

# At Home in Formosa

[taiwan-panorama.com/en/Articles/Details](http://taiwan-panorama.com/en/Articles/Details)



As a missionary, Mackay (at left, in pith helmet) traveled widely. The photo shows him taking a boat to Hualien from Nanfang'ao in Yilan.

In Tamsui, Taiwan, more than 11,000 kilometers distant from the township of Zorra in the Canadian province of Ontario, there is a Mackay Street, and June 2 is “Dr. Mackay’s Day.” George Leslie Mackay (1844–1901) was the first missionary sent overseas by the Canada Presbyterian Church, and he contributed much to Taiwan in the fields of religion, healthcare, and education.

With his arrival Taiwan gained a “Reverend Mackay,” and he married a local woman named Tiu Chhang-miâ (Minnie Tiu), giving Canada both a “Taiwan son-in-law” who could speak fluent Taiwanese, and a self-confident “Formosan bride.” Though separated by the Pacific Ocean, Taiwan and Canada have a special connection thanks to Mackay.

When George Leslie Mackay arrived in Tamsui, as he later wrote in his memoirs *From Far Formosa*, “Something said to me, “This is the land.” This is similar to God’s calling Abraham to go into Canaan, but what awaited Mackay in Taiwan were challenges and pioneering work to be done.



Mackay worked with a foreign doctor stationed in Tamsui to help the sick.

### **Going local**

Born in the township of Zorra in Ontario, Canada in 1844, Mackay decided at a young age that he wanted to go abroad as a missionary. On March 9, 1872, he arrived by sea in Tamsui.

Assistant Professor Cheng Yang-en of the Taiwan Graduate School of Theology describes the Taiwan that Mackay encountered: The 1858 Treaty of Tianjin had opened the port of Tamsui to foreign trade, thus opening up Northern Taiwan to the world. But society was far from open, and there were frequent ethnic conflicts. However, difficulty and danger did not deter Mackay, and he pressed ahead with his missionary work.

Language was key to fitting in to society, and Mackay took every opportunity to learn and practice Taiwanese Hokkien, even learning the most authentic local terms from boys who were herding water buffaloes. Mackay recorded in his diary: “This language is between me

and the people—I'll die or remove it, so help me God." Mackay arrived in Tamsui in early March, and in less than five months he was able to preach in Taiwanese.

Mackay's fluency in Taiwanese made him a curiosity, and people were attracted to hear what he had to say. Aletheia University chaplain Wang Jung-chang notes that Mackay showed genuine concern for the hardships of the people, and they in turn felt "this bearded barbarian is on our side."



Mackay often taught classes outdoors, using the world as instructional material.



Mackay not only did missionary work but also treated the ill and pulled teeth. Many old photos show him doing this work.

### **Medicine first**

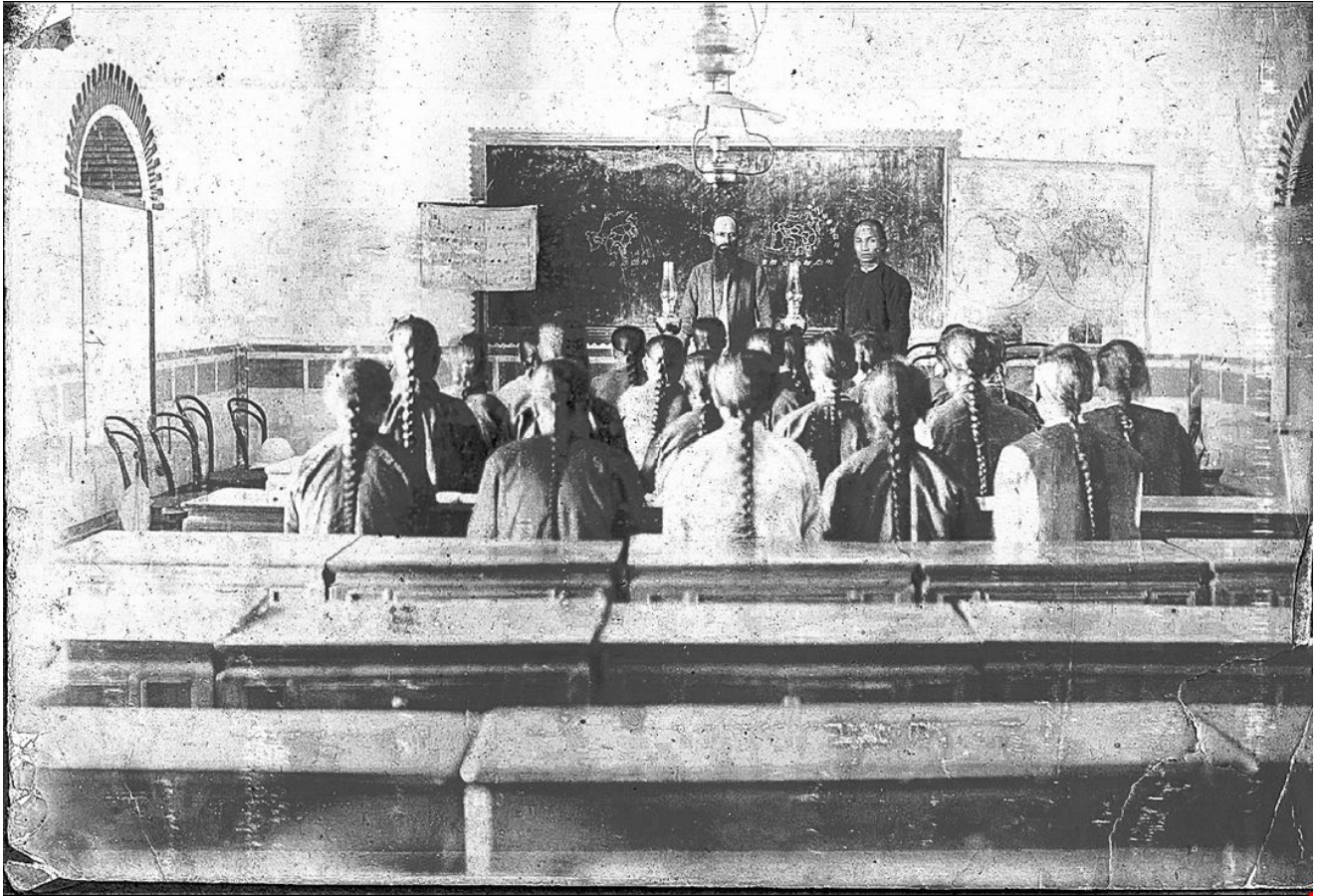
“All of the early missionaries in Taiwan had to help with people’s daily lives if they were to make a connection and overcome the local populace’s reticence and suspicions. The most common way they did this was by providing medical care,” says Cheng Yang-en.

