

The Mission of an Isolated Beautiful Island¹(Titus I) Queens Taiwanese Evangelical Church 1-28-2007 12noon By Eileen Chang

2006(last) summer during July and August, I participated in a missions trip to Taiwan organized by the Evangelical Formosan Church of Irvine in Orange County, California. The group included sixty-three members, and we were divided into teams and assigned to ten towns throughout Taiwan. Each team spent a week in each town. Before joining this group, I had heard Christians in California from different denominations commenting on this missions organization, saying that it has become widely known in just a few short years, and continues to get better every year. The organization was originally created for members of a single church, but now includes participants from New Zealand and Australia; the western states of California and Arizona; the midwestern states of Michigan and Ohio; the southern cities and states of Houston, Dallas and Florida; and the east coast states of Maryland, New Jersey, and New York. The team members come from all denominations, including the Evangelical Formosans, Baptists, Bread of Life Christians, Home of Christ, Presbyterians, Reformed Church, and non-denominational independent churches.

The targets of our missions are primarily less fortunate and rural elementary and middle school students, and we use English education as the means for spreading the gospel. As for missions, my daughter has been to Kazakhstan, and my son-in-law was in China for several months. So why did I decide to go to Taiwan? Since the 1990s, I have seen predominantly Muslim countries like Indonesia, Malaysia, and even Iraq claiming a four percent Christian population, and since the lifting of the iron curtain in China these past two or three decades, the number of Christians in China has supposedly risen above five percent. By contrast, the percentage of Christians in my homeland of Taiwan, despite with its greater religious freedom, has reportedly remained stagnant at around two to three percent during the past few decades. This fills me with great sadness and weighs heavily on my conscience. Thanks to God, I finally was able to witness Christ's love being sown in the hearts of Taiwanese children **last** year, and I am relieved to see that the

¹ This article is modified from a sermon Eileen Chang preached at Long Island Abundant Life Church on September 24, 2006.

local churches have been able to follow up on that progress and help the seeds grow. I am also thankful that if it were not for this mission trip, I might never have had the chance to visit these small, beautiful towns in Taiwan.

As you all know, geographically, Taiwan is a beautiful island located to the southeast of China. Even though smaller islands like Penghu, Orchid Island, Kinmen, and Matsu are nearby, Taiwan is a big island and the main one in the area, and is inhabited by 23 million people. The beauty of the island was originally referenced in a Portuguese poem written in 1517, when a Portuguese fleet passed through the Taiwan Strait. Someone on board wrote "Ilha Formosa" ("Formosa" means "beautiful" and "Ilha" means "island"):

"Go southward to the Isle of no-winter, Where there is no
snow to be seen. And spring prevails while home is winter.
Live in the Isle of flowers that flatter, For the land is
decked with colours of seven; To enjoy your life there
better."

Gradually over time, this Portuguese word "Formosa" became synonymous with "Taiwan." I was even surprised to discover that, on a world atlas, the strait between Taiwan and China is not called the "Taiwan Strait" but the "Formosa Strait."

This past summer, as we traveled through Yilan, Hualien, and Taitung of eastern Taiwan, the team members frequently commented on the breathtaking views formed by the natural coastline, the green mountains, the blue ocean, and the sky. At every bay and canyon, people could not help but exclaim, "Oh! How beautiful!" and "Wow, how pretty!" One week, we stopped at Yilan's Jhuangwei township (which most people have not heard of). After many days of non-stop and exhausting missionary work, during some free time on a Thursday afternoon, Jhuangwei Church's woman Pastor Liu Ya-Jen took us to a cold spring in Suao. July and August in Taiwan is known for its humidity and heat! We soaked in the strong-smelling sulfur cold spring, and enjoyed the scenery of the green mountains that was before our eyes. It was a truly unique experience! Afterwards, Pastor Liu took us to dine on seafood. After days of being hot and sweaty and surrounded by bugs, this seemed to us like an unforgettably sweet gift from God.

Taiwan is indeed a beautiful island. But why do I also call it an "isolated" island? Because politically and culturally, it had been ruled by Portugal, Spain, Holland, and Japan, but to this day, its status remains ambiguous. Plagued by dissension over the

question of unification or independence, and formally recognized by few other countries, Taiwan is indeed isolated. There is even a book on Taiwan entitled "Asia's Orphan."

