

# On Church Romanized Colloquial Education in Modern Taiwan

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**Abstract.** In modern times, Christian missionaries from Europe and America carried out missionary activities and practiced Pèh-oē-jī (Romanized colloquial) Education in various parts of Taiwan. Pèh-oē-jī (Romanized colloquial), which uses Roman letters to spell Minnan colloquial dialect, is an important language vehicle for religious communication and church education in Taiwan Christian churches. Romanized colloquial is simple and easy to learn, which is conducive to the promotion of cultural level of ordinary people. Moreover, during the Japanese occupation period, the Romanized colloquial education by the Church became a symbol of Taiwanese society resisting to Japanese “colonialassimilation” and maintaining Chinese national identity and national consciousness.

## 1. Introduction

Historically, many foreign religions have spread into China and exerted an important influence. Among them, Christianity was introduced into China as early as in the Tang Dynasty, but suffered many setbacks and experienced ups and downs. It was after the Opium War that Christian missionaries entered China in large numbers by unequal treaties and began large-scale and lasting missionary activities, which to some extent affected the track of modern Chinese history. With the coming of missionary forces, Taiwan also became a Christian missionary area.

## 2. The Missionary Activities of the Christian Church in Taiwan

In 1624, the Dutch colonists conquered Taiwan and opened the prelude of Christian missionary work in China. In order to consolidate their rule, the Dutch colonists vigorously disseminated Christianity, and strengthened their ideological control by establishing education in churches, which pioneered in running schools by foreign Christian churches in China. In 1635, Dutch missionaries opened schools within the conquered tribes. Besides religious teachings, students also had to learn Dutch, Latin and Greek. In 1662, the Dutch colonial rule ended in Taiwan, and Christianity’s spread in Taiwan also ended.

In 1858, when the Tianjin Treaty was signed, ten more foreign trade ports were forcedly opened. Taiwan was among them, and missionaries entered Taiwan immediately. In 1860, Rev. Carstairs Douglas and Rev. Hur Libertas Mackenzie, missionaries of the Presbyterian Church of England stationed respectively at Xiamen (Amoy) and Shantou (Swatou), with Chinese Christian followers Huang Jiazhi and Wu Wenshui, visited Taiwan for missionary endeavors. But it was Dr. J. L. Maxwell who really began to preach the gospel again in Taiwan. In 1864, Dr. Maxwell first arrived in Xiamen to learn Minnan dialect. The following year, he went to Taiwan to preach and set up his first church in Takao (now Gaoxiong) in Tainan Prefecture. Before Taiwan was ceded to Japan in 1895, the Presbyterian Church of England had sent 23 missionaries to southern Taiwan, including Hugh Ritchie, Mathew Dickson and William Campbell. The missionary stations were mainly distributed in Tainan, Chiayi, Zhanghua, Takao, Ahou (now Pingdong) and Houshan. After 30 years of hard work, the Presbyterian Church of England had established 37 churches in Taiwan, with 1445 baptized adult believers.[1] In 1871, Rev. George Leslie Mackay, missionary of the Presbyterian Church of Canada also arrived Taiwan but preached mostly in Taibei. Under the influence of the Christian churches, the number of Christian believers in Taiwan had grown from a small number to a significant number,

which increased from 10,148 in 1898, to 69,189 in 1942, and now 275 missionaries. In 1899, there were only 75 preaching centers and by 1942, there were 259 preaching centers.[2]

### 3. The Education of Romanized Colloquial by the Christian Church in Taiwan

With the expansion of missionary areas and the increase in the number of believers, the Church began to develop education in Taiwan. In 1875, the Presbyterian Church of England first established training classes in Tainan and Takao to train native preachers and ministers; in 1876, the two classes evolved into Tainan Theological School (now Tainan Theological College and Seminary). Then in 1928, Tainan Girl's Theological School was established. In terms of curriculum arrangement, Tainan theological students needed to study Pêh-oē-jī (Romanized colloquial), Chinese, natural science, arithmetic and other subjects as well as Bible and Catechism.[3] In 1885, the Presbyterian Church of England established Presbyterian Middle School (predecessor of Chang Jung Senior High School) in Tainan to recruit boys. Two years later, the Presbyterian Girl's School (predecessor of Chang Jung Girl Senior High School) was also established in Tainan. In 1882, Rev. Mackay established Oxford College in Tamsui, and later established Tamsui Girl's School and Tamsui Middle School. The Church also established many other primary, secondary, and evening schools, and other boy's and girl's education institutions in different places. Due to the efforts of the Church, school education had achieved outstanding results and the number of students was increasing. For example, there were only 60 students in Tainan Presbyterian Middle School in 1914, and up to 238 in 1923 and over 500 in 1938;[4] and there were only 18 students in Tainan Girl's School in 1887, but the number had grown to 650 in 1943.[5]

Unlike theological schools, these mass-oriented church schools focused on the implementation of comprehensive quality education for students, not just on the spread of religious beliefs. English, Chinese and Romanized colloquial were almost the main subjects in the curricula of all the schools. Especially the teaching of Romanized colloquial had achieved unexpectedly good results in church schools. Romanized colloquial are written in Roman letters, and the initial consonants, vowels and tones are formulated to spell out dialect words according their vernacular pronunciation. The Church invented the alphabetic characters for Chinese dialects and adopted them as the main form of writing for missionary work. Romanized colloquial is simple and easy to learn. People who can not read Chinese characters can spell their colloquial after a few weeks of learning, and within one or two months they can read and write skillfully. So Romanized colloquial can greatly helps to read Christian classics and promote the spread of Christianity. Thus in modern Taiwan, many Christian books such as the Bible, Bible Illustrations, Biblical Poetry, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Mark's Gospel and The Book of Ruth were translated into Romanized colloquial and widely used in the church schools.

