵⁵

Although the threat of evacuation and rioting continued for a period of time, Gary Williams noted, "The May riots . . . [do not] seem to have had any kind of a negative [e]ffect; but it has knitted the Americans and Chinese closer together."⁵⁶

International challenges continued to persist, including the 1958 Taiwan Strait Crisis, in which the People's Republic of China (mainland China) and

the Republic of China (Taiwan) exchanged intense fire. Bernard Knapp, an early missionary, had been out on his mission for only a short time period when he recorded speaking with Heaton about this challenging circumstance. Knapp wrote, "He [Heaton] told us about the situation of the Taiwan straits and the chance of war and expressed that we think about it and on the following morning express our thoughts in our testimony meeting."⁵⁷

Knapp recorded that all of the Elders felt confident in the Lord's protection and did not want to leave Taiwan. While Knapp wrote, "I am thankful for the great peace of mind that I have concerning this tense war situation,"⁵⁸ he also noted that as time went on other missionaries felt differently. He recorded, "My companion is always worrying. . . . [H]e talks to contacts during cottage meetings about it. . . . [H]e writes 2 or 3 letters a day about it."⁵⁹ Notwithstanding the very real challenge that the missionaries faced during this period of confrontation, the clashes began to dissipate and missionary work was continued unabated.

A difficulty subtler than troubled international relations was the local work of identifying real estate that the church could purchase, so as to develop a feeling of permanence in the island. At the end of 1958, President Heaton recorded, "While in Taipei I contacted another attorney to see if he would represent us in the registration of the Church there. He looked over our program and then refused to take our case. This is the third attorney who has refused to represent us in the legal work necessary there. I do not know if there is any organized opposition or not. In each case it seems to be just the individual hesitance of the men to take religious attachments into legal work."⁶⁰

Six months later W. Brent Hardy, second counselor in the Mission Presidency likewise felt frustrated with the difficulty of purchasing property. He wrote:

The need for a chapel in Taipei was becoming very apparent and so a lawyer was engaged for the purpose of registering the Church in Taiwan and assisting in the purchase of property. The organization of government, and the difficulty of red tape made progress on this point

53. Elder Gary Williams, in SFEM, June 30, 1957, 16.

54. H. Grant Heaton, in Heaton and Heaton, *A Documentary History of the Chinese Mission*, 108.

55. *Ibid.*

56. SFEM, June 30, 1957, 9.

57. Bernard Knapp, "Record of Events in the Mission Field," dated 1958, 22; copy in possession of author.

58. *Ibid.*, 24.

59. *Ibid.*

60. SFEM, December 31, 1958, 1.

very slow. Some difficulty also was experienced in connection with obtaining proper legal documents from the Church Offices. After about six months of letter writing and such the papers were finally delivered. However in order to become registered one must own land. This must be given to the Church because an unregistered organization cannot buy land.⁶¹

Although Heaton and Hardy continually made efforts to purchase property on behalf of the church, it would not be until 1962 that the church would purchase its first piece of property in Taiwan.⁶²

In Spite of Cultural Challenges, Missionary Work Accelerates

Notwithstanding large-scale problems, such as Taiwan–U.S. relations or purchasing real estate, missionary work continued to accelerate in Taiwan. While the Quarterly Mission Report dating June 30, 1957, recorded just two baptisms for Taiwan, the next entry (dated September 30, 1957) listed the names of twenty-six individuals who had been baptized and confirmed.⁶³ This rapid acceleration of baptisms, of course, reflected the lengthy time period required to teach all of the prescribed lessons. Fish noted, “By September 1957 our meetings had grown to the point that there was not enough room, so instead of having two separate Chinese branches in our homes, we rented a very large mansion in the middle of the city. It had a garage big enough that we could fix it up as a chapel that would accommodate at least 150 people and a front room for the Junior Sunday School and Primary that would accommodate at least 90 people. There were several rooms that could be used as classrooms. The eight missionaries also all lived there together.”⁶⁴ Growth continued to occur and on October 27, 1957, Michael Walker recorded in his journal, “We had a very nice church service today . . . [at] Sunday School we had over 90 people out. So many people have been baptized I don’t know who is a member and who isn’t any more. I never thought the day would come when I didn’t know all the members.”⁶⁵

61. SFEM, June 30, 1959, 16.

62. SFEM, December 31, 1962, 3. For a more complete account of this purchase, see John Hilton III. “‘One of the Great Moments of the History of the Church’: The Construction of the First Chapel in the Chinese Realm,” *Journal of Mormon History* 42, no. 3, 211–34.

63. SFEM, September 30, 1957, 2–3.

64. SFEM, September 30, 1957, 1.

65. Michael Walker, personal history, October 27, 1957; copy in possession of author.

One of the individuals baptized during this time period was Chen Lin Shu Liang. In an interview recorded forty-four years later, Chen reflected on her experience in joining the church: “In 1957 on a rainy day in spring, two elders knock on my door. At that time we lived in a bungalow, and we have a yard. So when I opened the door, I saw the two Americans. They asked me whether they could go to my house and talk with me because we were face-to-face. So I said, ‘Okay, you may come in.’”⁶⁶

Sister Chen arranged a time for the missionaries for her to meet her husband, Chen Meng Yu, as well. Brother and Sister Chen reported that the missionaries who taught them were extremely faithful and consistently made their appointments. Sister Chen recounted, “One day it rains very, very hard, and we thought they will not come, but there at that time, two o’clock, okay, the bell rings. So they got all wet together. . . . We said, ‘It’s raining so hard that you need not have come.’ They said, ‘Oh, it doesn’t matter for us. God’s job is most important.’ So we were moved very much. We thought, ‘They are really [are] God’s servant[s].’ Yes, they worked so hard and so dedicated.”⁶⁷

Joining the LDS church was not easy, as it meant giving up many cultural traditions. In fact, there were many cultural traditions that proved to be barriers for other Christian churches as well. For example, Gregory P. Hunt noted in his research on evangelistic techniques with Chinese Christians that a serious barrier to overcome among the people of Taiwan is the tradition of ancestor worship.⁶⁸ While ancestor worship was an issue for Christian evangelizers, perhaps more pressing issues for LDS missionaries pertained to the Word of Wisdom. For example, Sister Chen said, “In our Chinese party, they always toast to each other. So if they don’t drink coffee or wine or tea, their partners will think that [they are] very strange.”⁶⁹

Liang Jun Sheng, who was baptized in August of 1958 and would later become the first Taiwanese branch president,⁷⁰ also discussed the challenge

66. Chen Meng-yu and Lin Shu-liang, oral history, interview by Melvin P. Thatcher, Taipei, Taiwan, October 22, 2001, OH 2947, LDS Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah; hereafter CHL.

67. Chen Meng-yu and Lin Shu-liang, oral history.

68. Gregory P. Hunt, “A Study of the Effectiveness of Evangelistic Techniques with Chinese Christians: With Applications of the Mission Field of Taiwan,” A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Church Growth and Cross-Cultural Studies Graduate School of Religion of Liberty University, May 1987, 14.

69. Chen Meng-yu and Lin Shu-liang, oral history.

70. There is some discrepancy in the records regarding this point. President H. Grant Heaton in the SFEM, September 1958, states “In connection with the visit to the [Taiwan]

of giving up tea. Although he did not have any challenges with coffee, tobacco, or alcohol, Liang did not like the taste of water and frequently would put tea leaves in the water. He told the missionaries that once he converted he wanted to live the Word of Wisdom completely. He had a large supply of tea leaves; after he exhausted it, he was baptized. Liang demonstrated his great faith, not only in giving up tea, but in his subsequent church service. Liang said, "After I was baptized, I was called to be the supervisor of Sunday school and Sunday school teacher. I was not a Christian before and hardly read Bible and the only thing I have is the 16 classes I got when I was an investigator. It was difficult for me to be a teacher in Sunday school especially because the book we used in Sunday school was an English book."⁷¹ Liang would spend a week preparing his lesson and work with Elder Wisser, one of the missionaries before delivering it.⁷² This level of resolution to fulfill a calling is indicative of the efforts of many early Taiwanese converts.

