

THE GOSPEL IN CHINESE

Title: *The Perfect Man's Model* (全人矩矱)
Author: Karl Friedrich August Gützlaff
 (爱汉者) (1803–51)
Year published: 1836
Publisher: 坚夏书院 (Singapore)
Language: Chinese
Type: Book; 30 leaves
Call no.: RRARE 243 AHZ
Accession no.: B29240187K

Singapore's meteoric rise as a maritime trade centre soon after its founding in 1819 was largely due to its prime location at the tip of the Malay Peninsula. With trade came immigration and over time the population increased; by 1836–37, there were some 30,000 people in Singapore, almost half of whom were Chinese.¹

In 1819, the Reverend Samuel Milton, a missionary from the London Missionary Society (LMS) in Melaka, was sent to Singapore to spread Christianity to the Chinese. Shortly after, Claudius Henry Thomsen, a fellow missionary from the LMS, arrived in Singapore as missionary to the Malay community. Thomsen brought with him a

small printing press, and, together with Milton, established the Mission Press – the first printing press in Singapore (see also page 100).

Milton and Thomsen were tasked to establish a Chinese and Malay mission in Singapore. An important part of their work was the printing and distribution of religious tracts to spread the Gospel among the indigenous Malays as well as the large Chinese migrant community.

The larger aim of the missionaries was to convert the Chinese in China to Christianity. However, this was a challenging task because before the First Opium War (1839–42), Europeans were barred from

living and travelling in China except for Canton (Guangzhou) and Macau, which were the only ports open to European traders. Moreover, foreign missionaries had to carry out their work clandestinely as Christianity was banned in China until 1846.² At a time when the Western missionaries' access to China was restricted, the large number of Chinese junks plying between China and Singapore provided a convenient target for missionary activity directed at China.

Each January, Chinese junks sailed from the ports of Southern China with the Northeast monsoon, and returned to China with the Southwest monsoon, which blew from April to October. In the 1830 report of the Singapore Christian Union on its missionary work, Thomsen reported that "after supplying the Spiritual wants of a numerous resident population in Singapore and the neighbourhood our attention is directed to the junks that annually resort hither from China and other parts".³

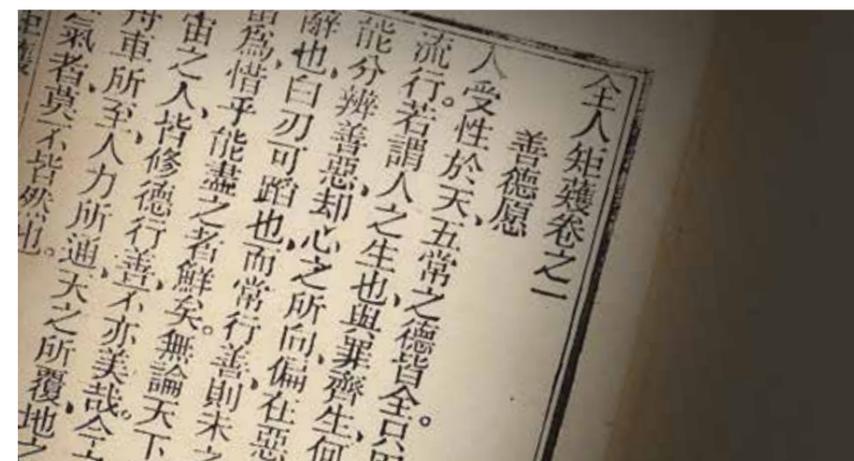
In total, no fewer than 100 junks visited Singapore every year, and took with them scriptures for distribution in China and parts of the Indian Archipelago.⁴ The large junks from China arrived early in the year and would remain for several months in port, providing ample opportunity for the missionaries to visit and proselytise to those on board. Those who were literate were supplied with books, while a small "export cargo" of pamphlets and booklets comprising the Bible and other religious texts would be entrusted to the captain or other crew members to be distributed in China.

