

# SELF-SUPPORT IN THE CHURCH IN FORMOSA

## A CHAPTER OF EXPERIENCE

Is it possible to say anything new on the subject of self-support of native churches? I doubt it. In books and magazine articles, as well as in mission year books and reports of divers kinds, almost every phase of the subject seems to have been touched on, and the most one can now do is to record some of the efforts an individual mission has made to reach the goal. I make no claim to any special qualification to discuss the subject, but I have the good fortune to belong to a mission which is in the very front rank, so far as self-support goes, and a few words regarding the steps taken to reach that position may not be out of place.

At the outset two questions meet us. First, Why does such a problem as self-support arise? As a result of missionary work a native church comes into existence. Apparently some, after preaching to the Chinese, advocate that the converts should be left to sink or swim.<sup>1</sup> One would like to know if such churches ever swim. But the great bulk of missionaries think converts should be nurtured. For a time at least that nurturing must be done by the missionary, or by the native assistants whom he has gathered round him, and that implies a certain amount of foreign money and foreign control. But sooner or later the subject has to be brought before the native church, and missionaries and converts realize that if the church is to be indigenious and permanent a *sine qua non* is self-support. Hence arises the problem, a problem which

<sup>1</sup> See *Chinese Recorder*, 1914 (December), pp. 744 ff.

does not stagger some young churches because the subject has constantly been kept before the converts from the days of their spiritual childhood, but a problem which does stagger others and that chiefly because they have not been prepared to face it.

The second question is, What do we mean by self-support? In many quarters there is a certain amount of indefiniteness in the language used. The editor of the *Chinese Recorder*<sup>1</sup> defines self-support as follows: 'To us a self-supporting church in China means that Christian work in China, or any given locality in China, in all its varied evangelistic, institutional and philanthropic features is controlled and undertaken by Chinese workers and financed by funds raised in China.' That definition seems fairly complete, and if we accept it the subject is very considerably narrowed down. All evangelistic, institutional and philanthropic work which is undertaken and controlled by foreigners and financed by foreign funds is at once excluded. But practically all evangelistic, institutional and philanthropic work in the church was in the first place undertaken, controlled and financed by the foreigner. The young church may conceivably disown that work, refuse to be responsible for it, or begin new machinery to suit her own requirements. But she may, and probably will in time, assume responsibility for it all.

Whilst it is well occasionally to remind the young church of the advisability, or even necessity, of having its own theological college to prepare its own ministers and evangelists, its own schools—kindergarten, elementary, middle schools, and teachers' training college—and its own philanthropic institutions such as hospitals and orphanages, still, to begin with, the attaining of such an ideal seems hopeless. In the early stages it is perhaps better to aim a little lower, that is to regard a church as self-supporting if it can supply its own immediate needs,

pay its own pastors' or preachers' salaries, and provide its own church or school buildings. That is the sense in which the English Presbyterian Mission has hitherto regarded a church as being self-supporting and the sense in which I use the word in this paper.

The three main centres of the English Presbyterian Mission in China are Amoy, Swatow and Formosa. Formosa, of course, belongs to Japan, but the work there is entirely among the Chinese and is similar in kind to that at Amoy and Swatow. In this paper my remarks apply chiefly to Formosa. The average givings per church member for the year 1913 (the latest to hand) were Amoy \$6.80,<sup>1</sup> Swatow \$3.71 and Formosa Yen 6.80.<sup>2</sup> With apparently only two notable exceptions these churches give a higher average than any other in China. How have they reached that point?

In answering the question it will be well to recall briefly the various stages by which a preaching station is formed. The great bulk of our churches are in villages or small towns. At first the Christians meet in the house of a brother. They have practically no expenses. As they multiply the need for a separate place of worship is felt. They usually secure this themselves—an old house at little cost—and sometimes without the missionary knowing anything about it. In the glow of their first love they may thus for a season profitably meet for mutual exhortation, but a time will soon come when if they do not get some more definite teaching they will cease to progress and even go back. They apply to the mission council (composed entirely of missionaries) for a preacher, promising anything from one month up to the whole year's salary. A preacher is sent, not because they promise much or little, but because the mission council, guided by the advice of the natives, consider it wise they should have one. In our dearth of workers every congregation does

<sup>1</sup> See, however, the *Chinese Recorder*, 1914 (August), p. 506, where the figure is \$7.91.

<sup>2</sup> *China Mission Year Book*, 1914, statistics, xii-xvii.

not have a preacher every year. When a preacher is settled in a congregation the question of finance arises.

