

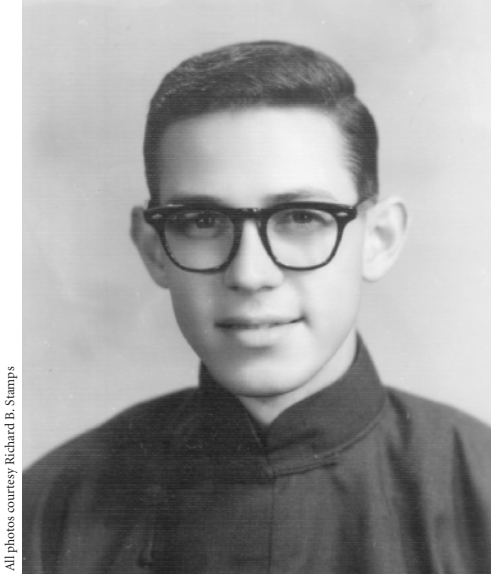
The Cultural Impact of Mormon Missionaries on Taiwan

Richard B. Stamps

I grew up in a multi-ethnic neighborhood in the San Francisco Bay Area, so from a very early age I was aware of China and things Chinese. In 1961 at Modesto Junior College, I met two international students from Hong Kong and was fascinated by their culture. When I heard a young man from our stake speak about his mission in Hong Kong, I said to myself, “That’s where I would like to go!” When I applied for a mission, I was interviewed by a General Authority, who asked, “Would you be willing to serve overseas and learn a foreign language?” I replied, “Yes.” He then asked, “Which language?” When I answered, “Chinese,” he started making notes. I was thrilled to be called to the Southern Far East Mission and serve in Taiwan from 1962 to 1965 (fig. 1).

Near the end of my mission, I met my sister-in-law’s uncle, an anthropologist doing research in Taiwan. A few chats with him helped me realize that I could have a career that would combine my love of history with my fascination for different cultures (especially the cultures of China), so I studied anthropology with a specialization in Chinese archaeology. I returned to Taiwan in 1972 for doctoral dissertation research and again in 1977 for post-doctoral research. I then settled into the happy life of an American academic—teaching, publishing, and making occasional trips to China. An important part of my work involves teaching people to understand foreign cultures, to make connections across cultural gaps, and to study cultures as living, changing entities.

In 1994, I was called to serve as the president of the Taiwan Taipei Mission of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This was an exciting “homecoming” for me and was my fourteenth trip to Asia. As an



All photos courtesy Richard B. Stamps

FIG. 1. Richard Stamps, as a young missionary in 1964, wearing the traditional *chang pao* (ankle-length coat) given him by the Fan family, whom he and Elder Casperson baptized in Miao Li, Taiwan.

anthropologist, I could not help but see that Latter-day Saint missionaries working in Taiwan have an impact on Taiwanese culture. At any given time, there were 135 to 195 missionaries in our mission. About 30 of those were natives of Taiwan from parts of the island outside the mission boundaries, and 5 to 10 more were expatriate Chinese from Canada or other areas. Most missionaries were young men; about 30 were young women. I saw the impact of the missionaries' presence appear in significant ways during my service both as a young missionary and as a mission president.

In addition to carrying the usual duties of a mission president, I was responsible for keeping a history of the development of the Church in our mission. A notable event in that history is the 1996 celebration of the fortieth anniversary (fig. 2) of the arrival in June 1956 of the first four Mormon missionaries on Taiwan. Through discussions held as part of that anniversary, I gained insight into the cultural impact the Church, and specifically the missionaries, has had on Taiwan. This essay attempts to record my impressions of those conversations and to formulate a few ideas about the cultural impact of Latter-day Saint missionaries on Taiwan in the latter half of the twentieth century. While my experience deals exclusively with the island nation of Taiwan, such cultural impacts apply to virtually anyplace where missionaries serve.

The Impact of Mormon Missionary Activity on Taiwan's Society

In the years since 1956, more than four thousand missionaries have served on Taiwan. By 1996, local Church membership numbered twenty-two thousand in a nation of twenty-one million. While I recognize that any influence the Church has had on Taiwanese society will necessarily be



FIG. 2. Fortieth anniversary of the Church in Taiwan, 1996. Missionaries and Taiwanese Saints gathered at the spot where Elder Mark E. Petersen dedicated Taiwan for the preaching of the gospel in 1956.

modest, as an anthropologist I see innumerable cross-cultural connections—connections that seem minute on a national level but are significant on a personal level and provide a beginning study of cultural impact.