District, I have discussed the reorganization of the Taipei Branch with the missionaries. It has been decided to Brother Cheng [Tseng I Chang], now first counselor in as Branch President [incomplete sentence in original]. He has chosen Brother Meng Yu Chen as his second counselor and Brother Gary will be first counselor in charge of American Servicemen activities. This change will be made by President Hardy when he arrives here about the 15th of September." 2. This change was to take place at the time that Weldon Kitchen, who had been serving as the branch president was released. Feng Xi is apparently utilizing this record as his source when he states that Tseng I Chang was the first branch president in Taiwan. Feng Xi, *A History of Mormon-Chinese Relations: 1849-1993*, 157. In addition, in an email communication dated November 25, 2014, Kitchen recalled that Brother Tseng was indeed made the branch president when he (Kitchen) was released. However, Thomas Nielson, writing in SFEM, June 30, 1959, 29, noted that Tseng was then serving as the first counselor in the branch presidency and that Chen Meng Yu (who Heaton said would be the 2nd counselor in the branch presidency) was serving as a counselor in the Sunday School. Moreover, in an oral history conducted with Liang Jun Sheng on October 23, 2001, Liang said that he was the first Taiwanese branch president. Both Nielson and Liang would have been in excellent positions to know firsthand whether Tseng had been a branch president and their comments indicate that he was not. The author interviewed church members who were alive at the present time, and none could recall Tseng being branch president. Nielson believed that Tseng may have been originally recommended but then moved to France shortly thereafter. Thomas Nielson, email to author, December 8, 2014; copy in possession of author.

71. Liang Jung Shen, oral history, interview by Melvin P. Thatcher, October 23, 2001, Taipei, Taiwan, OH 2954, CHL. Note that this transcription is in Chinese; the English translation utilized for this article was provided by Wen Ping.

72. Ibid.



Taipei Branch, ca 1958. Photograph courtesy of Weldon Kitchen.

As the missionaries worked to spread the gospel they grappled with numerous small issues that perhaps loomed larger because of language and cultural barriers. Kent Colin Betts, one of the early missionaries in Taiwan recalled, "One day Elder Walker and I came home to find about a hundred Chinese milling about in front of the gate. They were not happy, but did not in any way interfere with our gaining entry to the compound."⁷³

The missionaries discovered that some of the Elders they lived with had engaged in a feud with their neighbors. At issue was what was done with some wooden doors that were used by the neighbors to lock their businesses at night. The neighbors frequently stacked these doors by the missionary's house during the day, and some of the missionaries did not like it. Although they had asked their neighbors not to do it, their requests were to no avail. So the missionaries moved the doors to where the neighbors could not access them in an attempt to get their attention.

Elder Betts continues: "When we arrived, there was no doubt that they had their neighbor's attention. Our neighbors were very angry and many passers-by had joined the throng. Soon, it sounded like a riot. At this point, Sister Ch'en came running over. She worked next door at a kindergarten. When she found out her missionaries were in trouble, she immediately marched into the crowd and calmed everyone down. Sister Ch'en apologized for our not understanding. Soon, the doors were [returned] and some subdued missionaries were rethinking their actions."⁷⁴

73. Kent Colin Betts, personal journal, February 23, 1958; copy in possession of author. Note that these were retrospective comments added by Betts at an unnoted date but were attached to his February 23, 1958, journal entry.

74. Ibid.

Not all difficulties in developing positive teaching relationships were so dramatic. For example, on April 4, 1957, Michael Walker recorded in his journal, “We meet all kinds of people. Some don’t believe in God or Christ or anyone or anything else. We met a man today that wouldn’t accept the J.S. [Joseph Smith] story because J.S. wasn’t a Chinese.”⁷⁵ Colin Betts recorded different difficulties in his journal, “On easy days, several contacts meet us at the Taipei Mission Home. When that happened, we could more quickly meet with several people. At other times, the meetings would all be in people’s homes and we spent considerable time traveling . . . [and] sometimes there would be no one home. The Chinese people are very polite and often make an appointment instead of saying no. Then if they did not want to meet us, they would arrange to go somewhere before we arrived.”⁷⁶ Later Betts noted that “Sometimes, when they did not want to meet us, the contacts would just send their children to the door to tell us they were away. On days when the Elders were feeling frustrated from not finding contacts at home, they would sometimes say to the children, ‘Go ask father when he will be home.’ Typically, the children would go ask.”⁷⁷

Several missionaries later recalled how the Taiwanese children tended to look up to the missionaries and would frequently follow them as they tracted. Michael Walker recounts, “When we were out tracting we got in about every fifth house that we knocked on. If we did not get in for several in a row, we very soon had a gathering of children following us. I would guess most of them were about 8 or 9 years old. As they followed us, they learned our door approach. After we knocked or rang the bell, as the door would open, one of these kids would step forward and announce the message that they had heard the missionaries say previously: ‘These two missionaries are from the United States. They have come a very long way and have a very special message for you. It will change your life and make you very happy.’”⁷⁸

The conversion of Kuo Mei Hsiang provides another glimpse into both LDS proselyting methods and cultural difficulties. Some LDS missionaries attempted to initiate interest in the gospel by teaching English classes, an approach utilized by other religions.⁷⁹ Kuo, then age 14, and her family had

75. Michael Walker, personal history, April 4, 1957; copy in possession of author.

76. Colin Betts, in Heaton and Heaton, *A Documentary History of the Chinese Mission*, 580.

77. *Ibid.*

78. Michael Walker, personal history.

79. Hunt, “A Study of the Effectiveness of Evangelistic Techniques,” 48–49.

been contacted by the missionaries because Kuo’s sister had referred them based on Kuo’s interest in learning English.

When the missionaries, who taught gospel lessons in addition to English, taught her family about Joseph Smith, Kuo was touched, knowing that she herself was just fourteen years old. Although she began to pray, and felt the Spirit when she did, converting to the LDS church was not an easy road for Kuo. After several lessons the missionaries invited her parents to be baptized, which led to her parents asking the missionaries not to come back. However, they did allow Kuo to attend English classes at the church.⁸⁰

As Hunt has pointed out, efforts by Christian missionaries to convert individuals in Taiwan sometimes led to schisms within families.⁸¹ Such was the case with Kuo, who through the process of the English classes, and the gospel lessons which followed, gained a testimony of the church. Kuo asked her parents many times if she could be baptized; however, they consistently said, “No.” At one point Elders Walker and Goodfellow had a baptism planned and gave her a form for her parents to sign. She asked her dad yet again, and he stalled saying, “I don’t know how to sign it.” Kuo responded, “I will sign it for you then.” She signed it in his presence; after she got baptized, she told her parents what she had done, and they did not say anything.

