

# From Wife to Missionary: Lillian Dickson's Medical Missions in Post-War Taiwan\*

LEE Jen-der\*\*

## 1 Introduction

According to the Gospel of Luke, Jesus once visited the house of Martha and Mary. While Martha was preoccupied with the many preparations needed for receiving their honorable guest, Mary sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. Martha complained, and Jesus replied,

Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled by many things, but one thing is needful, and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.

Since Christ himself had confirmed what was best, the contrast between the sisters became a useful analogy in church history for women seeking the right way to serve. It was referred to again in 1954 when Lillian R. Dickson, founder of The Mustard Seed, Inc., announced that she was leaving household chores for a religious vocation. She told her husband that she had organized her Martha work and that now she wanted to do some Mary work, too. She claimed she was no longer satisfied being just a missionary's wife; she wanted to engage in the work herself as a missionary wife.<sup>1</sup>

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\* An earlier version of this article was published in Chinese. See Lee, Jen-der 李貞德, "Cong shimu dao nuxuan: Sun Lillian zai zhanhou Taiwan de yiliao chuandao jingyan" 從師母到女宣：孫理蓮在戰後台灣的醫療傳道經驗 [From wife to missionary: Lillian Dickson's medical missions in post-war Taiwan], *Xinshixue* 新史學 16.2 (Taipei, 2005), pp. 95–151. Documents used in this research are mostly collected in the "China Project" archives of Yale Divinity School. I wish to express my deepest gratitude to the archivists and librarians there for their tremendous help and generosity. Additional publications of The Mustard Seed, Inc. in Taiwan have also been consulted.

\*\* Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica

1 Kenneth L. Wilson, *Angel at Her Shoulder: Lillian Dickson and Her Taiwan Mission*, forward by Daniel A. Poling (New York: Harper & Row, 1964;

Lillian went to Taiwan in her twenties with her husband, James Dickson. Thirty years later she developed her own mission fields. The first Christmas she was in Taiwan, she welcomed lepers into her home. When she returned to Taiwan after World War II, she went into the mountains to distribute medicine and to set up itinerant clinics. She interceded to reform the government-run leper colony in a suburb of Taipei and attracted media attention by rescuing blackfoot patients on the southwest coast. She received several awards from the government of the Republic of China (ROC) and is remembered as a legendary figure in the history of Christianity in Taiwan.

Since the mid-nineteenth century, medicine has served as an important vehicle for the work of Western churches in East Asia.<sup>2</sup> In the years when women were not allowed to become ministers or priests, they participated in missions either as professionals, such as doctors, nurses, or teachers, or simply as pastors' wives.<sup>3</sup> Women held licenses or were trained in basic medical techniques, and they joined the field with an enthusiasm equal to that of men. But their roles and activities have often been overlooked in spite of an increase in recent decades in the number of publications on medical missions. Recent research has also seen interest in missionary women in China, but the stories of those going to Taiwan from the 1870s have remained mostly unstudied.

Lillian Dickson arrived in Taiwan in 1927 as a participant in the legacy of the American missionary movement. She lived through both the Japanese colonial period and the Chinese nationalist era in Taiwan. Her experiences during the two periods differed substantially. By proclaiming in her chatty letters and annual speaking tours that the biblical images of Martha and Mary were her spiritual role models, she drew notice from American churches. What was the effect of her "Mary" work, and how did it differ from her

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Christian Herald Paperback Library, 1970), p. 90.

- 2 For a pioneer study of medical missions in China, see Theron Kue-Hing Young, "A Conflict of Professions: The Medical Missionary in China, 1835–1890," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 47 (Baltimore, 1973), pp. 250–272. For an update on research and a summary of the subject, see Li Shangjen 李尚仁, "Zhanshi, shuofu yu yaoyang: shijiu shiji chuanjiao yiliao zai zhongguo" 展示、說服與謠言：19世紀傳教醫療在中國 [Demonstration, persuasion, and rumor: medical missions to nineteenth-century China], *Taiwanese Journal for Studies of Science, Technology and Medicine*, No. 8 (Taipei, 2009), pp. 9–75.
- 3 The participation of American women in foreign missions peaked in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Women missionaries with professional skills went abroad and fought for equal treatment in mission fields. See Patricia R. Hill, *The World Their Household: The American Woman's Foreign Mission Movement and Cultural Transformation, 1870–1920* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1985).

earlier “Martha” chores? Through her words and actions, what information and images were conveyed across the Pacific? How was she perceived in the process and what aspects about gender did that perception reveal? This article attempts to answer these questions through use of Lillian’s personal correspondence, church reports, biographies, and media literature. It explores, through the case study of a woman missionary, issues concerning medical missions, cultural exchanges, and international politics in twentieth century Taiwan.

## **2 The Missionary Life of Lillian Dickson**

Lillian was born in a town near Prior Lake, Minnesota in 1901. She graduated from Macalester College, St. Paul in 1925 and received training for two years at a New York Bible school before her departure for Taiwan. The year Lillian graduated, a majority of the members of the Canadian Presbyterian Church (CPC) split off to merge with other Protestant denominations to form the United Church of Canada. This caused anxiety within missionary circles in northern Taiwan.<sup>4</sup> Many missionaries chose to move south to join the English Presbyterian Church, leaving the congregations in northern Taiwan in need of human resources. The newly-wed Dicksons answered the urgent call of the CPC and immediately took up pastoral and medical responsibilities upon their arrival in northern Taiwan. In a home-bound letter sent two months later, the Dicksons joked about their insufficient language skills and the physical stress of hosting two-hundred leper patients.<sup>5</sup> In fact, before the Dicksons decided to leave Taiwan at the start of the war, Lillian took part in the mission field mainly through learning spoken Taiwanese and assisting with daily activities.

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4 There was a split in the Canadian Presbyterian Church in 1925 over the issue of joining the Methodist and Congregationalist churches to form the United Church of Canada. Two-thirds of the churches concurred with the merger while the other one-third remained in the Presbyterian Church of Canada. Although most missionaries in northern Taiwan endorsed the union, Taiwan as a whole was put under the oversight of the Presbyterian Church. The arrangement led many senior missionaries to move south in 1926 to join the British Presbyterian mission, which caused great anxiety among those who remained in Taipei. See the letter sent February 11, 1927 by Rev. Duncan Macleod from Taiwan to A.E. Armstrong, the pastor in charge of foreign missions of the United Church of Canada.

5 Mr. and Mrs. James Dickson, “Letter to Dear Christian People,” December 27, 1927.

## 2.1 The Martha Years

During the Dicksons' first thirteen years in Taiwan, Lillian lived and worked as a missionary's wife. Her husband, James, served as deputy principal of Tamsui Middle School and then as president of Taipei Theological School.<sup>6</sup> The Dickson house was always full of students and guests, and Lillian often expressed anxiety over unexpected visitors. She claimed that she had to be witty and hospitable because that was required of her as "an inn-keeper's wife."<sup>7</sup> Initially unable to become acclimated to life in Taiwan and burdened by her workload, Lillian suffered two miscarriages during the first three years of her stay.<sup>8</sup> She took long walks, sometimes along the beach, to relieve her worries, and wrote continuously to reach out for consolation.

Writing as a wife, Lillian's letters contained more funny anecdotes of socio-cultural phenomena than church information. The Taiwanese people were portrayed as thrifty, straightforward, and unfamiliar with tedious etiquette. Men and women sat separately in church. Children were allowed to run around during services; the congregations were never as quiet as in North America. As for receptions at the Dicksons' house, they were always in need of cakes and cookies because, as Lillian commented, "these women from the mountain were not used to our ways," meaning the women preferred eating to chatting at parties.<sup>9</sup>

After Japan invaded China in 1937, the lives of missionaries in Taiwan became precarious as the number of military exercises increased and social control was tightened. Lillian tried being comical when she encountered

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6 Tamsui Middle School was established in 1882 by Reverend George Leslie Mackay (1844–1901), a Canadian Presbyterian missionary who arrived in Taiwan in 1867. Taipei Theological School became Taiwan Theological College and Seminary in 1948.

7 Lillian Dickson, "Letter to Dear Friends," November 23, 1938. Part of the letter is included in the collection published later by Lillian's daughter. See Marilyn Dickson Tank ed., *Chuckles Behind the Door: Lillian Dickson's Personal Letters* (Taipei: year unknown). The image of witty hospitality is also mentioned in Wilson, *Angel at Her Shoulder*, p.43. All letters cited herein after were written by Lillian Dickson unless otherwise specified.

8 Lillian had complications during her first pregnancy, and a pre-mature delivery for the second pregnancy. Both babies died shortly after birth, and it was not until 1931 that the Dicksons had their first boy, Ronald. Their daughter, Marilyn, was born the following year. According to her biographer, the doctor comforted her by saying that most missionaries failed in two of every five pregnancies. See Wilson, *Angel at Her Shoulder*, p.40.