Contributing to the Economy. When the first Mormon missionaries arrived on Taiwan in 1956, the country was still recovering from the impact of World War II and the Chinese civil war. Taiwan was still under martial law. Hard currency from American missionaries helped the developing economy. The missionaries who have served since then have spent money for eighteen to thirty-six months, supporting the nation's growing middle class. The modest monthly living expenses of the individual missionaries,¹ multiplied by four thousand, add up to a substantial dollar amount.

The Church also spent funds to rent meeting places and office space, to hire local caretakers for church buildings, and to print books and pamphlets. Moreover, the money invested by the Church and the missionaries did not go into the military or government programs but instead contributed in a practical way to the development of the Taiwanese middle class (figs. 3, 4). Compared to the GNP, the amount was minuscule, but to the developing middle class, it made a difference.

Making Connections and Friendships. The Mormon missionaries who came from abroad were often the first foreigners that some Taiwanese people met. The young, nonthreatening missionaries gave the Taiwanese the opportunity to meet, talk with, ask questions of, and get to know non-Chinese people. Coming to Taiwan willingly, the missionaries projected a positive image. They were volunteers, they lived modestly, and—most of all—they

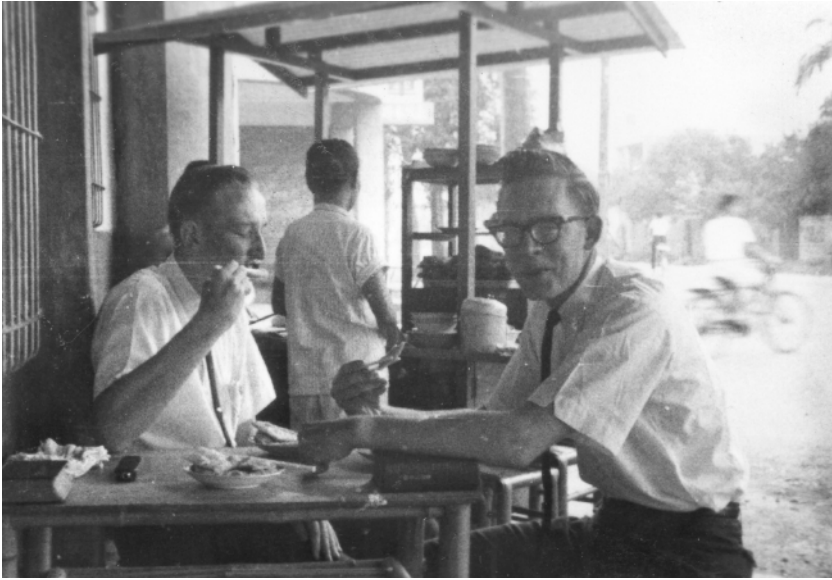


FIG. 3. Elder Doyle Brown, *left*, and Elder Larsen eat at an outdoor cafe in Tao Yuan, 1964. The “cafe” is on a bike cart. At the end of the day when his customers are finished eating, the owner will pack up the table and move on.

wanted to learn about the local people and their history, culture, and traditions as well as to teach the gospel. As a result, the missionaries were received much more favorably than were U.S. servicemen and women. The U.S. military was associated with the Taiwanese Nationalist government, which was not trusted by many native Taiwanese who lost family or friends in the struggle for control after the departure of the Japanese at the end of World War II.



FIG. 4. Elder Lance Barker examines Taiwanese cuisine, 1997.

During my first mission, I saw the many U.S. military men who came to Taiwan on “R and R” from Vietnam spending much of their time and money in the “red light” districts near the military bases, which did not leave a good impression with the conservative Taiwanese. While the soldiers raced around in their jeeps and taxis, the missionaries pedaled their bicycles like most of the locals (fig. 5). Today, while the locals drive cars and scooters, the missionaries are still on bikes. Most Taiwanese recognize the missionaries and admire them for the sacrifice they make to serve missions. I remember riding a local train and having a Buddhist woman tell me how much she admired and respected the young missionaries, who were making a sacrifice to serve the people of Taiwan.