What about religion? Most Taiwanese people worship a folk religion consisting of belief in ghosts, spirits, and ritualistic superstition. On the first and fifteenth day of each month, they participate in idol worship rituals, the most extreme of which is the "Demon Festival" occurring annually on July 15th of the Chinese calendar. They believe that on this day, ghosts and spirits are released from the underworld, and that people need to provide meat and fruit to appease these "lonely ghosts and spirits." Where do these "lonely ghosts and spirits" come from? From the people who die a horrible death from murder, suicide, fires, car accidents, drowning, etc. If these "lonely ghosts and spirits" become hungry, they become demons who attempt to attack people. People's fear of these demons prompts them to offer food in hopes that the demons will feast on it and then go back to the underworld. Temples are found all over Taiwan, and the smoke from incense is especially thick during the month of July. At the missions site in the town of Da-Jia, we visited the controversial Jen-Lang Temple. In addition to all the statues of gods and spirits in the temple, in the basement was a pure gold Mazu statue that weighed a full ton. Do you remember the golden calf from the book of Exodus? Our revered God despises the worship of idols! Not only do the Taiwanese worship in temples, they also worship at home and in the office, where they are led by company managers, especially in the banking industry. On a hot and oppressive July day, you will find them in front of their homes or offices burning spirit money amidst high-flying flames. How dangerous and scary it is to see that both the air and people's hearts are being polluted by superstition and idolatry, and suffocated by this evil.

Let's also take a look at the attitude that Taiwanese people hold towards money. An American newspaper once joked that ROC (Republic of China) stood for "Republic of Casino," saying that Taiwanese people couldn't live without gambling, and that they gambled on everything in life. They gamble using the lottery, referring to the winning number as one "chosen by the gods." In elections, they gamble on who will win the seat, and in sports competitions, on which team would be victorious. (Proverbs 29:18) says, "Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint." Taiwan is in dire need of a revelation, a vision , the gospel, and holy faith of salvation in Jesus Christ.

Today I selected to read from Titus chapter 1 because this passage describes an island very similar to Taiwan called Crete. The island of Crete is located in southern Europe within the Mediterranean Sea, directly south of the Aegean Sea. It is the largest island of Greece. Greece is renowned for its numerous islands, and even more so for its beauty, and many tourists travel by cruise to visit them. Titus chapter 1 touches upon several aspects of missionary work, and using our Taiwan Mission as an example, I will go into detail about these aspects as follows:

1. Accepting the Calling and Commission:

Scholars of the Bible said that the apostle Paul, before his death, took his assistant Titus, whom he treated like his own son, to Crete to spread God's word. It is commonly known that Paul had a spiritual son Timothy, but many do not know he also had a spiritual son named Titus. In (Titus 1:4), Paul called Titus "my true son." Timothy was weaker physically and emotionally, whereas Titus was more capable, and of stronger will and character.

Missionary work is a violent spiritual battle of seizing back the thought and spirit that evil has robbed. Since it is in essence war, we need to fight with just cause. In Titus chapter 1, Paul declared right from the start that he was an apostle of Jesus Christ and that the task of preaching had been entrusted to him by the command of Christ our Savior. After confirming this calling, he accepted this mission without hesitation or delay and took Titus to the island of Crete to preach and establish churches. Because Paul had to leave before the task was complete, he left the young and capable leader Titus on the island with a letter, instructing him on how to complete the remaining tasks, how to train church leaders, and how to set up a system. Back when I first received the invitation from the Taiwan Mission leader, Pastor Joseph Chang, he said that by teaching English for one week, the mission team is able to get 75 percent of the children from the class to accept Jesus. Like Titus, I felt that God was opening the doors to missionary work in Taiwan and without hesitation I said, "I will go!"

We are all familiar with the passage on The Great Commission (Matthew 28:19) in which Jesus said, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations." And there is also the tenet of missionary work (Acts 1:8): "But you will receive power when the Holy

Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." The task of mission does indeed originate from the Lord Jesus himself. As we receive invitations from others to participate in this ministry, who is willing to be a witness to all the peoples? Who can be entrusted with this mission? Lately, many Chinese churches have been posting the slogan, "Everyone's Commissioned, Everyone Witnesses." Are you willing to take up this commission of God's calling?

The last stop of the missions trip took me to the Hakka village of Chu-Dong in the northwest mountainous region of the island. I myself am one-quarter Hakka. Moved by our focus and passion in our Taiwan mission work, Pastor Tseng of the Chu-Dong church told me that his church had formed a "Great Commission Fellowship" that would continue sponsoring our type of work after we left. Before I had said that the number of Christians in Taiwan is not even three percent. The Hakka Christians number around 0.3 percent even less than the number of Aboriginal Taiwanese people! Having heard that a Hakka church would be actively spreading the gospel among its people made me truly happy for them! May God bless them! The fervor of our missionary work is indeed contagious! **Last year** the northern California "Sixth Home of Christ" sent five people on this trip, including Pastor John Lai and his daughter. Pastor Lai immigrated from Hong Kong, and they were assigned to a Hakka village called Eh-Mei. Having seen that God saved many Hakka little ones, they were deeply moved with a stronger burden. They decided to come back to Eh-Mei by forming a team of their own church members **this** summer. My dear brothers and sisters, has the passion of missions moved you? I look forward to and welcome the prospect of you participating in Taiwan Mission with your Pastor. Aren't there many of us or our parents from Taiwan? If you wish to give back to your homeland, I hope you will join this missions effort and invite others to join as well. Will you?