From the earliest days the ideal of a self-supporting and self-governing church was kept before the native Christians. It was pointed out that the foreign missionary was necessarily only a temporary worker, that the Chinese church was the permanent institution and that that permanent institution must ultimately be Chinese out and out. Hence self-government was not a matter conceded grudgingly by the missionaries, but eagerly almost forced upon the native church, and self-support, it was pointed out, was a crown which any congregation might be proud to wear.

As soon as suitable men were available, the Christians in every little congregation were invited to elect men who were ordained elders or deacons. These men superintended all the affairs—temporal and spiritual—of the congregation to which they belonged. Before the congregation had their own ordained pastor the missionary visited them at intervals and dispensed ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper. At such times the advice of these men was specially sought after. He would be a most unwise missionary who insisted on baptizing any candidate of whom these men disapproved, or refused to baptize one whom they unanimously recommended. That was the beginning of self-government. Then the deacons were instructed in their duties of collecting, spending and keeping strict account of money, and the congregation was exhorted on the duty and privilege of giving, that being regarded as an act of worship as much as singing hymns, praying and attendance at church services. Often before regular deacons were appointed to superintend the church finance, spasmodic collections were made for, say, the poor or the Bible Society, but the appointing of deacons usually marked the first regular step towards the payment of the salary of the preacher, and that with us has always been regarded as the first step on the road to self-support.

A period of thirty years elapsed from the birth of our mission in Formosa till the presbytery was formed. During that time a great amount of spade work was done. In 1870 (five years after the mission was started) the first ministerial missionary reported that the first annual meeting of the Pithau congregation had paid the full salary of their preacher, and that two other congregations had each agreed to pay six months of the salary. The missionary concluded his note with these words, 'From the outset I have set before them how desirable independence is and told them the sooner they can do without foreigners the better for healthy development.'<sup>1</sup>

In 1880 another missionary reported regarding the building of Awgulan church :

It will hold 300 or more. The people have given all the tradesmen their food from the beginning. They went to the hills and cut down all the wood materials and paid about \$100 for getting them sawn up ready for use, then brought all out to the spot free. They have also paid from first to last the wages of all the carpenters, except one whom we sent to superintend the work. The masons' wages, too, they had paid up till my visit and were to pay them to the end, though several of them had decided to sell their fields in order to do so. They have made also all the sun-dried bricks and done almost all the labourer work.

From the above extracts it must not be supposed that self-support in Formosa always showed a steady upward tendency. The thermometer of Christian givings rose and fell very considerably, but the following table will show the general inclination in dollars (Mex.) and in Yen.<sup>1</sup>

	1875.	1880.	1885.	1890.	1895.	1900.	1905.	1910.	1913.
Christian givings .	\$ 800	\$ 1426	\$ 1662	\$ 2511	\$ 2140	Yen. 7000	Yen. 10,818	Yen. 13,000	Yen. 27,568
Average per church member . . .	0.66	1.10	1.17	2.07	1.70	3.46	3.70	3.68	6.80

As I have indicated, the Christian Chinese gave considerable sums for church purposes before 1875, but that year is the first for which we have official figures.

<sup>1</sup> The dollar, used until 1900, is valued roughly at 2s., the Yen at 2s. 1d.

A big step forward was taken in 1895 when after a good deal of instruction and exhortation on the part of the missionaries, the office-bearers constituted themselves the Presbytery of South Formosa. This formation of a presbytery emphasized what had all along been recognized, that the church is organized entirely independent of the Presbyterian Church of England to which the missionaries belong. The position of the missionaries in that court is of course a little anomalous : they are full members, but are not subject to its discipline. On the formation of the presbytery they were invited by that court to act as assessors with full voting powers. This plan has worked extremely well for many years, and to us it seems an ideal arrangement for any form of church government, safeguarding at once the interests of the mission and of the young church.<sup>1</sup>

Without going into details, this great step towards self-government gave an impetus towards self-support, though no doubt there were other contributory causes. In 1895 the average contribution per church member was \$1.70 (Mex.), and by 1918 the average had risen to Yen 6.80. This is the highest figure reached. Of this sum it is to be noted, however, that only an average of Yen 1.72 per church member was given for preachers' and pastors' salaries, whilst Yen 3.27 was for new chapels and repairs to old ones.