9 "Letter to Dear Friends," March 31, 1928, Jan.10, 1929; March 6, 1939. See also "Letter to Dear Friends," Nov. 23, 1938, in Tank, *Chuckles Behind the Door*, pp.49–52.

frightening experiences. She made fun of herself by describing how she greeted an armed soldier in front of her house with *kon nichu wa*, the only Japanese expression that came to mind.<sup>10</sup> In her writing, she began using images of suffering when describing Taiwanese. She reported stories she had heard about boys resisting being drafted and girls fleeing from summons by the military to “serve in the camp.”<sup>11</sup> Lillian was afraid that her fellow countrymen in the United States would not understand the dilemma of the Taiwanese people and would stop praying for the people on the island because the war had been initiated by the Japanese, Taiwan’s rulers. In addition, she complained about the lack of official support from the West, and felt that the US government looked down on the missionaries as “poor relatives who were a trifle queer in the head.”<sup>12</sup> This sentiment of being disowned seemed to have formed a bond between her and the people she attended to.

Due to heightened tension between Japan and the United States, the missionaries on Taiwan were closely watched by Japanese officials. The Dicksons finally decided to leave the island in 1941.<sup>13</sup> After a short stay back in North America, they were sent out again by the CPC, this time to British Guiana. Lillian came to see herself in a new light during the five years in South America. Though a white woman, she felt totally different from the British colonizers and dismissed the pretentious etiquette of the “old society.” She was proud to shock the British women by riding a bicycle, scrubbing her

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10 “Letter to Friends Invisible,” 1937, in Tank, *Chuckles Behind the Door*, pp. 28–30, and “Letter to Dear Friends,” Nov. 10, 1939.

11 “Letter to Dear Miss Doty,” Aug. 18, 1938. Margaret Doty was the president of Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota. Lillian sent a series of letters to Miss Doty between autumn of 1937 and summer of 1938. On the title pages she specifically requested that the letters not be circulated or published for fear that people would be arrested. The original copies were sent from Kashiwabara, Japan and are now collected in the “China Project” archive of Yale Divinity School. Marilyn named the letters “Leaves from a Wartime Diary” and included them in Tank, *Chuckles Behind the Door*, pp. 34–45. For a description of the mobilization of the people of Taiwan to join the Japanese war effort, see Chou, Wanyao 周婉窈, “Ribei zaitaide junshi dongyuan yu Taiwanren de haiwai canzhan jingyan, 1937–1945, 日本在台的軍事動員與台灣人的海外參戰經驗：1937–1945 [Japan’s military mobilization and Taiwanese overseas war experiences, 1937–1945], *Taiwan Historical Research* 2.1 (Taipei: Academia Sinica, 1995. 6), pp. 97–102.

12 “Letter to Dear Friends,” Nov. 23, 1938. Parts included in Tank, *Chuckles Behind the Door*, p. 52.

13 According to “Letter to Miss Doty,” the colonial government would arrest missionaries for spy activities and Japanese detectives would investigate the Dicksons’ correspondence to prevent them from making contact with individuals overseas.

own floors, and by being the only white woman in the colony to do her own cooking and housework.<sup>14</sup> The thrifty and straightforward images that she had used to portray Taiwanese women years earlier seemed to be useful in Guiana for her to distinguish herself as a missionary woman from the new world.

More importantly, owing to the lack of human and material resources in Guiana, Lillian had to participate in a variety of mission activities. She visited families, took care of congregations, preached to street people, and told Bible stories to hundreds of children on the plantations.<sup>15</sup> These experiences, which transcended her previous roles as wife and mother, provided her with a sense of accomplishment and inspired her to undertake similar work when she returned to Taiwan.<sup>16</sup>

## 2.2 The Work of Mary

Soon after the war was over, James returned to Taiwan with a team that distributed food and supplies on behalf of the American government. He had been excited by stories of Christian revival in the mountains of Taiwan despite Japanese oppression, and wanted to resume his mission as soon as possible.<sup>17</sup> Lillian returned the following year after having acquired many experiences of evangelization of children.<sup>18</sup> She was forty-six at this point, no longer burdened with raising her own children, and had decided to lead a different life.

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14 "Letter to Dear Friends," Nov. 12, 1942. Parts included in Tank, *Chuckles Behind the Door*, pp. 66–67. In fact, many British women tried to enrich their lives in the colonies during war time through professional work such as teaching and nursing. See Thomas R. Metcalf, "Imperial Towns and Cities," in P. J. Marshall ed., *The Cambridge Illustrated History of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 224–254. Lillian saw a great many differences instead of similarities between the colonizers and herself.

15 "Letter to Dear Friends," October 10, 1941. Parts included in Tank, *Chuckles Behind the Door*, pp. 58–62.

16 Wilson, *Angel at Her Shoulder*, p. 90.

17 An aboriginal woman, Chi-won, was reported to have inspired the revival through her perseverance under persecution. Her story was recorded in many church accounts and became legendary in the Christian history of colonial Taiwan. See Lillian Dickson, *These My People: Serving Christ among the Mountain People of Taiwan* (Grand Rapid: Zondervan Publishing House, 1958), Chapter 2, "Pentecost in the Hills," pp. 16–27. Wilson, *Angel at Her Shoulder*, pp. 81–89. Also, History Committee of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, ed., *A Hundred Years of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan* (Tainan, 1965), pp. 365–371.

18 Both Ronald and Marilyn were teenagers then and attended school in the U.S.



Lillian continued her habit of letter writing. Her amiable style and touching stories presented to American readers an image of a post-war Taiwan greatly in need of help. Personal and institutional donations poured in, and the number of requests to reprint her letters reached 25,000 in 1954. After repeatedly receiving encouragement from friends, she finally decided to establish a non-profit organization so that donors could apply for tax deductions. The headquarters of the organization, The Mustard Seed, Inc., was thus located in California, while Lillian, as its defining figure, continuously sent out newsletters from her office in Taipei.<sup>19</sup> The nearly one thousand letters she wrote became the medium through which American churches learned about Taiwan. The letters now serve as research material for us to picture the world around her.

After the experience of a successful speaking tour in the U.S., Lillian decided to use her newsletters to announce her upcoming travel itineraries. From 1954, whenever she traveled to North America, she would accept advance invitations to appear on television, visit Christian institutions, or to be interviewed. She would then ask the U.S. Air Force and American consulate in Taiwan for assistance transporting back to Taiwan whatever monetary and material support she secured during her trips.<sup>20</sup> With these resources, dozens of organizations were built. After her husband James passed away in 1967, Lillian started the Burning Bush Mission in his name and sent aboriginal Taiwanese pastors to Indonesia and the South Pacific to carry on the mission.<sup>21</sup>

Lillian's mission often began with medical care and promotion of hygiene, followed by training programs and the building of churches. Her original intention was to evangelize children, but what attracted American donors and secured the most funding were her medical missions, such as mountain clinics, the leper colony, and the blackfoot disease clinic. Although she wrote mostly about the first two missions, the American Christian media was deeply interested in the third area, the blackfoot disease clinic.<sup>22</sup>

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19 Wilson, *Angel at Her Shoulder*, Chapter 17, "A Grain of Mustard Seed," pp. 162–170.

20 The Mustard Seed, Inc. spent at least 250,000 U.S. dollars on charity work each year. See Daniel Poling, "Foreword," in Wilson, *Angel at Her Shoulder*, pp. 11–12. Per capita income in Taiwan then was less than 100 dollars.

21 See Marilyn Dickson Tank, *Lillian Dickson's South Sea Story* (Taipei: The Mustard Seed, Inc., 1985).

22 For medical care in the mountains, see Dickson, *These My People*. For reforms of the leprosarium, see Lillian Dickson, *Loving the Lepers* (Taipei: The Mustard Seed, Inc., 1953/1983), with a foreword by Lillian's daughter, Marilyn. As for helping blackfoot patients, both *Angel at Her Shoulder* and a

### 3 Lillian's Medical Missions: From Nursing Care to Building Hospitals

In a letter to her daughter, Marilyn, Lillian discussed her plans for traveling to Taiwan's mountain areas. She would take a nurse with her, she said, and "tell them Jesus' stories and the importance of hygiene. I will teach them to wash their bodies and clothes...and build public baths with soaps and tubs."<sup>23</sup> This was in fact her work pattern. When she first visited a village, she would play the accordion to gather the children of the village around her; then she would provide medical resources to draw the attention of the adults.<sup>24</sup> She supported construction of hospitals and nurseries first, and built schools and churches later. Whether tending to aboriginals, lepers, or blackfoot patients, she insisted on carrying through her motto, "Meet their needs, then meet their real need of the Christ."<sup>25</sup>

#### 3.1 A Pastor's Wife in Nurse Uniform

Lillian managed to recruit a Mennonite medical team to provide medical support after her first visit into the mountains.<sup>26</sup> She herself would dress in a nurse's uniform to distribute quinine, explain prescriptions, and bandage the wounded. When there was no medical equipment, she took pride in being

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documentary film produced by Bob Pierce treated the subject at length. For analysis of the film and its treatment of the subject of blackfoot disease, see Lee, Jen-der 李貞德, "Xuanjiao yingpian zhongde jibing yiliao yu wenhua: yi 'chenzhe baije-Sun Lilian de Taiwan' wei li" 宣教影片中的疾病、醫療與文化：以「趁著白日—孫理蓮的台灣」為例 [Diseases, Medicine and Culture in Missionary Films: A Case Study of "While it is Day, Lillian Dickson's Taiwan"], *Gujin lunheng* 古今論衡 [Disquisitions of Past and Present] 23 (Taipei, 2011), pp. 144–172.