It is easy to underestimate the importance of personal contacts between people. Yet it is just these simple acts that change attitudes and build positive associations. I tried to take every opportunity during my missions to make personal connections. For example, I accepted innumerable requests for interviews by Taiwanese high school students writing themes for their English classes. And of course the missionaries spent a good deal of their time building relationships. As a result of those ties, missionaries are invited to people’s homes not only for Church-related meetings but



FIG. 5. Elders Richard Stamps, *left*, and Mel Kalama, *center*, on bikes, 1963.



FIG. 6. Missionaries celebrating Chinese New Year with the Weng family, 1965. *Back Row:* Elder Jerry Skaggs, Sister Chen (a Chinese missionary), Sister Komoaha (a missionary from Hawaii) and Elder Stamps. The celebration was a family reunion and included wearing new clothes and eating a multicourse meal of peanuts, sweets, and handmade potstickers. A family ceremony held after dinner included grandchildren kneeling before grandparents. The grandparents gave them *hong bao*, a red envelope with money in it.

for festivities such as Chinese New Year. I remember how as a young missionary I was invited to a home for dinner on my last New Year there (fig. 6). In the inner room, I saw grandchildren kneel in reverence (*kow tao*) to their grandparents and then receive their *hong bao*—red envelopes with gifts of money. We were accepted as friends. To this day, almost forty years later, I still maintain contact with that family. Such experiences helped the Taiwanese people put a personality to the image of foreigners; personal contacts built bridges between nationalities in ways that television, movies, and books could not.

Providing English Lessons. The people of Taiwan have a great desire to learn English, the language of the global economy. In order to make contacts with locals, Mormon missionaries often offer English lessons free of charge. While serving in the city of Ping Tung in 1963, my companion and I taught twenty hours of English classes a week. In Kao Hsiung, my

companion Oliver Daniel Smith had skills in music, so we helped create a choir to teach English through song (fig. 7).

Mormon missionaries offered English classes in the church and gave weekly conversation classes in public schools. In conjunction with the classes, missionaries helped local Rotary Clubs prepare for international conventions, filled out forms in English for businessmen and travelers, and proofed papers for students. These lessons were often the only opportunity Taiwanese had to practice English with a native speaker. Missionaries of other denominations also taught such classes, but I have observed that Mormon missionaries had more contact with the Taiwanese people than other missionaries did over the years.

Many Taiwanese members of the Church became bilingual through their ongoing interactions with the foreign missionaries. Local young members who served missions on Taiwan also had opportunities to live and interact with foreign missionaries and visiting foreign Church leaders. Local leaders who went to seminars and training sessions outside of Taiwan met other leaders from Asia and interacted mostly in English. Second- and third-generation Mormons are growing up exposed to English both in the schools and in the Church. When I returned as mission president, a convert I had taught thirty-two years earlier invited our family to celebrate her grandson's birthday. We celebrated with three generations of a Taiwanese Mormon family, and all three generations had enough basic English skills to communicate with my non-Chinese-speaking daughter.



FIG. 7. In 1963, the missionaries decided to assist the U.S. Information Service in Kao Hsiung with a "friendship activity." Elder Oliver Daniel Smith, *center front*, who had experience with choirs, formed a youth chorus and recruited two piano players, one Taiwanese and one American. The Taiwanese youth performed in English.

Becoming Ambassadors for Taiwan. Just as Taiwanese got to know foreigners in a positive way, the foreign missionaries developed an awareness and sensitivity for the people of Taiwan. Anthropologists have long noted that field workers develop a strong attachment to their work. Not unlike participants in the Peace Corps and other volunteer groups, returned missionaries became advocates for Taiwan.