Until recently the allocation and payment of preachers was in the hands of the mission council. The earliest method adopted was for the mission to pay the preachers, and each church, after paying local expenses, at the end of the year handed over their balances, if any, to the mission as a donation towards the salary of their preacher. One disadvantage of this method was that it swept away all their balances and left them penniless at the beginning of the year when no funds were coming in. But the main objection to it was that the salaries being already paid, it

<sup>1</sup> For a full description of this plan see notes by Dr. J. C. Gibson of Swatow in the *Report of the Centenary Missionary Conference, Shanghai, 1907.*

was impossible to get the brethren to feel responsibility for repayment. The system was soon abandoned. The next method adopted is our present one. In the beginning of the year every congregation is asked to say how much of their preacher's salary they will undertake for the year. They pay the amount promised direct to the preacher, through the local church treasurer who is usually a deacon, and the deficiency, if any, is made up by the mission. The main drawback to this method is that it is more trying to the preachers. They get their money less regularly, sometimes in doles of a few hundred cash at a time. But it has the good effect of making the preachers more careful. When the mission paid, if a preacher went away on private business for three weeks, no one cared to tell. It was ill coming between a man and his employer. But it was very different when the church paid direct. The churches that paid the full salary plus all local expenses were regarded as so far self-supporting.

Then when the presbytery was formed certain of the preachers were recommended by fellow-preachers for the office of pastor. Subjects of study were prescribed, and after examination, if satisfactory, they were licensed by the presbytery as probationers and were now in a position to receive a call from a congregation. A congregation might be only one gathering of church members, or several grouped together to form one congregation. From the first the rule was laid down that one of the absolutely necessary qualifications required of any congregation desiring to call a pastor was that they must bear the entire salary. We have never had cause to change or regret this. In this matter the ordained pastor is in a different position from the unordained preacher. The one gets no foreign money in his salary, the other may.

The question of preachers' salaries was a chronic difficulty. For many years the amount was fixed by the missionaries, though of course the advice of trustworthy Chinese was invariably asked and to a large extent

followed. That salary was, and is still, fixed not according to a man's ability or faithfulness, but on the basis of a living wage. The scale was so much for an unmarried man, so much additional on marriage and so much for every child. With some we found the salary sufficient; they could even save on it. To others it was not nearly enough; they soon got involved in debt. It is to be feared that for this latter class twice the amount would still have been inadequate. The subject was sometimes very painful. On the one hand was the preacher and his family needing and asking for an increase. On the other was the mission council, apparently with adequate funds, painfully acknowledging his need, glad to give him an increase, but deeply conscious that some found the present amount sufficient and that to raise the salary above that of a living wage meant putting back the day of self-support. We may have erred in keeping the salaries too low, but the resultant evils were certainly less than if they had been raised too high. In the one case only the preacher suffered and that suffering could easily be remedied, in the other the whole church would be injured and that injury could not easily be cured. The better class of preachers recognized this. The difficulty was to strike the happy medium, i.e. to pay a salary high enough to supply the reasonable needs of the preacher and thus set free his mind to devote all his energy to his work, and low enough not to imperil the best interests of the church. Great relief came to the mission council, and to a certain extent to preachers, when the presbytery in conjunction with the council undertook to allocate the preachers, fix the amount of salary and pay them.

The expenditure of each congregation may be divided into five items: General expenses such as slight repairs on chapels and preachers' houses (as part of their salary our pastors and preachers have all their house furniture, including bedding and lighting, provided); pastors' salaries; preachers' salaries; teachers' salaries; larger repairs on church buildings or erection of new ones.

How are these various items met? With slight deviations here and there the general method is as follows: Whatever a congregation can or cannot pay, it is at least expected from the first to pay all local expenses. These as a rule are met by offerings at service on Sunday. In every church there is placed a large locked box with a hole on top. Simple bamboo tallies are given to each member and adherent. To the tally is attached a string, and on it is written the name of the individual to whom it belongs. On Sunday morning the owner ties his collection to the tally and drops it into the hole in the box, and takes away with him another tally for the following Sunday. The deacons have a book containing the names of all who have received tallies. After the service the amount fastened to the tally is credited to the name of the owner. Thus the tally is also a record of attendance. The system means a considerable amount of bookkeeping for the deacons, but where properly worked is thoroughly satisfactory. Of course this is managed entirely by the Chinese.

As to the pastors' salaries, these are collected gradually during the year prior to that in which they are spent. The salary for 1915 is collected during 1914 and laid on the presbytery table at its first meeting in 1915. When a congregation presents a call to a certain man through the presbytery, the first year's salary must be laid on the table. This money of course is entirely native. To receive and disburse the pastors' salaries the presbytery appoints a treasurer who may or may not be a missionary. The time is at hand when no foreigner will handle native funds.