2. Serving with Teamwork and Structure:

Even though the ministry of mission expects that every Christian will be able to take up his own individual soul-winning battle, to do missions on a larger scale requires mobilizing people and effective organization. But an increase in numbers of people complicates everything, and consensus becomes hard to reach. An organization must

establish a structure in order to operate successfully. The Lord Jesus instructed his disciples to build churches on earth and use the aggregated power of a team to be His witness. Jesus led by example, first gathering groups of disciples, then training them and sending them out to spread the gospel. The fellowships, small groups, or missionary teams of today's churches are based on this model. The apostle Paul likely did not have time to set up a structure, so he charged Titus with the task of appointing elders and overseers in "every town" (Several churches already existed on the island). Titus openly accepted this great responsibility! A comprehensive structure is needed to effectively manage church members, teach the truth, establish order, and carry out missionary work. The Taiwan Mission is the same. Its headquarters is in California and is charged with recruitment, training, and identifying mission locations. They form teams of volunteers, and establish team leaders, assistant team leaders, and a spiritually-mature general manager to oversee all the teams. If in sending out these well-trained groups we can reach 100 kids at every stop and 75 of them will accept Jesus, then if we went out to 10 locations **last year**, how many kids would accept Christ? 750. Right? The reality is that **last summer** (2006), we shared the Word to 1,070 kids, and we reaped 756 adorable little fruit. Hallelujah! This number cannot be achieved by one single Christian on his own individual mission.

3. Witnessing with Spirituality and Goodness:

The Portuguese wrote a poem for Taiwan, exalting its beauty. The Greek poet Epimenides also wrote a poem for the beautiful island of Crete, but its first sentence was: "Cretians, always liars." In (Titus 1:12), Paul added, "Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons!" He referred to them as liars and gluttons who ate and drank in excess and did little else that was productive. How unfortunate that Epimenides' poem was not complimenting Crete's natural beauty, but rather describing its citizen's ugly evils. Cretans were also historically known for their treachery, immodesty, selfishness, and deceit. They were crooked to the point that the Greek language created a verb from their name called "Cretizein," which meant "lie and cheat." (In English it would be "Cretize.") Confucius said: "Morality is not alone; it will always have company." Moral people are never alone. But the citizens of Crete lacked morality, so they were inevitably isolated, as represented by their island's geography. No wonder the apostle Paul, with

consternation, pressed Titus to appoint elders and overseers using great care. The church leaders must be blameless and spiritually upright in order to serve as a good example for their church members. They must be able to discern evil and wayward doctrines and correct misbehavior in their church members, including those who pursue dishonest gain. There is a famous author in Taiwan, Ms. Yu Li-Hua, who wrote a book on Japan's invasion of China, called "Meng Hui Ching He" ("Dreams Returning to the Green River"). In it she described many examples of dishonest gain. She referred to it as "evil income," monetary gain on the basis of evil, because people would kill others for it. Paul repeatedly emphasized a Christian leader's morality, because spiritual goodness was the best witness for missionary work. Thus, training for missionary work must include training for spirituality and goodness. On this Taiwan Mission, I deeply felt the need for discipline, compassion, and mutual respect within the teams, because these spiritual characteristics will not only set examples for the kids, but also leave a good impression within the community, thereby ensuring that we will be welcome back in the future.

The "Taiwan Mission" work continues to expand to this day, and it must be due to the fact that it has received recognition for its vision, commission, and structure, and also emphasizes spiritual purity and goodness. Many young second generation Christians have braved the heat and insect-infested environment, working day and night, to carry out God's work. Many parents, in addition to assist teaching and providing food and cleanup, have also conducted visitations, prayers, and seminars, etc. This show of unity has been incredibly moving. May God continue to affirm our work. Please pray for Taiwan, that one day this island can become a God-worshipping kingdom and always be with God, so that it is no longer isolated and alone. I hope that, with God's blessing, one day it will not only be physically, but spiritually perfect to live up to its name of beauty. Lastly, I invite every one of you once again to join us in the Taiwan Mission. God Bless!