

OPINION: The story of a Canadian missionary in Taiwan

 torontosun.com/opinion/columnists/opinion-the-story-of-a-canadian-missionary-in-taiwan

Author of the article:

Winston Wen-yi Chen and Michael Stainton, [Special to Toronto Sun](#)

Publishing date:

May 15, 2022 • 17 hours ago • 3 minute read • [Join the conversation](#)



The bust of Canadian missionary George Leslie Mackay at the Oxford County Court House is seen Jan. 12, 2015, with overnight snowfall in Woodstock, Ont. Photo by BRUCE URQUHART / FILES / Postmedia Network

George Leslie Mackay (1844-1901) was the first Canadian Presbyterian missionary in Taiwan. He landed in Tamsui in north Taiwan on March 9, 1872. He braved many hardships to conduct missionary work in Taiwan and went on to establish 60 churches, two schools including Taiwan's first school for women, and a medical clinic. He learned to speak their language from herd boys, considered his converts his teachers, and famously married a Taiwanese woman.

As 2022 marks the 150th anniversary of Mackay's arrival in Tamsui, activities are being held to honour him, and a Mackay 150 commemorative stamp was issued. In a congratulatory message on this special historic occasion, Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen recalled Mackay's numerous accomplishments, most notably the founding of Oxford College, a gift from the people of Ontario's Oxford County in 1881.

Mackay's medical work was another lasting legacy, marked by the 6 branches of Mackay Memorial Hospital and a medical school. The name Mackay is synonymous with health care in Taiwan. When Taiwan donated masks and medical equipment to Canada in 2021, many of the donor groups specifically mentioned their gratitude to Rev. Mackay.

During his journey spanning 30 years, Mackay identified with the needs of the Taiwanese people and served them creatively. Though not a dentist, he saw the pain people suffered from bad teeth and applied his Canadian pioneer farmer DIY dentistry skills and pulled teeth everywhere he went.

Mackay knew that nothing matters more than leading a healthy, productive and meaningful life serving others. His practical compassion earned deep respect. The Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, of which Mackay was one of the founders, remains a positive influence in Taiwan's civil society.

Mackay's presence in Taiwan more than a century ago created a unique bond between Taiwan and Canada. Our two countries are like-minded partners with similar values and goals. We both prioritize the well-being of our citizens. In a long pandemic, we are staunch defenders of public health.

Today in Canada, we need to remember Mackay, and more importantly, reflect on how we can work to continue his vision of health for all and helping those in need.



A woman receives a COVID-19 test amid the coronavirus outbreak in Taipei, Taiwan, Thursday, May 12, 2022. Photo by Ann Wang /REUTERS

For the past two years, Taiwan's anti-pandemic efforts, its contributions to the international community, and its cooperation with partners worldwide have demonstrated that Taiwan is a force for good. It has also shown that Taiwan is willing and able to join global efforts to combat the pandemic and tackle the myriad challenges of the post-pandemic era.

It is a shame Taiwan is still excluded from the annual World Health Assembly (WHA), taking place on May 22-28 this year. The COVID-19 pandemic has reminded the world that disease knows no borders. Having been left isolated and unsupported during previous epidemics, Taiwan deeply understands the importance of mutual assistance and strengthening resilience to creatively meet challenges.

Leaving Taiwan out of the WHA gravely impacts the efficacy of international health cooperation. Canada's support for Taiwan to be invited by the WHA will definitely help.

The World Health Organization has the mandate to achieve health for all. Taiwan works for the well-being of its people despite being excluded from the United Nations. Canada can help Taiwan on the health front. Showing active support for Taiwan's participation in the WHA is an appropriate way to honour the memory of this great Canadian who helped build modern Taiwan.

Winston Wen-yi Chen is Representative of the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Canada. Reverend Michael Stainton is a senior member of the Canadian Mackay Committee and President of the Taiwanese Human Rights Association of Canada.