23 "Letter to Dear Marilyn," August 23, 1947, in Tank, *Chuckles Behind the Door*, p. 94. See also Dickson, *These My People*, Chapter 4 "Bath in a Pigpen," pp. 29–36.

24 "Letter to Dear Friends," September 27, 1947, November 11, 1947. Also see Tank, *Chuckles Behind the Door*, pp. 95, 99–100. An ethnographical survey indicates that aboriginals in the mountains were very much impressed by the missionaries' visits, remembering them as "singing and dancing and telling stories with wonderful programs that attracted lots of people." See Huang Shiun-wei 黃宣衛, "Zaitan yiwan ameizu de Kawas guannian" 再談宜灣阿美族的Kawas觀念 [Further notes on the ideas of Kawas of the Yiwan Amis], *Taiwan Fengwu* 台灣風物 38.4 (Taipei, 1988), pp. 149–164.

25 This is reiterated in both Wilson's book and Pierce's film.

26 The Mennonite team included Pastor Rev. Glen Graber, two Taiwanese doctors, a pharmacist, and an experienced preacher with some medical training. See Dickson, *These My People*, pp. 45–46.



able to deliver a baby in a wok.<sup>27</sup> She wrote to Marilyn that she was not made for the healing profession, and often expressed her pain and grief when encountering patients suffering, first because of a lack of medication and then later because she found the sight of deteriorating cuts and sores to be unbearable. Nevertheless, the nurse uniform she wore obviously provided an impression of professional care that made her no different from other medical personnel.

Not all visits to the mountains were welcome, however. The medicine she provided to treat intestinal parasites, for example, was once rejected by aborigines in Nantou. The Mennonites explained to Lillian that after the Wushe Incident in 1930, in which aborigines massacred Japanese and in return, were decimated by Japanese Government-General forces, there was great tension between the indigenous people and outsiders.<sup>28</sup> Before long, however, missionary doctors found that intestinal parasites were not the most severe condition faced by aboriginal tribes; the spread of tuberculosis was worse.<sup>29</sup> Although she faced difficulty raising funds for years, Lillian decided to build a clinic in the small town of Puli since it was in the center of the mountain area.

In 1948 fighting in China between the Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang, or KMT) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) became increasingly severe. At the end of 1949, the Chinese Nationalist government moved to Taiwan. The Korean War broke out a few months later. American churches were unsure of their future in East Asia. Lillian received no support for the Puli clinic project until Bob Pierce, founder of World Vision, provided money for medication and salaries for personnel. The Puli Christian hospital was finally opened in 1955.<sup>30</sup> To help patients recuperate and to save family

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27 "Letter to Dearest Girl," April 10, 1950, in Tank, *Chuckles Behind the Door*, pp. 119–121. See also, "Letter from Taipei," 1950, which was titled "Personal and Pertinent," in Tank, *Chuckles Behind the Door*, pp. 112–116.

28 For conversion stories of various sorts, see "Letter to Dear Friends," October 2, 1947. For the aborigines' suspicion of foreigners, see Wilson, *Angel at Her Shoulder*, pp. 17–24. The fact that the Wushe incident had occurred nearly twenty years earlier and was used by American missionaries to explain the aborigines' antipathy toward Japanese provides insight into the post-war political atmosphere in Taiwan. For the historiography of the 1930 Wushe incident, see Chou Wanyao, "Shilun zhanhou Taiwan guanyu wushe shijiande quanshi" 試論戰後台灣關於霧社事件的詮釋 [On the historiography of the Wushe incident in post-war Taiwan], *Taiwan Fengwu* 60.3(2010), pp. 11–58.

29 TB was called "the white killer" among the aborigines. See Dickson, *These My People*, Chapter 18 "The White Killer," pp. 100–102.

30 Dickson, *These My People*, Chapter 19, "A Dream Came True in Po-li," pp. 103–110.

members from the rigors of mountain travel, Lillian proceeded to add a sanitarium and a lodging house. She requested help from all sorts of individuals, Sunday schools, and Christian communities in North America. She promised to send pictures of the patients, the beds, and the wards to those who gave six U.S. dollars each month. Lillian believed that donors would like to know about the “guests” they were hosting.<sup>31</sup>

At first, the Puli Christian hospital had only a small staff. At the suggestion of Xie Wei, a surgeon sponsored by Lillian to study in the U.S. several years earlier, she decided to establish a nursing school to train aboriginal girls to work at the hospital.<sup>32</sup> Lillian visited the mountains every week and through her letters to churches in the U.S., she recounted stories of the joys and suffering at the hospital. It was through such regular depictions of Taiwan that she gathered a large number of small donations.<sup>33</sup> An American media company invited her to appear on a TV show in celebration of Bob Pierce’s philanthropic contributions. As a surprise gift for her as a guest, Lillian received two-thousand dollars worth of tuberculosis medication and an X-ray machine for her clinic. In the three weeks she stayed in the U.S., she finished writing *These My People*, a book about her missions to the aboriginals. It was published in 1958. In the prologue Lillian thanked the American churches for serving as “Big Brothers” to Taiwanese Christians.<sup>34</sup>

### 3.2 Fund-Raising Expert Builds Hospitals

Lillian had first-hand involvement with healing activities, but her expertise lay not in curing illness but in recruiting resources. She wrote and spoke to gather money to build hospitals and invited people to work in them, not only in the mountains but also in the cities.

In 1949, in a suburb of Taipei, several suicides occurred in the government-run Happy Life leprosarium. The pastor who ministered there came to Lillian for help. She responded immediately by visiting the patients. She invited Mrs. Hogan from the Assemblies of God to go with her. Through playing the accordion and telling Bible stories to break the ice, the two

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31 Dickson, *These My People*, p. 110.

32 Xie Dali 謝大立, *Xie Wei he tade shidai* 謝緯和他的時代 [Xie Wei and his time] (Tainan: Renguang chubanshe, 2000), pp. 111–115.

33 Dickson, *These My People*, pp. 112–113. In addition, Lillian used royalty payments she earned from her publications to rent houses. See “Letter to Dear Marilyn and Vernon,” Aug. 4, 1959, in Tank, *Chuckles Behind the Door*, pp. 194–195.

34 Dickson, *These My People*, Chapter 22, “America and Television,” pp. 119–121; “Letter to Dear Marilyn,” Oct. 11, 1956, in Tank, *Chuckles Behind the Door*, pp. 164–165.

women learned that the head of the institution was corrupt, and that there were instances of malnutrition as well as injuries among the patients. The lepers had been planning protest activities, but Lillian talked them out of it. When she returned the second time, Lillian brought with her Dr. Signe Berg, a missionary doctor who had recently arrived from China. They set up a temporary clinic in the lobby, and Lillian served both as nurse and interpreter. She treated patients suffering from headaches, stomach pain, and slight wounds, claiming that she was “just doing what a mother would do for her family.”<sup>35</sup> After free check-ups by the doctor, Lillian invited Miss Alma Drucks, a Lutheran missionary nurse, to live in the colony to care for the lepers.<sup>36</sup>

When the initial medical activities did not lead to interference by government officials, Lillian decided to take further action. As usual, she wrote to her American readers, requesting financial aid for milk, vitamins, blankets, beds, and chairs. She had a broadcasting system installed in the wards, set up reading rooms, and invited the United States Information Service in Taipei to show films for entertainment. She also asked the American Aid Headquarters for money to renovate housing for the six-hundred lepers. The Far East Broadcasting Company provided funds to finance construction of an annex for the lepers’ children. In 1952, Lillian had a church built in the colony. The patients sold chickens to subsidize external donations.<sup>37</sup>

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35 Dickson, *Loving the Lepers*, pp. 1–8, Wilson, *Angel at Her Shoulder*, Chapter 13. “Three Suicides a Week,” pp. 115–125, “Letter to Dear Marilyn,” Oct. 23, 1949, renamed “Lean Meat for Encouragement” in Tank, *Chuckles Behind the Door*, pp. 108–110. For the identity of the pastor and his mission, see Liu Jicheng 劉集成, *Lesheng liaoyangyuanzhi* 樂生療養院誌 [Book of the Happy Life Leper Colony] (Banqiao: Bureau of Cultural Affairs, Taipei County, 2004), p. 129.

