

Going Back to Church: Reencountering and Rediscovering Taiwan's Christian Communities

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The Taiwanese Christianity Community -- Protestant and Catholic -- has had a long, sometimes difficult, often fractured, and ever fascinating history on Taiwan from the early 1600s to the present. Over the course of the 1980s, your author studied the varied sub-communities that made up this diverse and influential body of believers. I explore the range of the extensive Christian spectrum, from large mainstream Western denominational churches such as the Presbyterian Church on Taiwan, to local indigenous churches whose doctrines appealed to large numbers of more traditional *minjian* 民間-centered Taiwanese, to a body of doctrinally radical and politically anti-KMT near sects such as the New Testament Church. Now, after more than twenty years of research done on a host of other Taiwan centered subject from present day politics to the US role in the Taiwan Miracle to the work of the feminist activist writer Li Ang 李昂, I have decided to return to my core interest -- the Christian community on Taiwan.

In this essay, one that will be based on a close reading of the wealth of new scholarly literature on Taiwanese Christianity, an exploration of the publications of the Taiwanese churches found in classic paper form and on church based websites, and series of interviews and visits to church services much as I had done in the 1980s (a set of experiences that made me one of the most "churched" Jews one can imagine) I will attempt to capture the nature of this increasingly influential and often socio-politically conscious group of believers.

Sometimes returning home is painful, but as I know from yearly visits to the small Presbyterian Church (and former home of the family of Lin Yixion 林義雄) homecomings can be events of deep joy as well. It is anticipation of this joy of renewed study and renewed fellowship that I will experience that makes the writing of and the presentation of this essay important to me.