Before coming to Taiwan, Mackay had undergone basic medical training. In his diary he writes that after finding lodging in Tamsui in March, by June he had already begun healthcare work. Besides using quinine to treat malaria, Mackay also pulled teeth, so that most people’s image of him was that of a man with a Bible in one hand and dental forceps in the other. He estimated that he had extracted more than 21,000 teeth, and there are many old photos of him doing this.

After Tamsui was opened to foreign trade, foreign businesspeople living there collectively hired a community doctor, and Mackay worked with him to treat the sick and frail. In 1880 Mackay founded the Hobe Mackay Hospital with funds donated by a woman from Detroit, also named Mackay, in commemoration of her late husband, a sea captain. The hospital, which was the earliest institution of Western medicine in northern Taiwan, served many injured persons during the Sino–French War of 1884–1885.



Oxford College, the original building of which is located on the campus of today's Aletheia University, was Taiwan's first modern school.(photo by Jimmy Lin)



In this old photo we can see a map of the world hung in a prominent place on the wall.

### **Education for all**

Oxford College, founded in 1882, and so named because Mackay raised funds for it on a trip back to his home county of Oxford, Ontario, was Taiwan's first modern school. The building still stands on the campus of today's Aletheia University.

Prior to this, Mackay had taught out in the open, "under the spreading banyan-tree, with God's blue sky as our vaulted roof." He led students out into nature to learn knowledge about the environment that wasn't in books. Besides lecturing on theology and the Bible, he taught many subjects, including geography, astronomy, anatomy, botany, zoology, and medicine. When out and about, he invariably collected plants, minerals, and indigenous people's cultural artifacts.