36 Drucks, who lived in the leper colony, must have faced more difficulties than Dr. Berg, who only visited once in a while. Lillian later mentioned that she had to take Drucks out for fresh air to keep her sane. See “Letter to Dear Marilyn,” March 31, 1957, in Tank, *Chuckles Behind the Door*, pp. 179–180. Lillian also invited a certain Sister Kuni to check on the lepers’ teeth. According to Tong Hsian-kuang 董顯光, *Jidujiao zai Taiwan de fazhan* 基督教在台灣的發展 [Development of Christianity in Taiwan] (Taipei: printed by the author, 1962/1970), pp. 115–116, she was Dr. Kunigunde Brunner, a missionary dentist from the Lutheran Marburger Mission of Germany. Tong served as the ROC ambassador to the U.S. from 1956–1959.

37 Dickson, *Loving the Lepers*, pp. 9–18, 20–21, 51–57. Also see Wilson, *Angel at Her Shoulder*, pp. 131–135. The effort of Christians to build a church inspired patients of different religions. Buddhist lepers built a worship room in 1954 and, with help from nearby Fu-jen Catholic University, a Catholic church was also established in 1971. The co-existence of three religious

Although the lepers were now taken care of and their children were settled, reports of suicide attempts continued. Lillian learned the cause: even though patients were being cured, they had no home to which they could return and they had no means to support themselves. She declared that a busy person would not have time to commit suicide; she decided to create jobs for the lepers. Again, she reached out to Bob Pierce for support and set up a midway house for the patients who had been cured. In 1953, she received a grant from the *Christian Herald* of New York. She used the grant to launch a project to build an occupational therapy room for lepers. According to Lillian, if the patients could engage in carpentry, they would not only find emotional relief but could also sell the artifacts they produced to improve their standard of living.<sup>38</sup>

Because of her reputation of responding promptly to challenges, Lillian was often informed of various problems across the island. One day in 1960 she received a phone call from a visiting professor at a seminary in southern Taiwan who described the suffering he had seen on the island's salty southwest coast. Lillian acted instantly by visiting the blackfoot patients in the area with Dr. Xie Wei and Miss Alma Drucks. Lillian set up aid stations along the coastal region to distribute food and vitamins, and sponsored a local clinic, run by Dr. Wang Jinhe, to regularly examine the patients free of charge. Not long afterwards, Lillian raised money by requesting donations from a Sunday school class at a Presbyterian church in Hollywood, California to construct a building adjacent to the clinic. She also garnered support from the members of the club for wives of American soldiers in Taiwan to equip the new clinic with surgery lamination. A few years later, renovation of the entire clinic was made possible through the donated inheritance of a deceased blackfoot patient.<sup>39</sup>

Later, in the 1960s, medical research suggested that arsenic in the drinking water was the major cause of blackfoot disease. Those affected would suffer numbness in one or more of their extremities—usually their feet—and would

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buildings on one campus became an unusual attraction later.

38 The wife of the Mennonite pastor Glenn Graber; a trained nurse, was in charge of the home for babies. Having lepers do physical work to improve their mental health was first proposed by Dr. Gushue-Taylor (1883–1954), who built the Happy Mount Leper colony in 1932. See Wen-ji Wang, “Laying out a Model Village: George Gushue-Taylor and Missionary Leprosy Work in Colonial Taiwan,” *East Asian Science, Technology and Society: An International Journal* 1 (2007), pp. 111–133.

39 For a discussion on donations from both the U.S. and Taiwan, see Wilson, *Angel at Her Shoulder*, p. 233, and “Letter to Dear Friends,” June 30, 1960 and September 30, 1965.

experience peripheral circulatory disorders that caused blackening and malodorous gangrene of the feet. Bacterial infections would lead to ulcers and suppuration. The patients would eventually die. The only effective treatment known at that time was amputation. Dr. Xie Wei went to Dr. Wang's clinic every week, taking his own instruments to operate on the patients. Patients who underwent amputations faced hardship even if they managed to survive. Lillian made requests to the American Aid headquarters while Dr. Wang and his wife applied for governmental subsidies to set up a mat-weaving factory for patients whose limbs had been amputated. The suffering of the patients and the efforts of The Mustard Seed, Inc. were broadcast repeatedly on television. The government finally announced a five year research program in 1971, and established a blackfoot prevention center two years later.<sup>40</sup>

In her first years in Taiwan, Lillian was rarely involved in medical practice. When she returned after the war, however, she became active in dispensing drugs, bandaging wounds, performing emergency deliveries, and promoting hygiene. She also became involved in fundraising to build sanitariums and clinics. She worked with medical missionaries from England, Germany, Norway, and Canada as well as with local Taiwanese doctors. When in need of financial support, she appealed to Americans throughout this period for donations and transportation for resource distribution. Some of her efforts were a continuation of James' mission in the mountains. In other cases she was approached by local pastors for help, and in still other cases, projects were initiated by foreign visitors who were aware of her prompt response in the face of important issues. The Dicksons were among the last to leave Taiwan before the war and the first to return afterwards. Their long-term relationships with local churches resulted in numerous requests for assistance, and Lillian's mission moved toward independence during the process.

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40 The first report of blackfoot disease in Taiwan was published by Gao Congming 高聰明 and Gao Shangrong 高上榮, "Kaocha tefaxing tuojudé yuanyin," 考察特發性脫疽的原因 [On causes of spontaneous gangrene], *Journal of Formosan Medical Association* 53.2(1954), p.272. National Taiwan University offered six beds for hospitalizing patients with blackfoot disease before Lillian interceded with substantial help. For later research on arsenic poisoning, see Wen-ping Tseng, "The Natural History of Blackfoot Disease," *Journal of Formosan Medical Association* 72.1(1973). Altogether the Nationalist government sponsored five continuous research and prevention programs between 1970 and 1994. The Mercy's Door free clinic served patients until 1984. For a detailed analysis, see Lee Jen-der, "Disease, medicine and culture in missionary films."

#### 4 A Missionary, Unofficially

When Lillian announced her plans to become a missionary wife, James agreed. He gave her a suggestion: “You could do things unofficially that the rest of us can’t do; things that ought to be done”.<sup>41</sup> Subsequently, “being unofficial” seemed to become her work pattern and informed her self-identity. Even after she established a formal organization, Lillian still described herself as a woman doing whatever a mother would have done at home. James once remarked to his daughter, “I envy Lil, running all her activities without any committee meetings.”<sup>42</sup> James had been officially summoned and sent to the mission by the CPC. His projects were subject to committee reviews and evaluations. In contrast, Lillian’s mission began on her writing table, and emerged gradually into an official organization in which she played the central role.

##### 4.1 A Missionary Wife

Even after The Mustard Seed, Inc. was first started in Lillian’s living room, her activities did not change dramatically from those of an “inn-keeper’s wife.” She not only continued to host missionaries and visitors from the United States, but also helped organize large-scale conventions for James’ college. The reports she sent were published in the Canadian *Presbyterian Record* under the name “Lillian Dickson” as author, but her position was always introduced as “Mrs. James Dickson, one of our missionaries in Taipeh, Formosa.”<sup>43</sup>

Lillian never forgot her role as her husband’s spouse. She began many chapters in *These My People* with “my husband said,” and emphasized her irreplaceable status as his honest and trustworthy agent.<sup>44</sup> In 1950 she took a four-month trip into the mountains on behalf of James. By that time she had become quite experienced at working with doctors and nurses among the aboriginals. But still she asked to be accompanied by a male mission worker because “women are not much value in the Orient, but if I went in as an adjunct to the Formosan pastor who would have standing and authority, it would be all right.” She claimed that her task was to play the accordion and

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41 Wilson, *Angle at Her Shoulder*, p. 90.

42 James Dickson, “Letter to Dear Vernon and Marilyn,” March 1961, in Tank, *Chuckles Behind the Door*, pp. 214–215.

43 For instance, see Lillian Dickson, “Christmas among the Lepers of Formosa,” *Presbyterian Record*, December 1950, pp. 341–342; “Formosa Today,” *Presbyterian Record*, June 1951, pp. 168–169.