Kuo enjoyed attending church and was quickly given responsibilities. She recalled, “There were less than ten people who would attend church. They called me as the teacher to teach in the primary. I was a kid myself and I did not know how to do it. In the early days everybody pitched in to do all of the work.”⁸² While she was happy her parents did not berate her for her baptism, but the peace in her home did not last long. Kuo recorded, “Unfortunately my parents grew upset again about my becoming a Latter-day Saint. If I blessed my food, my brother took it away from me. If I went to church too much, I got in trouble. Except for my two younger sisters, it seemed everyone in my family was against me and had sharp words for me. It was very difficult. They even read my diary. One of the most heartbreaking things happened when my father tore apart my Bible. I remember how I cried for days afterward. Now I had no scriptures to read. Countless nights I lay on my bed facing the wall and praying to my

80. Kuo (Moyer) Mei Hsiang, oral history, telephone interview by author, October 29, 2013.

81. Hunt, “A Study of the Effectiveness of Evangelistic Techniques,” 18.

82. Kuo (Moyer) Mei Hsiang, oral history.

Heavenly Father.”⁸³ Notwithstanding these difficulties, Kuo continued to actively participate in the church; she eventually served a full-time mission and married in the temple. In addition, several of her family members later joined the church.⁸⁴

Although cultural barriers existed, and not everyone was interested in the message of the missionaries, President Heaton recounted a story which illustrated his feelings about the receptiveness of the Taiwanese towards the gospel. After a long series of meetings with the missionaries, Heaton boarded a train, happy to be able to sleep for the four hour ride. Heaton wrote, “With my head on the pillow, I was just dozing off to sleep. Suddenly my seat mate jabbed me with his elbow and asked me what my name was? I told him and intended to go back to sleep. Again he poked me and inquired what I was doing in Taiwan. I told him I was a missionary and tried to go back to sleep. He again interrupted my sleep by suggesting that if I was a missionary, I should have a message for him. I did! My message was to leave me alone and let me sleep . . . but I could not deliver this message. I thought I could give a brief introduction to the Church and still get back to my own schedule.”⁸⁵

However, much to Heaton’s consternation the man with whom he spoke had several questions about the church. Soon others on the train began asking him questions about topics such as the existence of God and the premortal life. Heaton wrote, “It was . . . apparent that these men needed more background about the Church. I gave them an extensive ‘Joseph Smith Story’ presentation and testified that I knew this was a message from God. One man, who had been one of the first to join the conversation, observed, ‘Now I know how you can say there is a God. We have never had this kind of assurance before.’”⁸⁶

At the end of the train ride, President Heaton gave his audience the address of the missionaries in Taipei and left the train station to catch a taxi that would take him to airport. Although Heaton never knew what happened to those men, he later reflected, “Several things are important to me about this event. There are people who are interested in hearing about

83. Mei Hsiang Moyer, “Me, a Pioneer?” *Ensign*, August 2002, 11.

84. The story of Kuo’s father joining the church is remarkable. Kuo shared the gospel with her friend, who was baptized. Kuo’s friend’s parents were baptized, and later Kuo’s friend’s father baptized Kuo’s father. Kuo (Moyer) Mei Hsiang, oral history.

85. H. Grant Heaton, in Heaton and Heaton, *A Documentary History of the Chinese Mission*, 205; account written October 27, 1959.

86. *Ibid.*

the Gospel. On this train car, ten percent of the people were interested. Is it possible that ten percent of the people walking down the street are also interested in hearing the Gospel?”⁸⁷

Notwithstanding difficulties they faced, the missionaries were blessed in multiple ways as they shared the gospel with Taiwanese people. One consistent manifestation of the Spirit, reported by several missionaries, was the gift of tongues. Learning to communicate in Mandarin was quite difficult. Knapp wrote the following in a letter to his parents, “The language is really coming slow. . . . Soon I will have been here two months in Taipei and I can only say hello and goodbye as yet. One feels like an idiot, or sort of illiterate to say the least. This month I am going to try much harder however to learn the language. Today I spent about two hours with a teacher and it is starting to make a little sense, very dim and very slow however.”⁸⁸

Although the language was difficult, many missionaries reported that the Lord frequently blessed them beyond their own natural abilities. Elder Williams recalled a time he and his companion were teaching a man sitting on a floor. The man asked a difficult question, one that Elder Williams could not answer on his own. However, the Lord provided the response. Elder Williams said, “It was like there was a frame that appeared in my forehead, and the answer appeared in the frame. It was a culmination of things I had learned in seminary and was just written for me to read.”⁸⁹

Robert Suman, another early missionary similarly wrote of the gift of tongues blessing him:

I was set apart by Marion G. Romney. In that blessing he gave me the gift of tongues. I experienced first hand what having that gift really meant. As you know, we had not formal training in the language. . . . I had only been there 3 weeks when we had this experience. Boyce Harris was my companion and he was teaching the Godhead lesson to a woman and having difficulty understanding her questions. I understood her and interpreted for him. Her questions were centered around whether or not we have a Heavenly Mother. After that meeting he looked at me like I was from another planet and asked me how I was able to understand her and yet he couldn’t. I simply said I didn’t know. After that there

87. *Ibid.*, 206.

88. Bernard Knapp, letter to parents, received May 5, 1958; copy in possession of author.

89. Gary Williams, oral history, telephone interview by author, November 6, 2013.

were many more of the same kind of experiences. I studied hard and the language came to me.⁹⁰

However, the gift of tongues was not to be taken for granted. Early missionary James Goodfellow learned this difficult lesson the hard way:

I was progressing nicely with my ability to deliver a broad range of lessons. We were teaching a really nice family who was coming to church on a regular basis. I was quite proud of how quickly I was mastering the many lessons we had to teach. . . . It was time to teach this new family the apostasy lesson. I asked Elder Walker if I could teach it, as it would be my first chance to teach an apostasy lesson. He agreed and we went off to deliver my new lesson. I'm not sure what happened in that lesson but somehow we lost the spirit of the Holy Ghost and the lesson went sour. The family would not give us a return appointment and they never returned to church. I often wondered if it was my pride in language growth that disrupted the spirit that night.⁹¹

Changes to Branch Organization and Further Church Growth

From the inception of the LDS Church in Taiwan, there had been a branch located in Taipei, which was originally comprised of expatriate military officers. As the missionaries continued to focus on teaching and baptizing Taiwanese saints, small difficulties began to develop between the LDS English-speaking military families and the local Taiwanese saints. In a Quarterly Mission Report dated December of 1957, President Heaton wrote, "There are several very good LDS families serving in the military service in Taiwan and they have an active program in operation. There is some friction between them and the Chinese members, however I feel that it has been corrected and there will be a spirit of harmony there in the future. Several of the US members are studying Chinese and are being very friendly to the people in hopes of being helpful to the work of the missionaries."⁹²

However, things did not improve. Three months later, President Heaton recorded, "There is some difficulty in the Taiwan area between the American servicemen members and the missionaries. In the past the Servicemen

90. Robert Suman, in Heaton and Heaton, *A Documentary History of the Chinese Mission*, 549.

91. James Goodfellow, "My Mission," personal memoir; copy in possession of author.

92. SFEM, December 1957, 2.

members have been very helpful, however the group we now have there do not seem to be very anxious to mingle with the Chinese members and are overly critical of the missionaries."⁹³

The matter was ultimately resolved on April 20, 1958, when a new branch presidency was called and the branch was reorganized, so as to create separation between the English- and Mandarin-speaking members. Missionary Weldon Kitchen was called as the Branch President, Tseng I Chang as his first counselor, and Kenneth Nesson called as second counselor.⁹⁴ Hardy explained the procedures for how the branch would operate as follows: "The English speaking group, under the direction of Brother Kenneth Nesson, hold their Sunday School at 8:30 AM, Sacrament Meeting following that, and are finished in time to allow the Chinese services to begin at 10:40 AM. English Priesthood is held during the Chinese Sunday School. MIA is held jointly. . . . All concerned seem to be enthused with this arrangement."⁹⁵

Under the direction of the new branch presidency the Taipei branch continued to flourish. On July 19, 1958, the "Taipei Branch conducted a talent show and benefit program at the Taipei American School. Almost 600 persons attended this program and the comments are all very favorable. Members of the Church and investigators participated in a varied program under the able direction of Elder Glen Auna."⁹⁶

Auna, a missionary serving from Hawaii, had a knack for building the MIA programs, working with youth, and creating programs such as the one just mentioned. He is also reported to have contributed in a unique way to a particular practice that continues in some parts of Taiwan to this day. Thomas Nielson, another early missionary in Taiwan, said that Elder Auna would often begin his addresses by saying, "Aloha!" and would expect the congregation to return his salutation. Elder Nielson encouraged Elder Auna to at least use an equivalent Chinese greeting (e.g. "Zao an!") when greeting church members at the beginning of a talk. Elder Auna reportedly did so, and church members in some Taiwan congregations begin their remarks by greeting the congregation and waiting for the congregation to greet them in return.⁹⁷

93. SFEM, March 31, 1958, 1.

94. SFEM, June 30, 1958, 14.

95. SFEM, June 30, 1958, 4.

96. SFEM, September 30, 1958, 14.

97. Thomas Nielson, oral history, telephone interview by author, November 8, 2013.

It is also possible, and perhaps probable that other factors have led to this tradition in some Taiwan congregations.