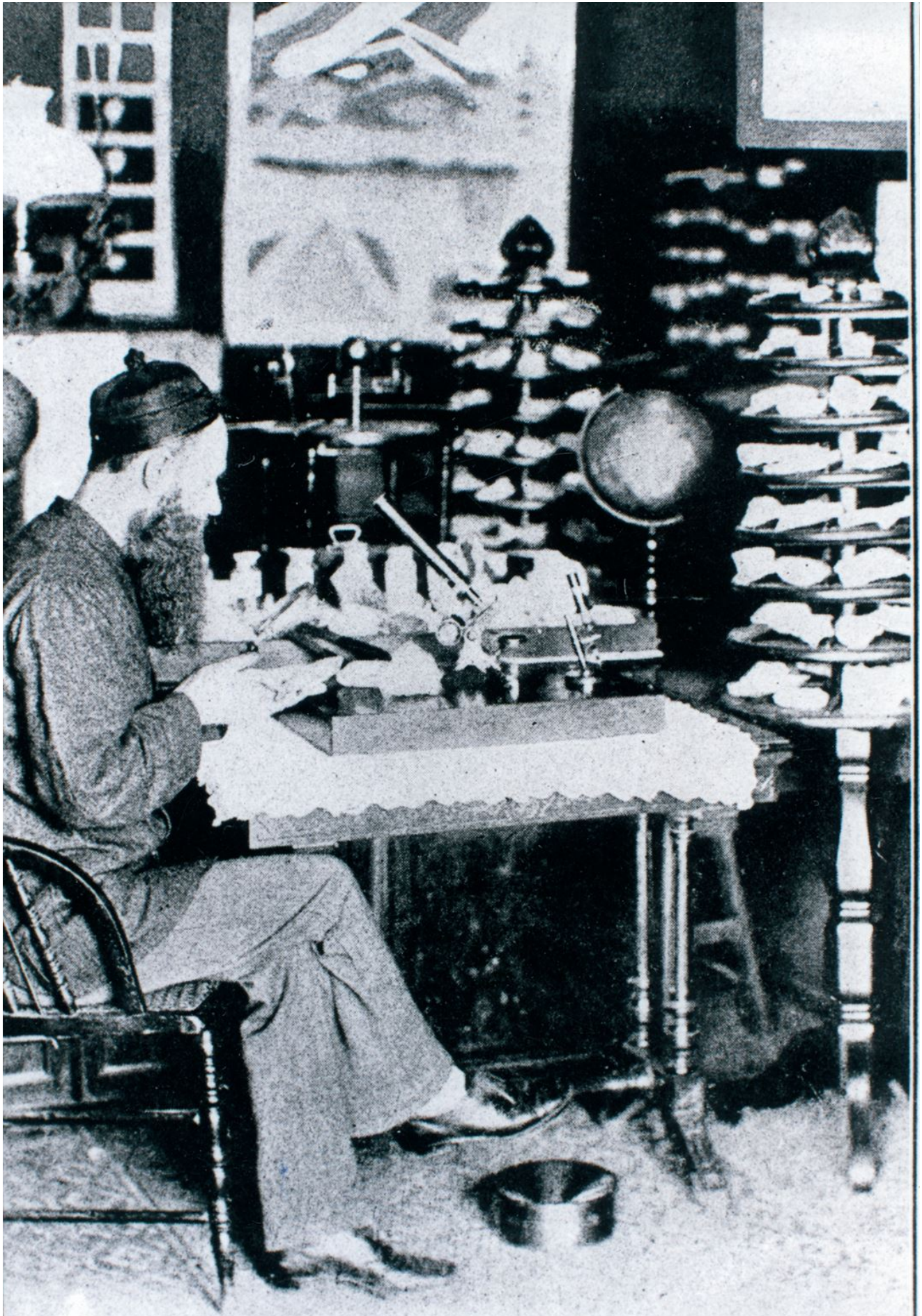
This curriculum, explains Cheng Yang-en, was based on the spirit of the Scottish Enlightenment. In the 17th and 18th centuries, various European countries initiated the modern era of development in science, medicine, education, and other fields. "Scotland was special because its Enlightenment focused on education, to train intellectuals with a social conscience."

This concept was similar to today's liberal (or general) education. Hence some people say that Oxford College was the pioneer of general education curriculums in Taiwan.

In 1914, 13 years after Mackay's death, his only son, George William Mackay, founded Tamkang High School, the predecessor to today's Tamkang Senior High School. David Wang, curator of Tamkang Senior High's school history museum, notes that it has produced many famous graduates, including Tsai Ah-hsin (Chhoà A-sìn), Taiwan's first female physician; Chung Hsin-hsin, who reformed Taiwan's nursing system and education; the late president Lee Teng-hui, who led Taiwan from authoritarianism to democracy; and Chung Chao-cheng, known as one of the fathers of Taiwan literature.



The arcaded building of Tamsui Girls' School, founded by Mackay, still stands today. (photo by Jimmy Lin)





---

In his residence in Tamsui Mackay had a small museum where he kept items he had gathered from all over Taiwan. Most of this collection is now held by the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto.



Mackay's son George William Mackay founded Tamkang High School in 1914. Its dormitory, topped with an octagonal tower, housed many Taiwanese students who went on to achieve great things. (photo by Jimmy Lin)

### **A gift to Taiwan**

In his writings, George Leslie Mackay often makes mention of maps of the world.

In his diary entry for May 8, 1872 he notes: "Strung up a map of the world and began with A-Hôa. How he opened his eyes and went right at it 'with gloves off' as the Yankee would say." "A-Hôa" was Giam Chheng Hoa (Yan Qinghua in Mandarin), Mackay's first acolyte. Moreover, a photo in the old Oxford College building shows a world map stuck on the wall. Mackay wanted to teach his students about the vastness of the world.

