



**The Life and Legacy of George Leslie Mackay: An
Interdisciplinary Study of Canada's First
Presbyterian Missionary to Northern Taiwan
(1872-1901)**

Clyde R. Forsberg Jr.

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George Leslie Mackay (1844-1901), the famous Canadian Presbyterian missionary who came to northern Formosa (Taiwan) in 1872 and preached specifically with aborigines in mind, is the subject of an interdisciplinary study by seven independent scholars interested in the nineteenth-century imperial project and Christian mission to China. Importantly, Mackay's mission defies such binary opposites as East and West: the missionary a conduit of an earlier Scottish-Canadian spirituality adapted to Taiwan that allowed converts to appropriate the Presbyterian faith on their own terms; the mission field in which he operated a biculture of foreign initiative and aboriginal agency working hand in hand. Mackay's ordination of aboriginal ministers, giving us the Northern Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan (PCT), was a bold departure from the imperial, Anglo-Canadian, Presbyterian norm. So, too, his marriage to a Taiwanese slave-girl, Chhang-mia, and the arranged interracial marriages that he performed between select Chinese ministers and female Taiwanese graduates (which included his two daughters). Mackay's missionary writing and famous autobiography *From Far Formosa* a fine specimen of the nineteenth-century heroic memoir genre is notable for its defense of both gender and racial equality, and despite its unmistakable patriarchal leanings. Mackay's repudiation of Darwinism and belief in an early type of creation science therein also locates the so-called *Barbarian Bible Man* opposite such virulent, racist theorizing as Social Darwinism and Eugenics. He was a dentist not an abortionist. A relative unknown to most Western scholars of religion, Mackay is Taiwan's most famous native son, represented on the national stage in 2008 as a sky god and Taiwanese animistic deity of supernatural power and political influence par excellent. Although a product of the colonial times in which he lived, post-colonial scholars who ignore Mackay, his life and legacy, clearly do so at some peril.

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