While the missionaries worked to provide large-scale activities such as the aforementioned talent shows, their work ultimately centered on individuals. Early missionary Robert Murdock shared an experience that illustrated the diligent efforts of the missionaries to follow the Spirit to find those who prepared for the gospel message. After a mostly unsuccessful morning of missionary work, he and his companion were anxious to return home and eat lunch before the other missionaries living in their home ate all of the food. Murdock recounts that as they were leaving for home,

The Spirit prompted me to stop at the lone house on the corner of the block. I could not deny the strong feeling I received to tract out this house. Although the urge not to be too late for lunch was also present, I obediently turned my bicycle toward the gate. My companion followed my lead but, wondering what I was doing, said, “Don’t you know what we’re going to miss?” Not knowing what was about to happen, I simply replied, “We’ve got to stop here.”

The house was surrounded by a high wall with a gate which opened to the inner yard. We knocked on the door, visited with the woman who answered, made an appointment, and began to leave. After taking a step or two toward the gate, again the unmistakable impression came to ask the lady what behind the split bamboo wall which divided the front yard. As I inquired, my companion looked at me as though I were crazy for asking such a question. The lady indicated that there was gate in the bamboo wall which opened to a path leading around the side of the house. Another family lived there. After being shown the gate, we went to the side door, knocked, met another woman, made an appointment, and left. We broke all speed limits returning home for lunch.⁹⁸

As a result of this second appointment, Elder Murdock and his companion were able to teach the Lin family. Brother Lin was an exceptional man; he carefully studied each pamphlet the missionaries left. In time, Lin and his family were baptized; Lin later became a branch president.⁹⁹

Chin Tan Shu Hui provided her perspective as a convert to the church during this time period. Chin had grown up enjoying religious atmosphere from both the Buddhist traditions of her grandmother and the Christian

98. Robert Murdock, in Heaton and Heaton, *A Documentary History*, 529.

99. *Ibid.*, 530.

traditions from her uncle. She hoped that her young children would also feel the good feelings associated with the religious atmosphere.

One time as she was passing home that the missionaries were utilizing as a church, a missionary enthusiastically shook her hand and welcomed her to church. She hadn’t intended to attend, but felt embarrassed to leave, so she entered the garage where church was held. She sat on the last row, so she could make a quick exit. She was thinking about all of the housework that she still needed to do, when she watched the Sunday School teacher wrote on the chalkboard “The Celestial Kingdom, The Terrestrial Kingdom and Telestial Kingdom.” She was intrigued that the teacher was Chinese and began to feel the Holy Ghost. She stayed through the end of the lesson.



Chin Tan Shu Hui, ca 1958. Photography courtesy of Weldon Kitchen.

When the lesson was over, the American who shook her hand came over and introduced himself and invited her to learn more about the church.¹⁰⁰

Chin eventually received the missionary discussions and chose to be baptized. She later wrote, “When I received the Gift of the Holy Ghost I had a burning feeling in my heart. . . . That feeling I can never forget.”¹⁰¹ As with many who joined the church, Chin immediately received a calling. She recounted, “I was called the second day after I was baptized to be a primary teacher. I didn’t know anything, I didn’t know how I should teach . . . [but] I was convinced by the Elders to teach. I only had English materials, I had not read the Bible, and we didn’t have a Chinese manual for the Book of Mormon. It was really difficult to prepare for lessons. But with the help from Elder Nielson I was able to finish all the preparation work before I taught the lesson.”¹⁰² Later one of her primary students became a member of the Seventy; she would feel special pride when he would introduce her as her primary teacher.

Chin’s experience highlights the positive influence that came from members serving each other in their church callings. Liang Shih An, who was baptized at the age of 12 in 1958, also recalled benefits that came from service, albeit it of a difference sort. He noted that typhoons that would regularly disrupt life in Taiwan, often damaging people’s houses. Liang, his father and others would visit members and help them repair their houses. This and other service opportunities helped church members become very united.¹⁰³

The Conversion of Hu Wei I

Vernon Poulter, an early missionary to serve in Taiwan recorded an experience that occurred during this same time period that would have significant repercussions for the future of the church in Taiwan. He recounted that he and his companion, Elder Daws, would pray each day to be led to those ready to hear the gospel, but would always begin their next day of tracting where they left off the previous day. Poulter felt it was incongruous to pray

100. Richard B. Stamps and Wendy J. Shamo, comps., *The Taiwan Saints* (N.p: Stamps and Shamo, 1996). This self-published volume was compiled to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the history of the church in Taipei, Taiwan. It is written in Chinese; the translation utilized in this article was provided by Whitney Ko.

101. Stamps and Shamo, *The Taiwan Saints*, 52.

102. Ibid.

103. Liang Shih An, oral history, recorded December 3, 2014, Taipei, Taiwan.

for inspiration to find the right people and to simply continue tracting in a linear fashion. One morning, he came up with a different plan:

I told my companion, “Let’s put our prayers to the test. . . . [L]et’s pray specifically to be led to someone that has been prepared to hear the Gospel. Then stay on the bikes until we receive the Spirit’s direction, and follow it to wherever He leads us.” Elder Daws agreed and off we went. After traveling about an hour and several miles through Taipei’s heavy traffic, when we were crossing a very busy intersection, with what seemed to be hundreds of trucks, and busses and thousands of other bicycles; I had the distinct impression to turn right. But I was in the middle of traffic and Elder Daws was already on the other side. Traffic was bad and dangerous, and I didn’t want to get caught out in the middle deciding which way to go . . . so I continued to the other side. As I caught up with my companion the impression returned, but this time it was stronger, telling me to turn around and plunge back into the traffic at the intersection we had just survived. . . . We plunged back into the traffic, made a “U” turn across 4 lanes of traffic, back to the intersection, turned left through another 8 lanes of traffic. . . .

After settling down and biking with traffic for a while, the impression [came to] “turn right.” In this manner we were eventually lead to a narrow street, too narrow for anything bigger than bicycle traffic. One more “left turn”; we were now in an alley too narrow for even the bikes. As we were getting off our bikes to continue on foot, I saw a man watching us very intently through an open window. We were only a few feet apart. Our eyes met and I knew he was the person to whom we had been led.¹⁰⁴

This man, Hu Wei I, invited Elder Poulter and Elder Daws to teach him the lessons. He accepted the First Vision immediately and continued to progress through the missionary lessons, along with his wife and daughters. Reflecting on his experience with the missionary lessons, Hu noted, “When the elders of our church came to my house to teach the gospel, I believed their words as soon as they said them. They just explained very clearly where

104. Vernon Poulter, “Hu Wei Yi [I] conversion reminiscence,” 2004; copy in possession of author and also archived in CHL.

we came from, why we are here, and where are we going in the future. Other churches could not explain these things.”¹⁰⁵

Hu would have been baptized within a short time; however, he struggled with the Word of Wisdom, having smoked for decades.¹⁰⁶ But he continued meeting with the missionaries. Hu reported with a smile, “I kept having lessons for 10 months. In Taiwan no other people had more lessons than I did. . . . Then in the tenth month, I felt bad. I decided to quit, quit both tobacco and wine. Actually it was not that hard after all. I succeeded on my first try.”¹⁰⁷

When Elder Poulter was transferred, which was prior to the Hu family being baptized, he felt impressed to give Mr. Hu a collection of church books he had received from his father. James Goodfellow, who took Elder Poulter’s place, recorded in his journal some of the events surrounding Brother Hu’s conversion:

October 29, 1958

Today we taught an investigator named Brother Hu. He is still smoking and appears to be having a good deal of difficulty overcoming the habit. If it weren’t for nicotine he could be baptized this week. I have prayed for the Lord to help him with his problem. Brother Hu has a great Hi-Fi set and many classical recordings. We listen to 2 or 3 each time we visit him.