As to preachers' salaries, the method adopted for many years is as follows: On or about the first Sunday of the year, at the ordinary service, each member and adherent is asked to state how much he or she will give during that year. A note of the same is taken by the deacons who call periodically for the various instalments. A note is sent to the general treasurer for preachers' salaries stating the amount the congregation will pay for that year. If

the amount is made up for the whole year, the treasurer has nothing more to do with that congregation, as the salary is month by month paid by the local deacon or treasurer. From this source alone the Formosa churches paid Yen 5725 during 1914. If the congregation cannot pay the whole year, the deficiency until lately was made up by the mission. The general treasurer was a missionary appointed by the mission council. Now, however, there is a joint treasurership, a foreigner appointed by the mission council and a Chinese appointed by the presbytery. The presbytery has thus recognized its responsibility not only to pay the pastors but also the preachers. Whilst they acknowledge this responsibility they are not yet strong enough to discharge it. The mission therefore helps them. It will be noted that the presbytery undertakes to supply the deficiencies of all the congregations which cannot pay the full year's salary. How does it get funds? From two sources.

1. Native. Some years ago the Chinese formed a society which for want of a better name I may call a Congregational Mutual Aid Society or Sustentation Fund, though that title does not cover all its work. The object of the society was to raise funds for all church work, but especially for the payment of preachers. They appointed a native travelling secretary to visit all the congregations at least once a year in the interests of the fund. By this means they collected considerable sums. One of the greatest benefits derived from this society is that it gives the whole church a sense of unity. Our churches are apt to become too congregational. They are ready to think they have completed their duty and are entirely self-supporting when they pay their own way. But this society offers boundless opportunities for wealthy men to give money after their own local expenses are met. The first charge on this fund, after the working expenses, is to pay Yen 6 insurance premium on the life of every preacher. Some years ago the presbytery decided on this

step instead of increasing the salaries, the amount assured going to the preacher's heirs at his death. The bulk of the balance of cash collected is then paid over to the treasurer for preachers' salaries to help to supply deficiencies in weak congregations.

2. Foreign. When the presbytery undertook the responsibility of paying the preachers' salaries an estimate was made of the amount borne by the mission. It was a little over Yen 3000. The presbytery requested the mission council to pay them that sum for the first year and diminish the amount each succeeding year by Yen 200, and to try this arrangement for five years. This year (1915) is the fourth, and until now the plan has worked well, the native contribution gradually increasing, that of the mission diminishing. But lately there have been several bad typhoons, with the inevitable accompaniment of bad harvests. Just now, too, the presbytery have a big scheme on hand to raise Yen 20,000 as their share of a new higher grade school. Thus I fear there is a danger of the scheme breaking down.

We have very few primary schools, but they are self-supporting. It is not difficult to secure the salary from the pupils' fees. In 1914 the sum spent by the church on this item was only Yen 817.

As to the last named item of expenditure, viz., larger repairs on church buildings and the building of new chapels, there are again two sources of income.

1. Native. Occasionally we have a church which pays the whole charge itself. The minimum which it must pay is three-fourths of the total cost. The amount of this item varies very considerably. In 1913 the native church paid for this item Yen 13,244, but in 1914 the sum fell to Yen 5894. The efforts which some congregations make for a new chapel are beyond all praise.

2. Foreign. The maximum grant of foreign funds to any congregation is one-fourth of the whole cost. Small loans without interest, to be repaid in easy instalments,

are also made. Whilst we should be glad to see congregations undertake the total cost of their church buildings, we do not feel that this item is to be placed in the same category with the pastors' salaries. The buildings erected are always bigger than will meet the immediate needs of the congregation: they build with a view to evangelizing the district. Hence the small grants we give are unlikely in any way to hinder self-support, and they may be regarded as a direct contribution to evangelistic work.

Like all other missions we have our difficulties in pushing self-support. In earlier days we often heard the plea of poverty: we seldom hear it now. It got laughed out of court as much by the natives as by foreigners. The Chinese in Formosa indulge in the unclean habit of chewing betel nut, they smoke a good deal of tobacco and spend quite considerable sums on drink. Many years ago it was pointed out that if the Christians would give to the church only a fraction of what they spend on these three luxuries self-support would at once be attained. From that time onwards the poverty plea hid its shamed face. With us it is as often the rich as the poor who hinder self-support. One of the greatest hindrances to the progress of self-support, in fact of all Christian work, is the unfaithful, lazy, lackadaisical preacher. In our mission a preacher seldom remains in one church longer than three or four years. The presbytery moves them from place to place as the mission council formerly did. Repeatedly we have seen a young church ministered to by a preacher not particularly well educated but faithful making marvellous progress in self-support. In a few years that man is followed by another of a different type, and the church which in 1910 paid say Yen 150 in preacher's salary finds in 1911 a difficulty in raising Yen 50. Granted that all our preachers were faithful, spiritually minded men with a fair education, we should have self-support in a year's time. Another hindrance we meet with occasionally is when the people suspect the deacon of using church funds,

though only temporarily, for private ends. If the deacon is not absolutely trustworthy, does not keep a strict account of income and expenditure and does not produce a clear balance sheet at the end of the year, the inflow of the people's gifts will soon cease.

