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Item Type	Article
Authors	Weber, Anton
Publisher	China-Zentrum e.V.
Rights	China-Zentrum e.V.
Download date	2026-11-14 04:13:45
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/4128654

中國宗教評論

Mission Experiences in Taiwan, with a Focus on the Indigenous Tsou People

Anton Weber SVD
Translated by Jacqueline Mulberge SSpS

Preliminary note: Fr. Anton Weber SVD, born in 1937, joined the Society of the Divine Word (SVD) in 1957. From 1965 to 2000 he worked as a missionary in Taiwan. In 2000 his order called him back to Germany to accompany the priests, seminarians and religious sisters from Mainland China who were studying at the SVD Faculty of Philosophy and Theology in Sankt Augustin. From 2005 to 2012 he held the office of Director of the China-Zentrum. In the following interview from May 2021, he shared his views and experiences regarding his work in Taiwan. Fr. Weber worked for many years among the indigenous mountain people of the Tsou (also Cou or Zou zu 鄒族), who traditionally live in the Alishan area near Chiayi in south-central Taiwan. Today, the ethnic group has about 6,500 members. The questions were asked by Katharina Feith (China-Zentrum, Sankt Augustin) and Barbara Hoster (Monumenta Serica Institute, Sankt Augustin).

1. What was your personal motivation for going to the mission in Taiwan?

Response: During my student years China already aroused my particular interest. Some of the writings (in a German translation) of the early Chinese philosophers held a certain fascination for me. When the Founder of the Society of the Divine Word, Fr. Arnold Janssen SVD (1837–1909), decided to found a mission society, he had China in mind first and foremost. After the communist takeover, however, deployment in Mainland China, where many SVD missionaries had worked for decades, was ruled out for foreign personnel. But then a door opened in the 1950s and 1960s in Taiwan (Republic of China) for the China Mission.[1] The SVD Generalate also decided, at the urging of former missionaries to China, to take over an area in Taiwan for their missionary commitment. In agreement with Bishop Thomas Niu Huiqing (1895–1973), the former Bishop of Yanggu in Shandong Province (previously an SVD mission area) and then Apostolic Administrator of Chiayi Diocese, the Divine Word missionaries took over an area in that diocese. That was the area east of the city of Chiayi, including the mountainous area that still belonged to Chiayi County, with its indigenous population. The SVD Region of China (later on China Province) was founded. The first regional superior was Fr. Alois Krieftewirth (1904–1990), who had formerly worked as a missionary in Henan. He also managed to extract a concession from

1 On the different phases of the history of the Catholic Church in Taiwan after 1949, see Francis K.H. So – Beatrice K.F. Leung – Ellen Mary Mylod (eds.), *The Catholic Church in Taiwan. Birth, Growth and Development* (Singapore 2018), and *ibid*., *The Catholic Church in Taiwan. Problems and Prospects* (Singapore 2018).

Bishop Niu to allow the SVD to take over the missionary-pastoral care and administration of a city parish in Chiayi. At the instigation of Fr. Krieftewirth, a parish was also taken over in the city of Tainan and the German Cultural Centre was established in Kaohsiung.

On the outskirts of Chiayi, on Wufeng South Road, the SVD then also found a place for their religious headquarters (after having previously settled in Dingliu village), in the immediate vicinity of the Fu-Jen Middle School, which was a foundation of the SVD. There a parish with a kindergarten was also established (Fu-Jen kindergarten).

Meanwhile, in Hsinchuang in Taipei County, the Fu-Jen University was re-established in 1961, with the SVD making a considerable contribution in terms of material and personnel.

All this took place in the 1960s. It all sounded quite interesting and proved to be an open developmental process; it encouraged me to sign up for the mission there.

Another sign pointing in the direction of Taiwan was the fact that the SVD personnel at the time, mostly consisting of elderly veteran Mainland missionaries who had been recalled from their new fields in Europe, Asia and Africa and assigned to Taiwan, were now getting older and looking for young people to carry on their work. That meant there was a very great probability that anyone who volunteered for the China Province / Taiwan would be given a mission assignment for it by the order's leadership. Apart from that, nobody else in my class of 30 new priests appeared to be interested in a mission appointment for China / Taiwan.