November 19, 1958

Brother Hu is still trying to give up smoking.¹⁰⁸ He is a curious fellow with many, many questions, some of which I cannot answer. I explained that while I could not answer all of his questions, if he would continue to study the scriptures, to become obedient to the Lord and to

105. Hu Wei Yi [I], oral history, interview by Melvin P. Thatcher, October 23, 2001, Taipei, Taiwan, OH 2952, 2, CHL. Note that this transcription is in Chinese; the English translation created for this article was provided by Wang Ru Yi.

106. Louise Andrus, “A Visit with President Hu.” February–March, *Voice of the Saints*, 1963, 16.

107. Hu Wei Yi [I], oral history, 2.

108. Notice that Goodfellow’s portrayal of Hu’s efforts to stop smoking are different from Hu’s. One way of reconciling these two accounts is that Goodfellow was talking about Hu’s reticence in attempting to seriously stop smoking (to which Hu alludes), while Hu’s statement about succeeding on the first try may reflect success on the first serious dedicated attempt, which was perhaps a long time in coming.

pray about his questions, the Lord would send the Holy Ghost with the answers and he would have the scriptures opened unto him.

December 16, 1958

We listened to Brother Hu’s music again today before we gave him another lesson. He is progressing well.

December 27, 1958

We baptized Hu, Wei-I and his daughter Hu, Tai-Li today.¹⁰⁹

Seeing this progression in journal entries provides an indication that missionaries often do not initially know which contacts will eventually choose to join the church or make a large impact after conversion. In reading Goodfellow’s journal, one does not receive the impression that Goodfellow had any inkling of the work Hu would accomplish.

Approximately five years after his baptism, Hu reflected, “In consequence my health suffered greatly and a continual cough stayed with me throughout the day. But when the gospel entered my life it changed everything completely. If it were not for the gospel entering my life, I would have disappeared completely from this world. Again, spiritually I did not have a clear concept of life before I was baptized; life did not mean much to me. All my thoughts and actions were sunk in pessimism. I was perpetually depressed. Baptism changed it all. I now know that life is not meaningless, but it is highly worth living and precious.”¹¹⁰

Decades later, President Gordon B. Hinckley would recount an experience of Brother Hu, saying that it was a story he had never forgotten. Due to debts incurred by Hu, and Hu’s low wages, it was very difficult for the Hu family to pay tithing. “After some discussion, Sister Hu insisted they obey the law. ‘Now what we are going to eat?’ Brother Hu asked. The next day, Brother Hu’s supervisor gave him an envelope saying that Brother Hu was a good worker and he was going to give him a raise. When he opened the envelope, he found the same amount of money he had paid for tithing.”¹¹¹ Hu’s faith was also manifest in other ways. After his baptism, he put Poulter’s gift of church books to good use; he translated several books into Chinese

109. James Goodfellow, journal; copy in possession of author.

110. Andrus, “A Visit With President Hu,” 16.

111. Emily Chien, “Ties to Taiwan,” *Church News*, August 6, 2005.

including *A Marvelous Work and a Wonder, Jesus the Christ, Doctrines of Salvation*, and most importantly, *The Book of Mormon*.

The Church in Taiwan Expands

As missionary work was accelerating in Taipei, it was also beginning to expand throughout the island. In August 1957 Elder Fish and Elder Kitchen traveled throughout the island to identify additional cities where missionaries could serve.¹¹² This effort was followed in September with visits throughout the island by President Heaton, who recounted, “While in Taiwan, I with Elder Fish and Elder Wisser visited several cities in the Southern part of the Island. As a result of this visit we decided it was necessary to assign four missionaries to labor in these parts of the island. The people seem to be friendly and receptive to us and we have hope of much success there. Elder Fish and Elder Nielson have therefore been assigned to study the Taiwanese language and beginning the 1st of January 1958, they will move to the city of Tainan and open up that area for missionary work. Elder Cutler and Elder Goodfellow were assigned to study Taiwanese and work in the city of Taichung.”¹¹³

The Church in Tainan

Although the missionaries in Tainan were originally supposed to speak Taiwanese, “it was found that the home was located in a Mandarin speaking area; the work included both Mandarin and Taiwanese speaking people. Much success has been found with the Mandarin speaking people, but the Taiwanese, although they have had a special Sunday School class, dwindled to nothing.”¹¹⁴ Thus, the missionaries’ focus became proselyting in Mandarin. The first baptism in Tainan occurred on June 11, 1958: “The Chinese air force swimming pool was the location. At this meeting, two people were baptized; Sister Ni-Feng-lan, and Brother Ling Chun-nan.”¹¹⁵ Two months later, the first family in Tainan joined the church: Brother Hsu Chi Cheng, his wife Ma Yuan Chih, and child Hsu Kuo Pro.¹¹⁶ These new converts soon began working in the church to strengthen others. On September 28, 1958,

112. Kitchen, *The Taiwan Experiences*, 17.

113. SFEM, December 31 1957, 2.

114. SFEM, December 31, 1958, 24.

115. SFEM, December 31, 1958, 25.

116. Ibid.

Michael Walker recorded, “Today marks a happy day for me. Bro Cheng took over the Sunday school class so I don’t have to teach it any more. He really did a good job!”¹¹⁷

Goodfellow related the following story regarding the conversion of an individual in Tainan who would go on to become an important part of the church in that city:

We kept good records of each house in each neighborhood we tracted. Thus we made sure that each house had proper contact. . . . This required much back tracking but we were comfortable that it was not only the right thing to do but that it would pay dividends. I recall one house that was visited 3 or 4 times before we left the neighborhood for fresh ground. Each visit was fruitless. However I made sure that any time we were anywhere near the old area we made another call on that home. I felt impressed that someone lived there that we should visit. Soon it became the only house in the tracting area that had not been crossed off. . . . Finally on the 8th visit we met the father of the home. Not only did he welcome us but after I was transferred out of the area the new missionaries learned that he spoke excellent English. Brother Cheng was baptized and became the first Chinese Branch President of the Tainan Branch. He was a great aid in the growth of the work in Tainan.¹¹⁸

The Church in Taichung

At the same time Tainan was opened to missionary work, Elders Cutler and Goodfellow began proselyting in Taichung. Initially their instructions were to proselyte in Taiwanese, which was the primary spoken language prior to the arrival of the Kuomintang. This initiative however was abandoned after the missionaries’ initial lack of success in teaching Taiwanese-speaking individuals.¹¹⁹

117. Michael Walker, personal record, September 28, 1958; copy in possession of author.

118. James Goodfellow, in Heaton and Heaton, *A Documentary History of the Chinese Mission*, 467.

119. James Goodfellow, oral history, telephone interview by author, November 8, 2013. Feng Xi is quite critical of this in his dissertation, noting that more efforts to reach Taiwanese speaking people could have resulted in increased conversions. While this may be true, it also needs to be balanced against the capacities and understanding of the missionaries at that time.