Among these publications was a book titled *全人矩矱*, which roughly translates as "The Perfect Man's Model". Written by 爱汉者, the Chinese pen-name of Karl Friedrich August Gützlaff, a German Protestant missionary fluent in Chinese, the publication is a religious tract containing "a treatise on the teachings of the Holy Scripture on unfeigned virtue; spiritual instruction; the Saviour; explanation of the law; theory of prayer; and the doctrine of Jesus true and self-evident".⁵ It was printed in 1836 by Jian xia shu yuan (坚夏书院), the publishing arm of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions,⁶ and is the earliest extant Chinese publication printed in Singapore in the National Library's collection. Stitched and bound in the traditional Chinese bookbinding style, the book contains 30 leaves, sewn together using the five-hole stitching method.

Gützlaff was born in Pyritz, Pomerania (a historic region that lies along the border of Germany and Poland). His interest in China grew after a meeting in England with Robert Morrison, the LMS' first missionary to China.⁷



[Left] The author Karl Friedrich August Gützlaff (1803–51) was a German Protestant missionary fluent in Chinese. *All rights reserved, Gützlaff, K. F. A. (1834). A Sketch of Chinese History (Vol. 1). New York: John P. Haven. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.*
[Below] Book 1 of *The Perfect Man's Model* (全人矩矱) on "unfeigned virtue". *Image source: National Library Board, Singapore.*



[Above] The cover of *The Perfect Man's Model* (全人矩矱). *Image source: National Library Board, Singapore.*
[Right] Book 2 of *The Perfect Man's Model* (全人矩矱) on "spiritual instructions". *Image source: National Library Board, Singapore.*



Gützlaff first set sail for the East in 1826 as a missionary of the Netherlands Missionary Society (NMS). He left the NMS in 1828 when the society refused to send him to China. Thereafter, he spent time in Bangkok and learned the Thai language. He also visited Singapore where he married an English missionary, Maria Newell, in 1829. When she died in 1831, Gützlaff relocated to Macau from where he made several trips along the coast of China travelling as far north as Tianjin, and repeatedly flouted the law by preaching the Christian faith and distributing Christian literature among the Chinese.

A prolific writer and translator of Christian literature, some of Gützlaff's notable works include the translation of the Bible into Thai, Chinese and Japanese. He also produced a Chinese-language magazine, *Eastern Western Monthly Magazine* (东西洋考每月统记传), which is regarded as the first contemporary Chinese periodical to be published in China.⁸ While living in Macau, Gützlaff translated the Gospel and Epistles of John into Japanese, which was printed in Singapore and is believed to be the first Japanese translation of the Bible.⁹ Gützlaff died in Hong Kong in 1851.

◆ Ong Eng Chuan

Notes

- Newbold, T. J. (1839). *Political and statistical account of the British settlements in the Straits of Malacca, viz. Pinang, Malacca, and Singapore: With a history of the Malayan states on the peninsula of Malacca* (Vol. 1, p. 284). London: J. Murray. Microfilm: NL 5141
- Fairbank, J. K., & Goldman, M. (2006). *China: A new history* (p. 195, 222). Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. Call no.: R 951 FAI
- Singapore Christian Union. (1830). *The report of the Singapore Christian Union* (pp. 10–11). Singapore: The Mission press. Microfilm: NL 30804
- Singapore Christian Union, 1830, p. 16.
- Wylie, A. (1967). *Memorials of Protestant missionaries to the Chinese: Giving a list of their publications, and obituary notices of the deceased, with copious indexes* (p. 57). Taipei: Ch'eng-Wen Pub. Call no.: RCLDS 266.40951 MEM
- In 1834, Claudius Henry Thomsen sold the Mission Press to the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in a dubious deal, see page 101.
- Bliss, E. M., Jackson, S. M., & Gilmore, G. W. (Eds.). (2002). *The encyclopaedia of missions: Descriptive, historical, biographical, statistical* (Vol. 1, p. 404). London: Ganesha Pub.; Tokyo: Edition Synapse. Call no.: R q266.003 ENC
- Zhang, X. T. (2007). *The origins of the modern Chinese press: The influence of the Protestant missionary press in late Qing China* (p. 39). New York: Routledge. Call no.: R 079.51 ZHA
- Bliss, Jackson & Gilmore, 2002, p. 501.