There are several matters which have helped the Formosa Chinese church to self-support. Apart from the fact that from the first the Christians were educated in the matter and were therefore fairly conscious of their duty, there are other considerations which have influenced them. For example, our church buildings are a marked contrast to the chapels I have seen in many other missions in China. Ours are built, inside and out, to correspond to the homes of the people. There is absolutely nothing in the way of foreign architecture and they are completed in almost the cheapest possible style. Many have no decoration. The minimum of foreign money is spent on them, though we encourage a certain amount of decoration when the people bear the cost themselves.

Another help towards self-support in our field is the knowledge of romanized Chinese. In South Formosa at present there are 5500 who can read this form of letters with intelligence. They can read any part of the Bible as easily as an average congregation can at home. They have a considerable literature including translations of standard English works. Each month there is issued the *Taiwan Church News*, which has been published without intermission for about thirty years and has now a monthly circulation of 1600 copies. This magazine often contains articles on self-support by missionaries and natives alike. In addition to the instruction in chapel on Sundays, the people buy quantities of this romanized literature which undoubtedly exerts a great influence in educating and moulding the opinions of the people. In this respect it is well worth noting that the churches or missions which have made most progress towards self-support—the Hingwha,

Amoy, Swatow and Formosa districts—are those which have most favoured romanized Chinese.

But perhaps the most important aid to self-support has been the developing of self-government, which in turn has developed the sense of responsibility. If the native church feels it is only a branch of a foreign church, and especially if the Christian workers feel they are the employees of the foreigner, self-support is bound to be hindered. If the pastors and preachers are to realize their responsibility to the native church they must be made to feel that they are pastors and preachers of that native church and do not merely have an occupation under foreign control. Our experience is that wherever the burden of self-support is understood and felt we find the greatest effort to bear it.

Self-support circles round the question of salaries, and in conclusion we may refer to the relation of highly educated men with high salaries to the subject of self-support. The pastor must also be a leader. To be a leader he must be educated and trained, and once he has got this training, whether at mission or private expense, the question of salary at once arises. His very training has created necessary expenditure in books, clothing, hospitality and social status which a less educated man does not have. He should have a salary sufficient for his needs unless his very training is to become a hindrance to his usefulness. As far as possible the education of the pastor, if he is to exercise a permanent influence, should be in advance of the majority of his congregation. The most highly trained men are perhaps not needed for country districts. In any case living is less expensive there, and the salary need not be so large as in the towns. But whether the salary of the pastor be high or low it should be fixed by the native church on the basis of self-support. Let the highest court of the church fix the minimum and perhaps also the maximum salary. Let the native congregation, who desire a certain well-trained man as their pastor, state the salary they are prepared to give. Let the individual invited to the pastor-

ate say if he is willing to accept it. A high salary need not necessarily accompany a high education. It does not at home. It does not among missionaries. There is no necessity for it to do so among native pastors. If the church can get these highly trained men only at the cost of once more becoming an infant in self-support it is meanwhile better without them. I do not believe such a price is necessary. Are we not wronging the church in supposing its pastors are incapable of the same self-sacrifice which highly educated and trained missionaries have shown? Let the church by all means provide a comfortable salary for the highly trained pastors; and if they must go off into other employment, let them go. If they cannot for Christ's sake so contract their expenditure as to bring it within the limits of the salary offered them by their brethren, it would be better for their own sakes and for the sake of the church that they seek other employment. After all, the best work in the church is that done by fairly well educated men who are faithful and filled with the Spirit of God. If we can get highly trained and educated men who are also faithful and willing for self-sacrifice the blessing to the church will be incalculable.

I have not touched on the case of a mission, far from the goal of self-support, which considers it needs highly trained men and to whom the native church cannot possibly pay a reasonably sufficient salary. In such a case let the mission beware of paying pastors fancy salaries with foreign funds. For the time being there may seemingly be much benefit derived. The position is one of great permanent danger to an indigenous, independent native church.

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