44 Dickson, *These My People*, Chapter 4, p. 29; Chapter 10, p. 65; Chapter 13, p. 81; Chapter 14, p. 85; Chapter 15, p. 88; Chapter 17, p. 96.



speak to children and women.<sup>45</sup> Later, when she realized that tuberculosis patients and their families were in need of warm clothes, she provided them with some of her own dresses and invited fellow workers to weave and sew more. She concluded, “You see, there is much housekeeping when one’s a missionary!”<sup>46</sup>

For Lillian, perhaps the image of a missionary was not much different from that of a dignified housewife. She mentioned that she endeavored to welcome guests and answer phone calls despite exhaustion to “keep it missionary-like.” She was also proud of her ability to sleep sitting straight up on the train, “trying to be a proper missionary.”<sup>47</sup> She established her own missionary organization independent from the CPC, and befriended aboriginal chiefs, nationalist officials, American church leaders, media personnel and diplomats, trying to press her cases and gain support in all fronts. Nevertheless, she posited that she was merely performing household chores, albeit it on a larger scale. And at the center of the house, the mother figure loomed large—a mother who was caring, perseverant, and all-embracing.

## 4.2 An All-Embracing Mother

Lillian adopted a mother image from the beginning, which her biographer, Kenneth Wilson, helped to consolidate. Right after giving birth to Marilyn in 1932, she assisted her husband James in organizing a Bible study group. At one meeting, a mother in the group stepped out to do some errands, leaving her baby temporarily in the care of the other mothers. When the baby began crying, Lillian responded by putting aside her own suckling child to breast-feed the howling baby. She related this story as her contribution to the smooth running of the Bible study group. Thirty years later, Wilson reiterated the tale and commented that Taiwan seemed to be full of children in need of mothering.<sup>48</sup>

Lillian adopted waifs and strays, set up orphanages and visited teenagers in correctional institutions. Such activities facilitated her image as being very motherly. When the Puli clinic finally opened, an aboriginal woman thanked her for bringing medical resources, saying, “the children now live—we know it is because America has come!” Lillian reminded her that God was the real helper, and noted later in her newsletter, “With mountain people, one must

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45 Dickson, *These My People*, Chapter 10, p. 65; Chapter 13, p. 81.

46 Dickson, *These My People*, p. 112.

47 “Letter to Dear Marilyn,” June 14, 1957, August 15, 1957, in Tank, *Chuckles Behind the Door*, pp. 184–187.

48 Wilson, *Angel at Her Shoulder*, p. 45.

always talk as if teaching children.”<sup>49</sup> Indeed, parenting was part of her image, and she often stressed the importance of her motherly presence to keep peace among the lepers. She noted in her book, *Loving the Lepers*, “They call me ‘mother’ and that is the ancient vocation of mothers, to hear about problems and to try and solve them!”<sup>50</sup>

The project that best illustrates how Lillian combined religion, medicine, and motherhood is “Room for Mary.” After 1960, she set up maternal wards in poor areas along the eastern coast of Taiwan to provide women with prepartum and postpartum care. She insisted that every mother would have wanted to help Mary deliver baby Jesus if she were present at the time.<sup>51</sup> As previously mentioned, Lillian lost her first two children. These sad experiences were reported by Bob Pierce in his preface of her book, *These My People*; in the biography by Wilson, *Angel at Her Shoulder*; and when Marilyn summarized Lillian’s life story right after her mother passed away in 1983.<sup>52</sup> But Lillian never mentioned the losses herself. She gave as her reasons for setting up the institutes her experiences with emergency deliveries and the soaring infant mortality rate among the mountain people.

Lillian’s mother image was pervasive. People addressed her as “mother of the aboriginals,” “mother of the lepers,” “mother of the blind,” and so on. After purchasing land to build a church adjacent to a cemetery, Lillian joked in a letter to Marilyn, “Will they ever, I wonder, call me Mother of a cemetery?”<sup>53</sup> The image of her as mother was not confined only to children or patients. Lillian also positioned herself as the mother of Taiwan. Lillian worried that American parishioners would forsake Taiwan, since it was under the ominous threat of communist aggression. She thus employed the image of motherhood in her appeal for support:

Sometimes in a home a mother puts all her children to bed, and then in the darkness she hears one crying or perhaps two of them. She goes

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49 “Letter to Dear Friends,” March 31, 1959.

50 Dickson, *Loving the Lepers*, pp. 65, 102.

51 “Rooms for Mary” were first set up in Hualian, a city on the eastern coast of Taiwan, and then in various mountain villages of the indigenous peoples. In addition to delivery and care by trained nurses, each new mother would receive a basket of infant goods and gifts. According to a count in 1964, at least 240 newborns were delivered every month in these maternal wards. Wilson, *Angel at Her Shoulder*, p. 195.

52 Bob Pierce, “Foreword,” in Dickson, *These My People*, p. 5; Wilson, *Angel at Her Shoulder*, p. 40, and Marilyn Dickson Tank, “Letter to Dear Friends,” January 14, 1983.

53 “Letter to Marilyn and Vernon,” May 16, 1961, in Tank, *Chuckles Behind the Door*, p. 223.

softly to their bedside and comforts them. I know that many people think that night is reaching out its long arms toward this island. But if we hear people crying in distress in the darkness before night, let us comfort them as a mother might, for Christ's sake, until they fall asleep.<sup>54</sup>

In the 1930s, when Japan, the colonial ruler of Taiwan, initiated war with China, Lillian felt unable to ask her fellow Americans to pray for the island. By the post-war period, however, that woman—the powerless missionary's wife—had become an outspoken missionary wife who pressed her case as the champion of woman's oldest vocation, motherhood.<sup>55</sup>

### 4.3 Only a Woman

Lillian summarized her working strategy: "Advice from a woman in the Orient has to be given diplomatically, something like 'just a suggestion and doubtless not a very good one.'" <sup>56</sup> She knew that her ideas would be appropriated by some men and promoted as their own.<sup>57</sup> This image of her "retreating to advance" was also enhanced by her biographers.<sup>58</sup> In her own book, she recorded her conversations with leper leaders, urging them to call off protests against the corrupt government officials who ran the leprosarium. She pointed out that all government offices were unstable after the war and that the Superintendent of the Leprosarium was a corrupt man. She warned that if there were protests, people could get killed and the leper colony would be enclosed with barbed wire. As a foreigner, she would not be able to help them if that happened. She said, "You will not get what you are asking for that way."<sup>59</sup> Her words were convincing and her manner firm; she analyzed the pros and cons as well as anyone with a good sense of political understanding. In Wilson's biography of her, however, an additional line was added before this forceful argument that belied her confidence: "I am only a

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54 Wilson, *Angel at Her Shoulder*, p. 236.

55 For motherhood as the oldest vocation of Christian women, see Clarissa W. Atkinson, *The Oldest Vocation: Christian Motherhood in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1991).

56 Dickson, *These My People*, pp. 69–70.

57 Wilson, *Angel at Her Shoulder*, pp. 109–110.

58 It was nothing new for women to promote themselves through a "retreat to advance" strategy. Christian women from the time of the Middle Ages invoked the callings of the Heavenly Father to indicate that they had no other alternative but to express their opinions. See Peter Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages: a Critical Study of Texts from Perpetua (†203) to Marguerite Porter (†1310)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

59 Dickson, *Loving the Lepers*, pp. 4–5.

woman, and you know more about these things than I do.”<sup>60</sup>

Lillian often stated that her original intention was to evangelize children; the project of helping the lepers had been initiated incidentally through “the angel’s touch” on her shoulder.<sup>61</sup> She confided to Marilyn that some people doubted her qualifications for working in medical missions. She declined to defend herself, asserting only that time was pressing, people were suffering, and support was lacking. “How else would they deal with the problem? Would they just let the people die until they could build white tiled hospitals and have a white-faced staff to man them?”<sup>62</sup> She frowned on rigid procedures and preferred to keep The Mustard Seed, Inc. flexible to answer people’s needs. According to her biographer, Lillian believed that “mission work has to be a passion, not a profession.”<sup>63</sup>

It was passion that drove this pastor’s wife to action. Before publishing Wilson’s *Angel at Her Shoulder* in 1970, the *Christian Herald* had introduced Lillian’s story in a short essay titled “Littlest Lady with the Biggest Heart” by Clarence Hall in 1962. The essay began with a challenge that had been posted by the CPC, asking for clarification of her work. Hall recounted Lillian’s response to queries about her activities: “Lil Dickson drew herself up to her full five-foot-minus height, pleaded guilty to wanton compassion. ‘But what would you do,’ she demanded, her blue eyes flashing, ‘if God pushed you as He’s pushing me?’”<sup>64</sup> In fact, the CPC never criticized her mission work. The *Presbyterian Record* always acknowledged her status when publishing her Formosa reports. What the Board of Foreign Missions of the CPC questioned was her opening an office independent of the CPC. But the essayist Hall apparently saw merit in portraying her as a caring woman left with no choice but to act. The essay was soon condensed and reprinted by *Reader’s Digest* and her story was distributed all over the United States.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, the U. S. was far more important than Canada in Lillian’s missionary life.

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60 Wilson, *Angel at Her Shoulder*, p. 124.