Goodfellow later recounted that upon arrival in Taichung, he and Cutler identified a suitable apartment where they could both live and hold church meetings. Outside their apartment they hung a sign that said, “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.” Once established, he said, “We then went out and started tracting. We had tracts made up that showed our location and we went up door to door and we would leave these tracts and invite people to church. And interestingly enough, it’s just amazing when you think about it, they came!”¹²⁰

The first baptism in Taichung took place in June of 1958,¹²¹ and a mission report at the end of 1958 stated, “The opportunity for growth and expansion are great in Tai Chung, the land of the good weather good fruit and good meals.”¹²²

The Church in Kaohsiung

The next branch to open was Kaohsiung, an assignment which was given to Elder Degn and Elder Knudson.¹²³ On March 14, 1958, Dennis Knudson recorded the following (perhaps with both excitement and trepidation) in his journal, “My assignment is to work with Elder Degn. We’re going to open the work in [Kaohsiung] down at the southern tip of the island. So tomorrow the fun begins. The language is Mandarin. I’m glad Elder Degn has been here for 30 months!”¹²⁴

They arrived on March 18, 1958; “a two-story apartment located at Ch’ang Sheng First Street was selected and rented as the first Branch.”¹²⁵ Some of their initial efforts were directed towards initiating English classes. Knudson recorded in his journal on March 22, 1958, that Taiwanese individuals had expressed interest in English classes. Five days later he wrote the following regarding their preparations for class: “We ordered 2 blackboards, a dresser, a dining table and 100 folding chairs. We also picked up a sign for the front.”¹²⁶ The initial response to their efforts was not what they anticipated. On March 29, 1958, Elder Knudson ruefully recorded, “None of our furniture arrived today, which I expected. So we had them loan us 20 chairs for our English

120. James Goodfellow, oral history.

121. SFEM, December 31, 1958, 24.

122. Ibid.

123. SFEM, December 31, 1958, 22.

124. Dennis Knudson, personal record, March 14, 1958; copy in possession of author.

125. SFEM, December 31, 1958, 22.

126. Dennis Knudson, personal record, March 22, 1958.

class; and then one person showed up. But that’s life in the mission field. It was worth it though.”¹²⁷

Although the work was initially slow, the missionaries soon found people who were interested in hearing their message. On “July 25, 1958, the Elders selected a place on the beach for the first baptism. Sun Shui Yuan, one of the first investigators was baptized by Elder Cutler and was confirmed by Elder Payne on August 3.”¹²⁸ Payne recounted his memories of Sun Shui Yuan’s baptism: “I remember his baptism as we went to a secluded area on the beach. Elder Cutler and Brother Sun waded out quite a ways to have enough depth to baptize. I was witnessing the event from quite a dry distance away. There was no one else in attendance at this baptism.”¹²⁹

Shortly thereafter, a woman named Chen Li Che was baptized in Kaohsiung. Chen recounted, “I was in Kaohsiung. One day when I got off work, a missionary . . . asked if I would like to know more about the church. I didn’t know anything about the church, but I agreed, and we made an appointment for the following week.”¹³⁰

One challenge for Che, as well as many others,¹³¹ was that there were no Chinese materials for her to read. Fortunately Che could read Japanese, so the missionaries gave her a copy of the Book of Mormon in Japanese. When asked what most interested her in the church, Che recalled, “The thing that attracted me the most was that there was a Taiwanese sister who invited me to go to relief society. The church was barely beginning in Kaohsiung and there were very few people. But we gathered together and I enjoyed the relief society lesson.”¹³²

The Church in Hsin Chu

The fifth city to which the missionaries went was Hsin Chu, which was opened on June 19, 1958.¹³³ The June 1958 Mission Report states, “The city of Hsin Chu was opened for missionary work. This area will be the working area of Elder Lewis F. Wiser and Elder Bernard Knapp. The population of

127. Ibid.

128. SFEM, December 31, 1958, 22.

129. Ronald Payne, email to author, January 19, 2014; copy in possession of author.

130. Chen Li Che, oral history, Toronto, Ontario, June 25, 2004, 7. This oral history was conducted in Chinese; the English translation was provided by Whitney Ko.

131. Shih An Liang, oral history, recorded December 3, 2014, Taipei, Taiwan.

132. Ibid.

133. SFEM, December 31, 1958, 21.

Hsin Chu is about 50,000 and there appears to be a friendly group of people there. We have rented a fine branch headquarters there. The capacity will be about 100 persons which will give the missionaries laboring there a great deal of work.”¹³⁴

Bernard Knapp recalled that the work initially was slow. Aside from the missionaries, there were only three members in the area. A Taiwanese young man who had been baptized in Taipei, and Brother and Sister Stevenson, a couple from America.¹³⁵ The missionaries spent most of their time tracting to find people interested in their message. The Catholic Church had a strong presence in Hsin Chu, including ten places of worship, a brand-new cathedral, and “over 200 foreign missionaries.”¹³⁶ However, outside an occasional incident of investigators discontinuing missionary lessons at the suggestion of their church leaders Knapp did not feel opposition between their efforts and those of other churches.¹³⁷

Six months later, the mission record states, “The first baptism [for Hsin Chu] was held on November 9, 1958, at Taipei, due to the fact that a baptismal place could not be obtained in Hsin Chu. Four wonderful people were baptized into the Church . . . only through the workings of the Holy Ghost did the baptisms come to pass. With membership now in the Branch, a Sunday School was established toward [the end] of the month.”¹³⁸

The Church in Chia I

The next branch to open was in Chia I. In March of 1959, President Heaton recounted, “Because of news of new Elders arriving, it is going to be possible to open up a new branch in the Southern District. The town that has been chosen is Chia I. Two trips have been made to this town. The first

134. SFEM, June 30, 1958, 3. According to a letter written by Bernard Knapp, the address was Hsin Chu, Pei Ta Lu, Min Li, 112 (approximately June 23, 1958); copy in possession of author.

135. Bernard Knapp, oral history, interview by author, December 17, 2013; copy in possession of author.

136. This information is drawn from Bernard Knapp, oral history, and a letter from Knapp to his parents (approximately July 5, 1958); copy in possession of author.

137. Not all missionaries found a lack of opposition. For example, on September 5, 1958, Dennis Knudson wrote, “The local Baptists and Presbyterians are going around the district spreading nasty literature. [Those] kind of people usually help us out by creating an interest.” Dennis Knudson, personal record; copy in possession of author. See also Feng Xi, *A History of Mormon-Chinese Relations: 1849–1993*, 156.

138. SFEM, December 31, 1958, 21.

was to locate the Mandarin speaking people, and the second was to locate a home for the Elders to live in and to hold Church in. Chia I looks very promising.”¹³⁹

Elder Michael Walker and Elder Gerald Walker were given the assignment to find suitable housing for the missionaries in Chia I, a task which was not easy. Michael Walker recounted how they contracted with a sturdy-looking pedicab¹⁴⁰ driver who agreed to transport around the town for the day as they looked for a suitable location where missionaries could both live and hold church meetings. After several hours of carting the missionaries around town, the pedicab driver became frustrated and refused to go any further. The owner of the home from which the pedicab driver had stopped came out to greet the missionaries and asked if they had come to rent the home. The missionaries inspected it and found that it was a perfect location.¹⁴¹ Now the work could commence in Chia I.

Miao Li Branch

The final branch formed in Taiwan prior to the dedication of the island was the Miao Li branch; as with Chia I, it was the arrival of new missionaries from the United States that made it possible to open a new branch. On April 13, “Elder Knudson and his companion Elder Miner opened the new branch in Miao Li.”¹⁴²

Although these were humble beginnings, “by small and simple things are great things brought to pass.”¹⁴³ At the time of this writing there are five stakes in Taipei, three in Taichung and two in Kaohsiung. Hsin Chu and Tainan each have stakes, Chia I is a district, and Miao Li is a ward. The initial efforts to start branches in these locations have born great fruit.