In modern Taiwan, Pêh-oē-jī (Romanized colloquial), which uses Roman letters to spell Minnan colloquial dialect, enabled a large number of grass-rooted people to learn to read much more quickly and then to grasp basic cultural knowledge much more easily and conveniently. In view of the practical value of Romanized colloquial, the Christian Church officially stipulated that the missionaries in Taiwan should promote Romanized colloquial as a compulsory course in church schools.[6] Besides religious books, many other books such as medical ones were translated in Romanized colloquial by the church. Church journals were published in Romanized colloquial as well. In modern Taiwan, vernacular characters not only created good conditions for Christianity to spread, but also objectively improved the cultural literacy of ordinary people.

### 4. The Influence of Church Romanized Colloquial Education on Taiwan Society

Foreign Christian churches in Taiwan set up numerous educational institutions including kindergartens, elementary schools, middle schools, universities, seminaries and vocational education schools, using education as a supplementary means and promotion method of missionary undertakings. Many attempts had been made in the schools, such as introducing English teaching, carrying out women's education. This sort of Western-style education had provided various talents

for Taiwan's modernization. In particular, offering courses in Romanized colloquial had a far-reaching impact on Taiwan's modern education

On the one hand, the easy-to-learn Romanized colloquial had helped to improve the cultural level of ordinary Taiwanese. In the church in modern Taiwan, "Few of female believers could read Chinese, and only about one tenth of male believers could read it." [7] The majority of Taiwanese spoke Minnan dialect. So Romanized colloquial could be learned to spell and read in a short time for Taiwanese. Native Christians used Romanized colloquial for correspondence. This form of writing enriched the spiritual life of Taiwan people and was welcomed by the native Christians.

On the other hand, Romanized colloquial has strengthened Taiwan's Chinese national identity and the cultural ties between Taiwan and Fujian. P<sup>h</sup>-o<sup>h</sup>-j<sup>i</sup>, a Romanized colloquial based on Minnan dialect promoted both in Fujian and Taiwan, has generated consanguineous and literary resonance in Taiwanese society. Especially in the period of Japanese occupation, Japanese colonists carried out the policy of assimilation in Taiwan. They first changed Chinese subjects in Taiwan's "public schools" from compulsory to optional. Afterwards, the optional Chinese subjects were abolished in Taiwan's "public schools" and all Chinese publications were banned, which attempted to break off Taiwan's Chinese cultural consciousness and eliminate Taiwan's Chinese national feelings and national identity. But there were exceptions for church schools. For example, in early period of Japan's occupation of Taiwan, most of the courses in Tainan Theological School taught in Romanized colloquial, except some Chinese classics in Chinese. With the intensification of Japan's "assimilation policy", the teaching in Romanized colloquial had been adopted in all subjects since 1919. After 1932, with the intensification of Japanese colonial policy in Taiwan, the teaching of Minnan dialect was restricted, but Romanized Colloquial teaching was retained, and the teaching of the Bible in Romanized colloquial of Minnan dialect was still allowed in church schools. During the period of Japanese occupation, "There were two kinds of Chinese languages in Presbyterian Middle School at that time, one was in Taiwanese pronunciation, and the other was in Japanese pronunciation. This was the characteristic of our alma mater (Presbyterian Middle School). Others, such as Tainan First Middle School, did not teach Chinese in Taiwanese pronunciation." [8] The "Chinese in Taiwanese pronunciation" here is actually P<sup>h</sup>-o<sup>h</sup>-j<sup>i</sup> (Romanized colloquial of Minnan dialect). It is precisely because of the "Romanized scriptural form" of P<sup>h</sup>-o<sup>h</sup>-j<sup>i</sup> that the teaching of "Chinese in Taiwanese pronunciation" had been retained for a long time in church schools and become an important teaching form of "Chinese language". Thus the church schools and Sunday schools that taught Romanized colloquial had become another choice for Taiwanese to maintain their status as "Chinese". [9] This is because Taiwan P<sup>h</sup>-o<sup>h</sup>-j<sup>i</sup>, a script spelled in Roman letters based on Minnan colloquial dialect, has a strong Chinese cultural identity and a close kinship with its mother tongue, namely Chinese generated and spoken in mainland China across the Strait.

Moreover, it is found that during the Japanese occupation period, Romanized colloquial also functioned as a tool to resist Japan's contra colonization and preserve Chinese national consciousness, which has positive historical significance. However, nowadays the so-called "consciousness of Taiwanese tongue", which makes efforts to promote Romanized colloquial, has a strong political purpose with a tendency for national split. Thus, the issue of Romanized colloquial in Taiwan should be examined respectively and objectively in specific historical contexts.

How to view Western missionaries's various educational activities, including Romanized colloquial education in China in the past 100 years? Obviously, the Western churches do bear the label of "cultural aggression". Aided by the powerful Western military forces, they set up their missionary stations and propagated Christianity in China by unequal treaties, which has a strong imperialist and colonial color. However, it is undeniable that quite a number of missionaries with dedication have made useful contributions in promoting Sino-Western cultural communication and China's modern cultural education and social change, just as the church Romanized colloquial education in modern Taiwan had far-reaching significance in disseminating knowledge and culture and maintaining the cultural bond between Taiwan and Mainland China. Therefore, the activities of Western missionaries and Christian churches in China cannot be generalized and simply criticized.

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