61 Dickson, *Loving the Lepers*, pp. 3, 104.

62 “Letter to Marilyn and Vernon,” April 17, 1961, in Tank, *Chuckles Behind the Door*, pp. 219–220.

63 Wilson, *Angel at Her Shoulder*, p. 167.

64 Clarence W. Hall, “Littlest Lady with the Biggest Heart,” first published by the *Christian Herald* (May 1962), condensed and reprinted by *Reader’s Digest* (New York: The Reader’s Digest Association, Inc., July 1962).

65 An American pilot who worked for the Civil Air Transport claimed to have read this essay before he met Lillian on a flight from the Pescadores back to Taiwan. See Wilson, *Angel at Her Shoulder*, p. 215.

## 5 Christian America and Free China

To correct the misperception of the aboriginal woman mentioned above, Lillian pointed out that it wasn't America, but God who was the real helper. But in post-war Taiwan, the image of the Almighty was essentially manifested through "America." The anecdote demonstrated that Lillian was perceived as the representative of Christian good will, and its inclusion in her newsletter conveyed to her fellow Americans the gratitude of Taiwanese people. Friendly exchanges between the United States and Taiwan were expressed first through comparison with a belligerent Japan and later through the perceived common enemy: communism.

### 5.1 Representing Christian America

To exemplify the connection between Christian faith and the United States, Lillian used the example of conditions under wartime Japan for contrast. In *These My People*, she mentions the story of a young aboriginal man who served in the Japanese army in the Philippines during World War II. He was told by his Japanese superiors that if captured by the Americans, he would be abused and tortured. But when he did become a prisoner of war in Bataan, he was given medical care and was well fed by the Americans. After he was sent back to Taiwan, the young man pondered the treatment he had received from the Americans and concluded that it was Christianity that made Americans special.<sup>66</sup>

Americans were portrayed by Lillian as having brought both Christianity and modernity to the aborigines. Lillian commented about the aborigines: "They want education. They don't want to live like primitive savages in this new world".<sup>67</sup> She supported the idea proposed by an aboriginal pastor to open kindergartens, and paid for the training of teachers. Through the program, young aboriginal women taught the children Bible stories and Christian hymns. They also provided milk to supplement nutrition.<sup>68</sup> Indigenous girls were not only educated to teach kindergarten, but also to

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66 Dickson, *These My People*, pp. 28–29. Several accounts show that young Taiwanese aboriginal men were converted to Christianity because of their experiences in the war in the South Pacific. Ethnographic reports indicate similar cases. See Huang Shiun-wei, "Zaitan Yiwan Ameizu de Kawas Guannian," p. 156. The report shows that the Amis perceived Jesus as the Euro-American god, in contrast to the Han Chinese gods such as Buddha and Guan Gong (Lord Guan) or the Japanese Shinto god Tenshō-daijin.

67 Wilson, *Angel at Her Shoulder*, pp. 199–200, quoting Lillian. Some of the Amis, however, detested Christianity because of traditional customs and generational ethics. See Huang, "Zaitan yiwan Ameizu de Kawas guangnian," pp. 157–158.

68 Wilson, *Angel at Her Shoulder*, p. 200.

become nannies, nurses, tailors, and hair dressers. The boys were offered classes in agriculture, husbandry, driving, and carpentry so that they could earn a living. Modernity was thus introduced to the aborigines through American-style church services, a taste of Western food, and a division of labor based on gender.<sup>69</sup>

Lillian's efforts were recognized in Taiwan. She received an award in 1962 from the Nationalist government for being a "good person with good deeds," and was granted an interview with Song Meiling (Madame Chiang Kai-shek).<sup>70</sup> Lillian appeared to have greatly admired Song because of the latter's Christian faith and American educational background. During the war, despite Japanese surveillance, Lillian had secretly listened to Song Meiling's radio broadcasts from Nanjing, and was impressed by Song's English speeches. After the war, the Dicksons were more than once invited to join Song to entertain guests from the United States. Lillian named a girl she adopted after Song, and actively responded to Song's call to support refugees of the Vietnam War.<sup>71</sup> Although she told the media that she never expected to receive awards, Lillian was later granted four more awards from the ROC government for her contributions in medicine and education.<sup>72</sup>

Lillian's nationality made her the object of Japanese scrutiny during wartime but became useful protection in her post-war mission on Taiwan. The Nationalist government imposed martial law on Taiwan from 1949 to 1987, a period in which the right of assembly was suspended and free speech was

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69 Most Euro-American missionaries in Taiwan continued to drink milk for nutritional reasons. During the war, when there was a shortage of milk, Dr. Gushue-Taylor once raised his own goats for milk. See "Letter to Dear Friends," November 10, 1939. For an account of the missionaries' efforts to transform Taiwanese dietary habits and behavioral patterns, see Dawie Fu 傅大為, *Yaxiya de xinshenti: xingbie yiliao yu jindai Taiwan* 亞細亞的新身體：性別、醫療與近代台灣 [The new body of Asia: gender, medicine, and early modern Taiwan] (Taipei: Qunxue, 2005), pp. 45–55.

70 *Central Daily* (Taipei), December 7, 1962, 3<sup>rd</sup> page; Dec. 10, 1962, 3<sup>rd</sup> page; Dec. 14, 1962, title page.

71 For a description of Lillian covertly listening to the radio in wartime, see Wilson, *Angel at Her Shoulder*, pp. 58–59, 143. For Song's invitation, see "Letter to Dear Marilyn and Vernon," September 6, 1962, in Tank, *Chuckles Behind the Door*, pp. 260–261. For information about Lillian's naming of her adopted daughter, see Wilson, *Angel at Her Shoulder*, p. 143. On support of Vietnam war refugees, see *United Daily News* (Taipei), Feb. 16, 1968, 3<sup>rd</sup> page.

72 Her awards came from the Ministry of Internal Affairs in 1969, Ministry of Legal-Administration in 1970 and 1978, and again from the Ministry of Internal Affairs in 1981. See *Central Daily* (Taipei), Feb. 21, 1969, 3<sup>rd</sup> page, Jan. 27, 1981, 3<sup>rd</sup> page, Jan. 28, 1981, 3<sup>rd</sup> page, and *United Daily News*, Feb. 11, 1969, 3<sup>rd</sup> page.



curtailed. Ignoring her husband James' reminder about the restrictions of martial law, Lillian on one occasion invited local churches to participate in a big gathering to replicate the outdoor preaching she had done while living in British Guiana. As her husband had warned, she was stopped by the police and required to report to the police station the next day. Lillian decided not to behave submissively, and invited an official from the American embassy to go with her. She was told that the police who had stopped her group the previous day had only recently transferred to Taiwan from mainland China and had mistaken Lillian and her crowd for communists. Or so the story goes. The police apologized and Lillian was satisfied. Similar situations occurred more than once, underscoring her elevated status as an American in post-war Taiwan. This was in sharp contrast to the tenuous status of her life as an American missionary under Japanese colonial rule.<sup>73</sup>

Although it was convenient for her to live in post-war Taiwan as an American, Lillian's missionary activities were not necessarily recognized by American diplomats resident in Taiwan. To cheer up the patients, she once asked the United States Information Service to show movies in the leprosarium. Her request was quickly rejected because, the man in charge noted, lepers were not a politically important group. Lillian felt rebuffed and complained in her newsletters, drawing connections between Jesus, lepers, and Cold War rhetoric: "It [Taiwan] remains for those of the free world with Christ as their Savior." Wilson notes that a Sunday school class in New York, upon learning of the slight, quickly wrote a letter to the U.S. State Department and before long, a chastened official visited her to offer screenings in the leprosarium.<sup>74</sup>

Lillian was encouraged by the experience. She stressed the political significance of using American aid to renovate the leprosarium in the fight of American organizations allied with "Free China" against communist aggression. She told the project reviewer, "This is really a war of ideology!" According to her account, the official was convinced after her hour-long presentation and decided to visit the leper colony the next day to finalize the

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73 On another occasion, she invited officials from the American Aid office to accompany her when she assisted with the repainting of a juvenile jail. Similarly, when the construction of a TB sanitarium was prevented by local police because of its vicinity to an elementary school, Lillian threatened to send photos of the evacuation to *Free China*, a magazine published in the U.S. See Wilson, *Angel at Her Shoulder*, pp.90–97, 176, 199.

74 Wilson, *Angel at Her Shoulder*, pp.131–132. In her own account of the incident, however, Lillian did not mention the complications involved, but simply stated that the Information Service only leased out one tape each week. See Dickson, *Loving the Lepers*, p. 15.

subsidy.<sup>75</sup>

## 5.2 On Behalf of Free China

“A wealthy America should rescue a poverty-stricken free China to combat their shared enemy of Communism!” This was not only Lillian’s rhetoric but also her action guideline. In the United States, the *Christian Herald*, a New York-based news organization, and World Vision, a charitable foundation created to rescue orphans after the Korean War, were prominent at this time as the Christian organizations most helpful to Lillian.