From Village to Village

As the missionaries began to expand to different cities, they sometimes visited smaller villages. Hardy recounted an experience that forever changed his perspective about laboring in what to him seemed like a faraway place. On one occasion he visited a tiny community. The arrival of the missionaries in this village was heralded as a great occasion, given that foreigners rarely

139. SFEM, March 31, 1959, 9.

140. A pedicab is a three-wheeled bike.

141. Michael Walker, oral history, telephone interview by author, October 29, 2013.

142. Michael Walker, in SFEM, June 30, 1959, 21.

143. Alma 37:6.

visited. Hardy wrote that the missionaries were taken to a humble gathering place of the village:

The room was small, maybe twenty by twenty. It was full. . . . The ever present children were sitting in the front on the floor. There were no electric lights in the room, or the village. Candles and lanterns were available for our use. When it was dark we would have to move the candle up and down the flannel board so the people could see the word strips and pictures. The press of people made it necessary to hang our flannel board on the wall and then almost stand with our backs tight against the wall to give the lesson.

As one of the Elders began with the introduction to the meeting I was standing over the side near a window; a window with no glass. It was on the east of the building. Immediately outside the window was the rice paddy with half grown rice standing in water. The water was so still it became a mirror. It was now near dark and the almost full moon had risen. Its reflection in the water gave a double chance to see its beauty. As I looked at it I was overwhelmed with its magnificence.

As I stood gazing at this splendid scene I was transported in my mind, it seems, to a high place. Not a cloud nor a mountain, but somehow suspended in space, yet not so far that I couldn't see the details on earth. From this place I could see us in our journey to this remote village. I could see my home in the United States. I could see my friends, my girlfriend, the University of Utah, and my family. The distance between home and that village seemed overwhelming. The question came to my mind, "*Why have you left your family, friends, schooling, and all that is dear to you to travel the many thousands of miles to come to this land to the end of the earth, and then today journeying since early morning by train, bus, and bicycle to come to this small obscure village. Surely there must be a thousand thousands of places like this in the world?*"¹⁴⁴

As Hardy reflected on this question, he felt the Spirit pour thoughts into his mind, testifying of the importance of carrying the gospel message throughout the world, even to a remote place such as this one. He was in that village on that day because he had a vital and true message to share. This lesson would remain with Hardy throughout his mission and was again reinforced

144. W. Brent Hardy, in Heaton and Heaton, *A Documentary History of the Chinese Mission*, 480–1.

when he was called to preside over the Southern Far East Mission in 1968. He and his fellow-laborers were not simply teaching in a faraway place, they were sharing an important message intended for every individual on earth.

The Organization of the Relief Society

The organization of the church in Taiwan would not be complete without the Relief Society. Fish recounted, "I became the first Relief Society President [in Taiwan]. Because we were starting out from scratch with no Chinese members to rely on, when we finally grew to the point where we were ready to organize a Relief Society, we had no sisters that knew anything about Relief Society. Someone needed to prepare a Sister to take the position of Relief Society President Heaton called me to be the Relief Society President, telling me that I would hold that position until I trained someone to take my place. Let me tell you this, it didn't take long to train my replacement."¹⁴⁵

In 1959 Sister Betty Marlene Johnson was transferred to Taiwan to help further establish the Relief Society programs. Johnson, originally from Salt Lake City, had been serving in the Southern Far East Mission for several months. Her previous work had been in Hong Kong speaking Cantonese. Johnson recounts, "President Heaton transferred me to Taiwan with the specific purpose of working with sisters in Relief Society. At that time only Elders were laboring in the Taiwan District, so of course they were responsible for the Relief Society program. To be replaced by me in their Relief Society work did not bring sorrow to any of the Elders."¹⁴⁶

Johnson's companion was Chiu Siou Ping (Donna), the first full-time missionary¹⁴⁷ to serve from Taiwan. Donna's brother Richard was the first individual baptized by missionaries in Taiwan. Donna had graduated from National Taiwan University Hospital and was an intern in Taiwan University Hospital just prior to beginning her missionary labors. Although her internship was scheduled to continue through July 1959, Sister Johnson had an

145. Fish, *Missionary Experiences*, 70.

146. Betty Johnson, in Heaton and Heaton, *A Documentary History of the Chinese Mission*, 527.

147. As used in this sentence, I am defining "full-time missionary" as one who leaves work or other affairs to engage in missionary work on a full-time basis (not necessarily for 18 or 24 months). Although Chiu's mission would last for less than two months, it nevertheless is a significant part of the unfolding of the church in Taiwan. I have not been able to document any other Taiwanese individual who served full-time prior to Chiu Siou Ping.

urgent need for a companion in January of 1959. Sister Chiu submitted a report to the President of Taiwan University requesting to take a leave of absence, something that had never previously been approved. However, permission was granted to Sister Chiu to take a leave, and she was set apart as a missionary on January 18, 1959.¹⁴⁸

Johnson wrote of their experiences together: “We had a very small apartment in Taipei, but seldom stayed in it. Each Sunday evening we would board the train in Taipei, travel all night, and arrive at our destination the next morning. We’d hold Relief Society that day, then back on the train, more traveling, then stopping to hold Relief Society—and so it went for the entire week. We would return to Taipei each Saturday.”¹⁴⁹

The work of these two sisters made a significant difference in the church in Taiwan. W. Brent Hardy, second counselor in the Mission Presidency noted that “Their fine work with the sisters of the Church added a great deal to the spirit of the work, and feeling of permanence.”¹⁵⁰ Chen Lin Shu Liang shared her perspective as the first¹⁵¹ Taiwanese Relief Society President:

At that time we don’t have any Chinese copy materials. Sister Johnson gave me a magazine, a Relief Society magazine. All the lessons were printed inside. At that time we don’t have many sisters who can understand English. So I have to teach the Relief Society lesson. The other lesson I translate into Chinese and give the sisters to teach in the Relief Society. I was so afraid.

First, I said to Sister Johnson, “I don’t know anything about Relief Society. How can I be president of this organization?” She said, “I work with you together.” But after two months, she went back to the United States. So I was so afraid; I did not know what to do. But anyway, we have many good sisters together, and we work very hard.¹⁵²

On March 4, 1959, Johnson completed her mission and departed for the United States; Chiu returned to her internship.¹⁵³ Approximately two months

148. *Voice of the Saints*, March 1959, 14. Note that this article is in Chinese; an English translation utilized for this article was provided by Wen Ping.

149. Betty Johnson, in Heaton and Heaton, *A Documentary History of the Chinese Mission*, 527.

150. SFEM, June 30, 1959, 16.

151. Thomas Nielson, email to author, December 8, 2014; copy in possession of author.

152. Chen Meng-yu and Lin Shu-liang, oral history.

153. SFEM, March 31, 1959, 9.

later, two more sister missionaries, Esther Smith and Dezzie Clegg arrived in Taiwan; from this point forward, sister missionaries would continue to bless the people of Taiwan.

The Dedication of Taiwan

Since President Joseph Fielding Smith had initiated the work in the Southern Far East Mission, no general authorities had visited the mission, despite constant requests from President Heaton. However, in the spring of 1959 President Heaton was notified that, health permitting, President David O. McKay would be traveling to tour the Southern Far East Mission. The Heaton family were excited, knowing that President McKay had originally dedicated China for the preaching of the gospel on January 9, 1921. However, in May President Heaton was advised that President McKay’s health would not permit the trip and that Elder Mark E. Peterson would be taking his place.¹⁵⁴ Nevertheless, President Heaton and the church members in Taiwan were excited to welcome Elder Peterson to their island. President Heaton recorded, “Well, it finally happened! On May 25, 1959 Brother Peterson, one of the Twelve Apostles, and his wife, Sister Peterson, arrived at the Taipei Airport. The members in the Taipei Branch had chartered a bus and were at the Airport with banners which said, ‘Welcome Brother and Sister Peterson’ to greet them as they got off the plane. The spirit was felt in abundance as the Apostle walked to the waiting room of the airport. He and his wife then shook hands with all the members present.”¹⁵⁵

Arrangements were made to take Elder Peterson throughout the island to visit the approximately 350 church members.¹⁵⁶ Hardy recorded, “The effect on the members of the Church . . . was very great. . . . A spirit of brotherhood was felt among the members that is priceless.”¹⁵⁷ Chen Meng Yu said “that the minute the people saw him at the airport getting off the

154. H. Grant Heaton, in Heaton and Heaton, *A Documentary History of the Chinese Mission*, 654. This also represented a change of plans for Elder and Sister Peterson who had previously been scheduled to instead tour the missions in Scandinavia.