I know several returned missionaries who are pursuing careers in academics related to their Taiwan experience because of their love for that nation. Missionaries who had served in Taiwan helped out when Salt Lake City hosted the 2002 Winter Olympics.² And many returned missionaries used language and culture skills as they entered the business world. In their own small businesses or in larger firms, the missionaries' overseas, cross-cultural experience opened doors. Correspondingly, many Taiwanese business people made their first American contacts through returned missionaries and their families. The phrase "*Zai Jia Li Kao Fu Mu, Zai Wai Kao Peng You*" ("At home depend on parents, overseas depend on friends") shows the Chinese concept of using reciprocal relations (*Guan Xi*) in business, government, and other activities. A number of returned missionaries have entered government jobs in the U.S. State Department, Department of Agriculture, Army, Air Force, FBI, and CIA, using firsthand knowledge gained while on Taiwan.³ Matt Salmon, who served a mission in Taiwan and was later a representative to the U.S. Congress from the State of Arizona, said on the floor of the House during debates on U.S.-Taiwanese relations, "*Tai Wan Shi Wo Men De Peng You*" ("Taiwan is our friend"). He reflects the feeling of many who have been touched by Taiwan.

Missionary service in Taiwan usually makes not only the missionaries ambassadors for that nation but their family and friends also. Since over 90 percent of missionaries report that their experience in Taiwan was favorable, that goodwill is spread to a large number of people outside Taiwan.

Reinforcing Chinese Values. Traditional Chinese social values such as loyalty, benevolence, and service are increasingly under pressure in fast-paced Taiwan. The missionaries support these values through their teachings and activities. The prominent teaching that the family is the basic unit of society rings true with many people. Similarly, the teaching that "the glory of God is intelligence" (D&C 93:36) reinforces the Confucian value placed on education. Literacy is encouraged for male and female Church members of all ages. Although the Church does not operate its own schools on Taiwan, both men and women are strongly encouraged to get as much schooling as possible. Brigham Young University has hosted many undergraduate and graduate students from Taiwan, and the tradition continues with a large contingent from Taiwan at BYU-Hawaii.

The Latter-day Saint teaching of self-reliance also fits well with the traditional Chinese value of families taking care of their own. Relief Society and priesthood lessons give practical training in self-reliance. Other charities' aid sometimes created "rice Christians" (people who "converted" to Christianity to receive the rice that missionaries offered), but the Church welfare program emphasizes disaster prevention through training and preparation rather than rescue through food or clothing handouts.

The activities of the missionaries and the Church have in some cases pricked the social consciousness of the people of Taiwan. A lengthy article in the Taipei newspaper *Lien He Pao* discussed service performed by foreign missionaries (fig. 8). Photos depicted missionaries talking with people and—most powerfully—bathing invalid patients in an understaffed veterans' hospital. Letters to the editor written in response to the article commented that it was nice to see the examples of service, but it was embarrassing that the people of Taiwan were not taking care of their own and were dependent on help from foreigners. In another instance, Taiwan's litter problem came under scrutiny. In the increasingly wealthy society, garbage pickup and landfill costs are a mounting challenge. Styrofoam lunch boxes and bamboo chopsticks clutter the roadsides. The sight of foreign and local missionaries walking along streets and beaches picking up trash has caused some to admire the missionaries' service but also to denounce Taiwan's throw-away attitude.

Organizing Genealogy. Although the Chinese have a long tradition of preserving genealogies and family histories, little such work was being done in post-World War II Taiwan. A series of Church-sponsored microfilming projects, genealogical conferences, exhibitions, and data collection efforts supported the founding of the Genealogical Society of China.⁴ Several collection and preservation efforts have been strengthened. The impact of this activity will be felt for generations to come as future Taiwanese attempt to trace their roots.

Changing Lives. Local members of the Church were somewhat surprised at my query, "What has been the impact of the Church on Taiwan?" I was looking for something external, but they had experienced something internal. For them the Church had changed their lives.⁵ As President Gordon B. Hinckley said, "The purpose of the Church is to make bad men good, and good men better."⁶ The Church helps Taiwanese converts remember traditional Chinese values but also augment that with a knowledge and testimony of Jesus Christ. New members develop increased inner peace and the joy of knowing for themselves who they are and what their potential is.⁷