Cheng Yang-en shares another story, which recounts how Taiwan's third Japanese governor-general, Maresuke Nogi, visited the home of the chief of the Rapan indigenous community, where he was amazed to find a world map on the wall. He was told that it was a gift from

Mackay. “This shows Mackay’s worldview. He wanted to bring the enlightened world of Canada and Scotland to Taiwan and help Taiwanese to learn about the globe, so they would know that they were not simply living in Taiwan but could be part of the larger world.”

Mackay’s all-encompassing memoir of Taiwan leaves a deep impression. He observed Taiwanese weaving fibers from banana tree pseudostems into a light cloth, and noted that betelnuts could be gifts of reconciliation. “There is a tongue in every leaf, a voice in every flower.” Cheng explains that Mackay adopted a broad interpretation of the Gospels, understanding the order of the world through its myriad forms of life, physical phenomena and events, and from there getting to know the God who created the universe.

### **Empowering women**

In the conservative Taiwan of that time, Mackay also opened new pathways for women. He founded a school for women and girls, marking the beginning of female education in Taiwan. Women could absorb new knowledge and pursue vocations, and consequently change their social status.

However, Mackay was no feminist. Rather, he was motivated by humanitarian concern and his sympathy for the plight of women as a disadvantaged group.

Unlike most Protestant overseas missionaries of that era, Mackay was single when he came to Taiwan. Because of the strict separation between genders at that time, he was unable to bring the gospel he believed in to local women. With a formal introduction through a matchmaker, Mackay married the adopted granddaughter of a Taiwanese Christian. He had previously baptized his future bride, whose surname was Tiu (Zhang in Mandarin), giving her the new given name Chhang-miâ (Congming), meaning “clever,” instead of her birth name, Chhang-a (Congzi), meaning “scallion.” As Mackay’s wife, she was known in English as Minnie Mackay.

Mackay was not only Minnie’s partner but also her teacher, and she became his most capable assistant. Mackay returned to Canada twice to tell people about his mission, and took Minnie along both times. Researchers who have studied their route believe that Minnie Mackay was the first Taiwanese woman to travel around the world. From old pictures of Minnie one can see that after being educated she had a very self-confident style.



The life of Minnie Tiu (Tiu Chhang-miâ) was transformed by her marriage to Mackay, and she developed a self-confident style.



Mackay requested that after his death he be buried in Taiwan, and family members also are interred here. (photo by Jimmy Lin)

### **Long memories**

In 1901 Mackay, then only 57, died of throat cancer, ending his rich and adventurous life. He had wished to be buried in Taiwan, and he and family members were interred in a graveyard on the campus of Tamkang High School.

Su Bunkhoe, who has long studied the culture and history of Tamsui, reminds us of Mackay's importance to Taiwan against the background of 20-plus years of community development: "In the modern history of Taiwan no other foreigner has been so intertwined with the local history and culture of a specific place. Even after more than a century Mackay's name has the power to attract support for local development efforts in Tamsui, not only in terms of adding refinement to local culture but even changing the face of the town and promoting local industries."

The connection between Taiwan and Canada can be traced back to Mackay's arrival 150 years ago. Today successors to his acolytes are still active doing missionary work in Taiwan. In 1995 a bust of Mackay was erected in Tamsui, in 2000 Canada's Oxford County and Tamsui

became sister cities, and in 2015 Tamkang Senior High School and Oxford County's Woodstock Collegiate Institute became sister schools. Moreover, the Ontario-based Canadian Mackay Committee has long promoted mutual visits with Taiwan, and Tamkang and Aletheia University are must-see stops for Canadian political figures visiting Taiwan.

In 2022, the 150th anniversary of Mackay's arrival in Tamsui will be marked by the issuance of a commemorative postage stamp, and by special exhibitions at Tamsui Metro station, Mackay's former residence, and the Oxford College building. Other events will also be held in his honor, including concerts, celebratory church services, and tours of places where he proselytized, to keep alive the memory of his love for and contributions to Taiwan.

George Leslie Mackay's life was closely interwoven with Taiwan, and he is part of Taiwan's history. During the 29 years of his missionary work, he established 60 churches and trained dozens of local pastors. Taiwan is the place he called home, and as we celebrate the 150th anniversary of his arrival in Taiwan, his spirit of devotion will be fondly remembered.



An exhibition at Tamsui Metro station for the 150th anniversary of Mackay's arrival in Tamsui traces his life in Taiwan through precious historical photographs. (photo by Jimmy Lin)

# 馬偕來臺 150 週年紀念 郵票

Canada

150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of George Leslie Mackay's Arrival  
in Taiwan Commemorative Issue



中華郵政股份有限公司發行



Chunghwa Post is marking the 150th anniversary of Mackay's arrival in Taiwan with a commemorative stamp. (courtesy of Chunghwa Post Co. Ltd.)