155. H. Grant Heaton, in Heaton and Heaton, *A Documentary History of the Chinese Mission*, 654–55.

156. While exact figures are not available, in 1960 there were 371 members. William B. Smart, ed., *The Deseret News 1976 Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News and LDS Church History Department, 1976), E14.

157. W. Brent Hardy, in SFEM, June 30, 1959, 17.

plane, they could sense a man of God by his appearance.”¹⁵⁸ Chen “was very impressed with the spirit Elder Peterson seemed to radiate.”¹⁵⁹ Tseng I Chang reportedly “remarked on his humbleness, how he talked to everybody, shook their hands, let them take pictures of him. He was particularly impressed that such a great man was so humble.”¹⁶⁰

Perhaps similar to the cultural celebrations that have in recent times accompanied the dedications of temples, there was a “Gala Talent Show” held at the Taipei American School on Saturday, May 30, two days before Taiwan was dedicated. Thomas Nielson recounted, “In the show, was talent from all of the Branches in Taiwan. Each Branch contributed very much to this show which made it a huge success. The auditorium was filled, with



Elder Mark E Peterson at the airport, June 1959. Photograph courtesy of Boyd Harris.

158. Thomas Nielson, in SFEM, June 30, 1959, 29.

159. *Ibid.*

160. *Ibid.*

members and non-members alike. All that attended were shown an enjoyable time. . . . The members of the Church especially had their testimonies strengthened with all that happened this day.”¹⁶¹

The actual dedication of Taiwan took place on “June 1, 1959 at the end of Chung Shan Pei Road, just under the Grand Hotel.”¹⁶² At the time, the Grand Hotel was one of the largest and most impressive edifices in Taiwan. Thirty-nine members and twenty-three missionaries were present for the special event.¹⁶³ Those in attendance felt that it was a spiritually moving experience. As she recalled the dedication, Kuo Mei Hsiang, whose conversion was previously described in the present paper, said, “It felt wonderful when he dedicated the land. Almost everybody had tears in their eyes during the meeting.”¹⁶⁴

Elder Williams remembered playing the pump organ at the dedication. Because they were outside, he had to pump really hard to make the organ play. Reminiscing about this experience, Elder Williams said, “His prayer, I remember, was wonderful. . . . The land of Taiwan was now being dedicated for missionary work, so we felt we had something significant for our work.”¹⁶⁵

Thomas Nielson, in an official record of the dedication wrote the following:

Monday morning was a little cloudy. The angels in Heaven were watching over us and were ready to cry with joy. This is the reasons for the clouds. All the saints who were able, met at the Grand Hotel, which is a beautiful site. There, with Apostle Peterson we proceeded to have a dedication ceremony for the Island of Taiwan. After the opening exercises a quietness filled those who attended so that the dedication prayer could be heard and absorbed by all. As the Apostle opened his mouth to dedicate Taiwan to the preaching of the Gospel, the Holy

161. *Ibid.*, 29–30. Although the dedication was certainly a spirit-filled experience, it is interesting to note that there were some difficulties surrounding it. For example, Luana Heaton, wife of President Heaton, recorded her absolute dismay with an incident that occurred in conjunction with the dedication. There was a miscommunication about the number of hotel rooms needed and on one evening there was only room for the Petersons. The Heaton family thus had to find their own accommodations and could only find it at a brothel. While this event is unpleasant, it does show that even spiritual highlights such as the dedication of Taiwan can have unanticipated accompanying challenges. Heaton and Heaton, *A Documentary History of the Chinese Mission*, 635–636.

162. Michael Walker, in SFEM, June 30, 1959, 25.

163. SFEM, June 30, 1959, 23.

164. Kuo (Moyer) Mei Hsiang, oral history.

165. Gary Williams, oral history.

Ghost entered and spoke the words that God wanted to be said, and every active member there realized this. Words of prophecy poured forth from his mouth, which will soon be fulfilled.¹⁶⁶

Among other things, Elder Peterson prayed, “We are thankful for the dedication of the missionaries and for the reception of the saints. . . . We pray that Thy Spirit may reach mightily upon all the people of this island that they may have respect for the presence of the missionaries and that the missionaries may be emissaries of God. . . . We pray that the members will dedicate themselves to the work, that their friends and neighbors may receive the blessings of the everlasting gospel. We pray that they will invite their friends and relatives to come to our meetings, that they will introduce them to the missionaries so that the missionaries may teach them in cottage meetings.”¹⁶⁷

Michael Walker recorded, “After the meeting and at the airport the members talked with [Elder Peterson] and thanked him so very, very much for coming. As Brother and Sister Peterson accompanied by President Heaton and family got on the plane to go to Hong Kong, the members and Elders sang ‘God be with you till we meet again.’ Although the Apostle has left the island of Taiwan, he has made a deep impression in the hearts of the people, and the memory of his visit will last for many, many years to come.”¹⁶⁸

Conclusion

While the dedication of Taiwan marked the end of the first three years of official church presence in Taiwan, it was just the beginning of the unfolding of the gospel. Within a period of weeks an additional branch would be opened in Keelung¹⁶⁹ and Liang Jun Sheng would be set apart as the first Taiwanese branch president in Taiwan. The missionaries had faced significant troubles with language and culture, and they exhibited the same follies and foibles that their peers experienced in the mission field throughout the world.¹⁷⁰

166. Thomas Nielson, in SFEM, June 30, 1959, 30.

167. SFEM, June 30, 1959, 32. The entire prayer spans pages 31–33.

168. Michael Walker, in SFEM, June 30, 1959, 25.

169. SFEM, June 30, 1959, 21.

170. For example, President Heaton noted that there were several problems (including deficiencies in diet and cleanliness) with the missionaries in Taiwan, and he lamented the fact that the missionaries were not receiving closer supervision. SFEM, September 30, 1958, 1–2. However, perhaps in the larger picture what is surprising is not that the missionaries

Although logistical challenges, such as a lack of real estate remained, early missionaries and members had been able to overcome numerous difficulties through heavenly guidance. By 1959, when Taiwan was dedicated for the preaching of the gospel, a foundation had been laid that would lead to the firm establishment of the church on the island.¹⁷¹

While this foundation was laid through the collective efforts of many, ultimately the gospel blesses individuals. Liang Shih Wei recalled his baptism on December 28, 1958: “The day of my baptism was very cold. The font was an outdoor one. Some kind member cooked a pitcher of boiled water to add to the font, but you can imagine that didn’t help much. I was dressed in my school Khaki uniform as they did not have white clothing for kids. After my dad baptized me, he had to carry me and run back into the building to get me changed. It was cold, but my heart was warm. And that began my life in the Church.”¹⁷² Just as Liang’s life in the church began in 1958, so too did the time period of 1956–1959 mark the beginnings of the birth of the LDS church in Taiwan.

experienced such common shortcomings, but rather that miraculous results were nevertheless obtained.

171. The early efforts of missionaries and church members exemplify this statement from the Lord: “Wherefore, be not weary in well-doing, for ye are laying the foundation of a great work. And out of small things proceedeth that which is great” (Doctrine and Covenants 64:33).

172. Liang Shih Wei, email to author, November 18, 2013; copy in possession of author.