

Relationship between Midwife and Christianity during Japanese Occupation Period

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the relationship between midwifery and the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan during the Japanese colonial era, the impact of female Christians taking up midwifery on the Church, their family and themselves, as well as the relationship between faith and specific occupations. From the late Qing Dynasty to the early Japanese rule, female Christians who learnt about modern midwifery through foreign female doctors, female missionaries, and church clinics became pioneers of modern midwifery in Taiwan. In 1906, Taiwan Sōtokufu launched midwifery workshops to train Taiwanese midwives. The church encouraged female believers to undergo the training, thus explaining why many early Taiwanese midwives came from Christian families. Besides being the earliest local midwives, they also shared the experience of birth delivery, and helped medical professionals accumulate knowledge about pregnancy and childbirth. After 1923, modern midwifery gradually became accepted by society. This high-income profession not only contributed to personal independence of female believers, but also improved the family income of missionaries. As illustrated by the examples of Li Zhao-zhi and Li Xiu-xian, it was common among believers for mother and daughter both becoming midwives, as well as marriages between “doctor and midwife” or “missionary and midwife,” showing that midwifery had become one of the main career options for female believers. However, from the 1930s onwards, churches in the south questioned whether the pastor’s wife could serve as a midwife or not. The church’s attitude gradually changed from actively encouraging female believers to take up “midwifery mission” to worrying that the female believers’ profession would hinder their missionary work. Female pastors had faced a dilemma between missionary work and personal career since the Japanese colonial era.

Keywords: Midwife, Female Christian, Li Zhao-zhi, The Diary of Ng Ong-seng, Huang Li Xiu-xian, Medical Mission