洋 馨 溫 溢 院 老 敬

圖明何/文與圖 慈有市城

「聽這公報。」「聽這公報。」「聽這公報。」

人聲鼎沸。這是在慈濟老人院。慈濟老人院是美國加州聖地牙哥市的一處老人院。慈濟老人院是美國加州聖地牙哥市的一處老人院。慈濟老人院是美國加州聖地牙哥市的一處老人院。



人老的不動行幫院老慈然浩遊關到都周短，年耆籍美名三

天一的快愉過度們人老陪，笑發們他逗、澡洗

慈濟老人院是美國加州聖地牙哥市的一處老人院。慈濟老人院是美國加州聖地牙哥市的一處老人院。慈濟老人院是美國加州聖地牙哥市的一處老人院。

OK 成老人口頭禪

「OK」成老人口頭禪。老人們在院中生活，感到滿意和舒適。他們經常說「OK」，這反映了他們對生活的積極態度。

藉慰精神人老予盼 石金衛 北在在州老

「予盼」是老人們對未來的期望。石金衛表示，老人們雖然身體衰老，但精神依然矍鑠。他們對生活充滿了熱愛和期待。

慈悲為念

「慈悲為念」是慈濟老人院的宗旨。院中充滿了溫馨和關懷，老人們在這裡得到了最好的照顧和服務。

Fig. 8. Lien He Pao, Sept. 20, 1994. This newspaper article featured William Watkins, pictured in four photos, and Jayson Calderwood, missionaries serving at a veterans' hospital. The two missionaries are standing in the large picture, bathing an elderly man.

Membership is not without challenges. The Church's prohibition of tobacco, tea, and wine and the opposition of some members to ancestor worship often alienate family and co-workers. Members may feel alienated from a community that celebrates Daoist, Buddhist, and folk holidays. Church leaders struggle to maintain continuity in Church work because some members feel the political and economic limitations on Taiwan and decide to leave the country for greener pastures. Feng Xi, in his 1994 dissertation on the Latter-day Saints in China, suggests, "It is relatively easier to find more qualified Chinese members available for a church position in California or Salt Lake today than in Taiwan."⁸ Fortunately, there has been some reversal of this trend in recent years.

Concluding Thoughts

As an anthropologist, I see the cultural impact the Church (and specifically the missionaries) has had on Taiwan. But as a mission president, I see a greater impact on the lives of individuals who are touched in some way by the gospel, either through contacts with missionaries or through conversion to the Church. It is my impression that Taiwanese people who are now grandparents have lives firmly rooted in Buddhism, people of the next generation centered their lives on material comforts, and the rising generation is coming of age in an environment lacking strong spiritual guidance.⁹ Those young people are looking for meaning in life—meaning that the gospel of Jesus Christ can provide for them.

Sometimes I hear people claim that the Church does not belong in Taiwan, that our goal is to force change on Taiwan—a change of religion, tradition, and culture. But we are not forcing anything; rather, we are offering our best gifts. We believe that we are living by the Chinese saying that you share your good things with your friends. The gospel is the best gift we can offer.

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Dr. Stamps welcomes information about the history of the Church in Taiwan from members and former missionaries. He hopes to establish an archive of Taiwanese Church history in Taipei. He plans to help the Church celebrate its fiftieth anniversary in Taiwan in 2006 and welcomes input for that event.

1. Between 1962 and 1965, I lived on \$65.00 a month. In the period 1994 to 1997, each missionary spent just over \$400.00 a month.

2. Nicholas Toyn, interview by Anastasia Sutherland, Provo, Utah, October 20, 2002.

3. Paul Hyer (Professor Emeritus of Asian Studies at Brigham Young University), interview by author, 1998.

4. Melvin Thatcher (representative of the Genealogical Society of Utah), interview by author, March 26, 1998.

5. Richard B. Stamps, *The Taiwan Saints* (Taipei, Taiwan: Cultural Dynamics, 1996) (in Chinese).

6. Gordon B. Hinckley, talk given to the Taiwan Taipei Mission conference May 25, 1996, Taipei, Taiwan, notes in possession of the author.

7. I believe this is what Brian Howell is referring to when he talks about “the religious elements of conversion” and “the personal, spiritual and psychological dimensions which believers themselves are most likely to say are the core of their religion.” Brian M. Howell, “Beyond Conversion: The Anthropology of Christianity for the Twenty-First Century,” presented at the Anthropology of Religion Section meetings, Kansas City, Missouri, 1998, 2.

8. Feng Xi, “A History of Mormon-Chinese Relations: 1849–1993” (Ph.D. diss., Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, 1994), 204.

9. I shared these thoughts with Jonathan Brody, who used them in his article “Trying to Fill an Emptiness,” *China News, Student News* [Taipei, Taiwan], December 25, 1994, 1–2.