The *Christian Herald* supported the occupational therapy project in the leper colony and donated to orphanages run by The Mustard Seed, Inc. It also reported twice on Lillian’s Taiwan missions. The article written by Clarence Hall in May, 1962 was reprinted in the July 1962 *Reader’s Digest*. To finish the book *Angel at Her Shoulder*, the *Christian Herald* sent a reporter in 1964 to stay with Lillian and visited all her mission fields both in Taiwan and on the nearby Pescadores. The editor of the *Christian Herald* and pastor of the Marble Collegiate Church, Dr. Daniel Poling, was a long-time acquaintance of Song Meiling, who arranged for private airplanes to transport him around to the institutes he sponsored on Taiwan. Song also invited the Dicksons to hear Poling’s sermon in Chiang Kai-shek’s private chapel.<sup>76</sup>

World Vision supported Lillian’s missionary activities in a variety of ways, from underwriting large projects such as the Puli hospital to addressing even the smallest need, such as providing a jeep for Lillian to use to visit the mountain clinics.<sup>77</sup> Bob Pierce, Lillian’s old friend and an advocate of preaching through visual materials, made a documentary in 1972 to introduce Lillian’s missions.<sup>78</sup> The film began with her reading the Bible at dawn on a

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75 Dickson, *Loving the Lepers*, pp. 54–55.

76 For a discussion of the *Christian Herald*’s project to publish a book on Lillian’s mission, see Daniel Poling, “Foreword,” in Wilson, *Angel at Her Shoulder*, pp. 11–12. On Song Meiling’s hospitality to Poling, see “Letter to Dearest Girl,” September 26, 1950, and “Letter to Dear Marilyn and Vernon,” September 6, 1962. Both in Tank, *Chuckles Behind the Door*, pp. 126, 260–261.

77 See Dickson, *These My People*, p. 106, Wilson, *Angel at Her Shoulder*, pp. 137, 177, Dickson, *Loving the Lepers*, p. 92, and “Letter to Dear Marilyn,” October 11, 1956, in Tank, *Chuckles Behind the Door*, p. 164.

78 When James passed away in 1967, Bob Pierce attended the funeral in Taipei. He did not speak on the podium but sat silently with the family. See “Letter to Dear Marilyn and Vernon and two dear little folks,” June 30, 1967, in Tank, *Chuckles Behind the Door*, pp. 282–283. Bob used slide shows of the bereaved children in his speeches in the late 1940s and successfully raised money to establish the World Vision. See Marilyn Dickson Tank, “Letter to Dear Friends,” September 30, 1978. On visual materials used in mission work, see

hilltop overlooking the Taipei basin, while the voice-over recited John 9:4 in a calm and persuasive tone.

I must work the works of Him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.

The film had the telling title, “While it is Day: Lillian Dickson’s Taiwan.” It conveyed the atmosphere of the Cold War and the missionaries’ concern over the developing détente between the United States and the People’s Republic of China (PRC). The narrative echoed the image of Lillian as mother of Taiwan, and linked her Christian missions with a fierce confrontation between bright free days and dark communist nights.<sup>79</sup>

Despite support from major institutions, Lillian found it necessary to write constantly and to go on speaking tours in the United States to secure financial resources for her various missions. It cost 4,500 dollars each month just to make 25,000 copies of her letters and to send them out to requesting donors.<sup>80</sup> In 1974, in her seventies and feeling worn out, Lillian wrote from a California hotel, describing herself as a very small mouse, with no energy left for lion’s roars.<sup>81</sup> Whenever she learned of large sums of money becoming available, however, she would write proposals to try to obtain them. “That is much easier than trying to run around at home and get a few dollars here or there,” she told Marilyn.<sup>82</sup> However, it was exactly through trying to “get a few dollars here or there” that The Mustard Seed, Inc. received more than 250 thousand dollars in donations each year. It was also through this “run around at home” that Lillian introduced Taiwan to her fellow Americans.<sup>83</sup>

The image of Taiwan that Lillian presented was that of a “free China” standing up firmly to communist aggression.<sup>84</sup> Fearing that her countrymen

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Terry Lindvall, *Sanctuary Cinema: Origins of the Christian Film Industry* (New York: New York University Press, 2007).

79 For a detailed analysis of this documentary and its representation of Christian missions in Cold War Taiwan, see Lee Jen-der, “Diseases, Medicine and Culture in Missionary Films.”

80 Wilson, *Angel at Her Shoulder*, p. 168.

81 “Letter to Dear Marilyn,” October 1, 1974, in Tank, *Chuckles Behind the Door*, pp. 228–229.

82 “Letter to Marilyn and Vernon,” August 18, 1961, in Tank, *Chuckles Behind the Door*, p. 229. This was when the American Methodist Church offered a special fund in 1961 to help Chinese in Taiwan and Hong Kong. Lillian immediately applied for funding to build two more orphanages and one more midway house.

83 On annual donations received by The Mustard Seed, Inc., see Poling, “Foreword,” in Wilson, *Angel at Her Shoulder*, pp. 11–12.

84 Before WWII, Lillian listed her address as “Taihoku, Formosa, Japan” or

would withdraw support for the Nationalist government due to political instability, she stressed that Taiwan's vicinity to the enemy made it a cornerstone for spreading Christianity in Asia.<sup>85</sup> During the Korean War, Lillian's Formosan reports published in Canada portrayed the perseverance of Taiwanese churches.<sup>86</sup> When the Republic of China was forced out of the United Nations in 1971, Lillian cancelled her annual speaking tour due to heightened political tensions.<sup>87</sup> Four years later, Chiang Kai-shek died; the missionaries were relieved that the United States had decided to send the Vice President to attend the funeral in Taipei. "It sort of part-way redeems America from seeming such a boor and fickle," she wrote.<sup>88</sup> When the U.S. established formal diplomatic relations with the PRC in 1978, Lillian requested urgent prayers for Taiwan. "Will 2,000 churches and over 100 years of missionary work be lost?" "Witness how people are trying to smuggle just Bibles into the other Communist countries even today!" She wrote that she had apologized to a Taipei taxi driver for America's shifting foreign policies, and the mixture of anxiety and anger expressed in her writing reminded the readers of the feeling of helplessness she experienced during the 1930s.<sup>89</sup>

Interestingly, however, precisely because the U.S. was no longer an official ally of the ROC government in combating communist China, Lillian, as the spokeswoman for "Free China," became even more valuable for the Nationalist government. On her eightieth birthday, the Ministry of Internal Affairs presented her with a silver medal for social services, but the award was delivered by the director of the "Free China Relief Association" at a tea

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"Tamsui, Taiwan." When she returned after the war, she wrote "Taipeh, Taiwan" or "Taipeh, Formosa" on her envelopes. After the establishment of The Mustard Seed, Inc. in 1954, she used the somewhat more formal address of "Taipei, Taiwan, Republic of China." But during political crises, such as the Korean War, the ROC's expulsion from the UN, or cessation of diplomatic relations with the U.S., Lillian tended to use "Free China" in her newsletters.

85 Dickson, *These My People*, p. 104.

86 Lillian Dickson, "Formosa Today," *Presbyterian Record*, June 1951, pp. 168-169.

87 "Letter to Dear Friends," October 30, 1971.

88 "Letter to Dear Marilyn," April 15, 1975, in Tank, *Chuckles Behind the Door*, p. 339. Vice President Nelson Rockefeller was assigned to head the delegation after the ROC government strongly objected to President Ford's original plan to send Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz. See *Observer-Reporter*, April 15, 1975, p. 31. Also, National Security Advisor, Memoranda of Conversations in the Ford Presidential Library, April 18, 1975. <http://cdn.geraldrfordfoundation.org/memcons/1553035.pdf>, accessed November 24, 2013 .

89 Dickson, "Letter to Dear Friends," December 30, 1978. According to her letter, the taxi driver told her that Taiwan should have been more independent instead of relying solely on the U.S.

party held in his office.<sup>90</sup> The event was not even mentioned in her newsletter sent out three days later. Instead, Lillian quoted a Japanese poem at the end of the newsletter to express her growing fondness for Japan, which she felt had become a different country after WWII than what she had known it to be before.<sup>91</sup>

In the promotional literature of The Mustard Seed, Inc., Lillian portrayed herself as a pipeline that transported a variety of resources from the U.S. to Taiwan. Sometimes readers were able to catch a glimpse between the lines of the literature into the crueler side of reality. After she finished the first draft of *These My People* in 1956, she spent two years in a complicated lobbying effort to find a Christian printing house for the book.<sup>92</sup> During her 1963 speaking tour, she was invited to be on a radio talk show to explain her Taiwan missions, but the host mistook her as “Mrs. Jackson from Madagascar.”<sup>93</sup> Sometimes donors would not finalize their support until they received a personal thank-you note from Lillian, or they requested to inspect the entire island in her company. More than once when she and The Mustard Seed, Inc. staff opened large packages supposedly from altruistic American donors, they found garbage such as empty cans or broken dolls.<sup>94</sup> Advised to introduce some Chinese dietary culture to her readers, she once appended a recipe of sweet and sour pork at the end of the monthly newsletter. The dish used sherry for seasoning, which caused a protest from an American donor. The woman claimed that she could not believe Lillian would encourage drinking alcohol, and insisted that her name be removed from the donors’ list.<sup>95</sup>

## 6 Conclusion

Western medical missionaries began going to China from the mid-nineteenth century. They took advantage of the imperialist expansion of their countries and of the efficacy of new methods of healing in order to save souls through curing bodies. At the same time, they conveyed the impression that the West was an advanced civilization. In this context, both the British and

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90 *Central Daily*(Taipei), January 27, 1983, 3<sup>rd</sup> page, January 28, 1983, 3<sup>rd</sup> page.

91 Dickson, “Letter to Dear Friends,” January 30, 1983.

92 On the complicated process she experienced in dealing with different publishers, see “Letter to Dear Marilyn,” Feb. 14, 1957, August 15, 1957, in Tank, *Chuckles Behind the Door*, pp.170–172, 186–187.

93 See Tank, *Chuckles Behind the Door*, p.269.

94 “Letter to Dear Marilyn and Vernon,” March 22, 1961, in Tank, *Chuckles Behind the Door*, pp.201–212.

95 “Letter to Dear Marilyn,” October 1, 1974, in Tank, *Chuckles Behind the Door*, pp.334–335.

Canadian Presbyterian churches began to send missionaries to Taiwan in the 1860s. Only one-third of the men who arrived in Taiwan at that time were licensed medical professionals, but even missionaries without diplomas practiced medicine.<sup>96</sup> Dr. James Maxwell, the first British missionary to arrive in Taiwan in 1865, built combined clinics and chapels in southern Taiwan, declaring that he was there to preach the gospel through medicine and scalpels. Reverend George Leslie Mackay, sent by the Canadian Presbyterian Church in 1867, practiced in the suburbs of Taipei by pulling teeth and distributing quinine. He stated about his experience that “No part of my preparatory training proved more practically helpful than the medical studies pursued in Toronto and New York.”<sup>97</sup>

In the beginning, Western medical activities in China and Taiwan seemed sensational to the native peoples and caused much panic, but eventually Western medicine became a useful channel for missionaries to penetrate local communities. Miraculous surgeries of the nineteenth century seemed exotic yet efficacious in societies dominated by traditional Chinese medicine. In Taiwan, there is no doubt that Christian missionaries did play an important role in the modernization of medicine. But their impact was not as great as that of Western medical missionaries in China because the Japanese Government-General had promoted the advancement of modern medicine on the island for the fifty years between 1895 and 1945. By the time the war ended, Western medicine was not only accepted on Taiwan but was perceived as mainstream; there was no longer fear that “foreign devils would take out your organs.”

Nurses, who were instrumental in successful surgeries from the beginning of the medical missions, dispensed drugs, bandaged wounds, and performed emergency deliveries of babies. They became essential in poverty-stricken locations, particularly in the mountain areas. Women were often involved in these activities if they were the wives of doctors and pastors, whether they possessed their own medical licenses or not. Lillian Dickson began her medical mission at a time when Western medicine was no longer considered

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96 Seven of the twenty male missionaries who went to Taiwan between 1865 and 1895 were licensed doctors. Twenty of sixty missionaries who arrived in Taiwan between 1895 and 1945 were practicing doctors. See Li Xinfeng 李欣芬, “Jidujiao yu Taiwan yiliao weisheng de xiandaihua: yi zhanghua jidujiao yiyuan wei zhongxin zhi tantao, 1896–1936) 基督教與台灣醫療衛生的現代化：以彰化基督教醫院為中心之探討 [Christianity and the medical modernization of Taiwan: a case study of Zhanghua Christian hospital], (Taipei: National Normal University, 1989), p. 61.

97 George Leslie Mackay, *From Far Formosa: The Island, its People and Missions* (New York/Chicago/Toronto: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1896), p. 308.



a threat, and her work often followed the pattern of medical aid, nursing and caring, occupational training, and, finally, conversion. She reacted to needs by raising funds through all available means, recruiting professionals, and building hospitals, sanitariums, maternity wards, orphanages, and churches. Amidst the devastation of post-war Taiwan, surgery was no more a miracle than loving care. Lillian achieved success in her medical mission in this new context, and in return encouraged modern trends in medicine.

Although Lillian went through medical training before arriving in Taiwan, attended to deliveries of babies in mountain villages even when there were complications, and wore a nurse's uniform when she bandaged the aborigines, she carried out her mission "unofficially." She often claimed that she was not a proper member of the medical profession. Instead, she positioned herself as an all-embracing mother who discovered the illnesses of her children, listened to their suffering, and provided help for alleviating their pain. In fact, she explicitly stated that she did not wish to be simply a missionary's wife; she pursued her mission career by establishing an independent organization. However, both she and the authors of her biographies continuously portrayed her medical, charitable, and educational works as "unofficial." Lillian's achievements were depicted as being carried out by a woman who merely felt impelled to serve as a kind of housekeeper. Even when Lillian announced her debut by referring to the story in Luke, she effectively actualized her Mary work through Martha activities.

This insistence on an "unofficial" image characterized Lillian's work style. Instead of planning beforehand, she often reacted to incoming requests and made decisions on the spot. More importantly, this self-portrayal became a useful device to face challenges, whether from distrustful aboriginal leaders, questioning leper patients, suspicious medical professionals, uncomfortable board members of the Canadian Presbyterian Church, or from the outside "free world" that was about to forsake the "free China" she protected as a mother.

The fact that Lillian was an American citizen should not be overlooked in evaluating her "unofficial" mission in post-war Taiwan. When she first arrived, she was considered an American sent by the Canadian Presbyterian Church to a Japanese colony of ethnically Chinese and aboriginal inhabitants. Her situation differed from that of a British missionary in nineteenth century India. It was also dissimilar to that of Maxwell and Mackay, who had arrived in Taiwan when it was under Qing imperial rule. The projects initiated by Lillian and her husband were not under the protection of the Japanese colonial government, and their lives were closely watched in the militaristic era that began in the late 1930s. But the situation had completely changed by the time the couple returned to Taiwan after the war. After the Nationalist

government's retreat from mainland China to Taiwan, it relied on American support militarily, politically, and economically for its existence.

The Dicksons were often able to use the fact that they were Americans as leverage in their work. The Mustard Seed, Inc. received donations during the post-war period mostly from the United States rather than from Canada. Lillian continued to return to the U.S. for speaking tours until 1978, when she was almost eighty. She recruited support by visiting charitable institutions, discussing the tremendous needs of Taiwan through interviews on television and through other media, and asking American military and diplomatic agencies to help her transport to Taiwan the monetary and material resources she obtained. In the process, Taiwan was introduced in the United States as "Free China." It was portrayed as a frontier from which to combat Communism and the best location to preach the Christian faith in Asia. In contrast to Japanese colonizers or to the threatening communists across the Taiwan Strait, America was perceived by the people on Taiwan as a synonym for Christian charity. Lillian became, voluntarily or not, the spokesperson for both Taiwan and the U.S., and accomplished her mission work through an exchange of information and images.

In the fifty years she lived in Taiwan, Lillian never forgot her vocation, but her feelings had changed over time. On the voyage back to Taiwan in 1935 after her first furlough, she wrote two poems on the ship. One began with the line, "And now to that long exile we're returning," while the other commanded, "Oh, giant ship! Turn back! Turn back!" The poems vividly expressed the sorrow of a homesick woman. In 1951, after devoting herself to the mountain clinics and leprosarium, Lillian went back to the U.S. for a short visit. Upon returning to Taiwan, it was obvious that her feelings had changed:

I'm back, back in Formosa, where I belong, and where my roots have gone down deep! The Pacific, no matter how beautifully blue and arresting, seemed far too wide and unending to suit me. My heart out-distanced the boat in speed and I felt at times as if I would have to dive in and give the boat a push and see if it wouldn't go faster.<sup>98</sup>

In 1983, Lillian was old and sick, and would often mention her childhood home in Lake Prior, Minnesota. Marilyn thought she might want to be buried near the lake, close to where her parents were buried. But when Lillian passed away early in the morning on January 12, 1983, the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan, which was in charge of the funeral, lay her down to rest in a grave next to her late husband, James, in the garden of the Taiwan

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98 "Letter to Dear Friends," May 4, 1951.

Theological College and Seminary.