A final, very concrete stimulus came from Fr. Karl Weber SVD (1936–1994), my compatriot and fellow student, who, after completing his theological studies in the USA, had signed up for the China Mission and had left for Taiwan a year before me. He had only



Fr. Weber as a young missionary en route to the mountains. Personal photo.

good things to say about the conditions and possibilities of the SVD mission work in Taiwan, especially concerning the mountain mission. He encouraged me to choose Taiwan as my first choice for a mission field. My wish was then granted without further ado by the leadership of the order.

2. How was the relationship between *benshengren* 本省人, *waishengren* 外省人, *yuanzhumin* 原住民 and the Catholic Church?

Response: With the communist takeover of Mainland China in 1949, the National Chinese Army under Chiang Kai-shek retreated to the Island of Taiwan, which had been under Japanese colonial rule for the past 50 years. They regarded themselves as Taiwan's liberators, so to speak. At the same time, President Chiang Kai-shek and his party – the Guomindang 國民黨 (also Kuomintang) – claimed to be the official legitimate government of the whole of China with the name Zhonghua Minguo (Republic of China, R.O.C. for short). In the early years they upheld the slogan: "Reconquer mainland China, liberate the compatriots, exterminate the communist bandits!" This slogan could even be found on liquor bottles as a proposition.

With the hopelessness of this so-called reconquest, all these slogans increasingly disappeared, and the soldiers of the Mainland army found themselves more and more at the mercy of their fate to settle down definitely in Taiwan and to integrate into the local population. The need to start a family became a problem for them. They looked for wives among the Taiwanese (*bensheng* 本省) population or among the indigenous population (*yuanzhumin*), which as a minority (approx. 2.4% of the total population), divided into several smaller and larger peoples and ethnic groups (also known for a long time as tribes), mainly inhabited the mountain regions. Along with the Chinese army, a large number of private individuals and their families had fled from Mainland China to Taiwan, not without the thought of returning to their original homeland if developments permitted. This, too, soon proved to be quite hopeless, so that they also had to prepare themselves to settle permanently in Taiwan.

The so-called "Mainlanders" (*daluren* 大陸人) or *waishengren* ("those coming from outside") were not exactly welcomed by the "Taiwanese" (*benshengren*) in Taiwan, especially as the Mainlanders often felt themselves to be masters and liberators and behaved accordingly. The linguistic differences were also considerable, although "Mainlanders" and "Taiwanese" are both ethnically Han Chinese. Even though the writing was comprehensible on both sides due to the same Chinese characters, the spoken language was too different to be mutually understood. For example, the sentence in Mandarin *Wo gei ni jiang/shuo* 我给您讲/说 (I tell you) in the Taiwanese rendering would be *Gua kap li kong*. Important positions in politics, economy, education, land protection and various public offices were held by Mainlanders. Standard Chinese or Mandarin (officially called *guoyu* 國語, i.e. "national language," in Taiwan at the time), based on the Beijing dialect, was introduced as the official language. It went to the extent that students were forbidden to use Taiwanese (*Minnanyu* 闽南语, also known as Amoy) in schools under penalty. In those circumstances it was obvious that there would be tensions, integration difficulties and misunderstanding between the two population groups. In our SVD central house in

Chiayi we had two employees, a Taiwanese as chauffeur and a Mainlander as a kind of factotum, but especially as an intermediary in dealing with the authorities. Both of them were efficient and friendly and our missionaries could get along well with both. Yet even if there were no actual conflicts, the different ways of thinking were tangible. We were once speaking of Taiwan's rapid development. Mr. Wang (Mainlander) said that this was only due to the wise and consistent leadership of the Mainlanders. Mr. Cai (Taiwanese) said that this view was complete nonsense, that Taiwan's progress was only due to the diligence and good cooperation of the Taiwanese people. The government behaved rather dictatorially until the death of President Chiang Kai-shek (1975) and followed martial law for a long time (1949–1987). His son and successor Chiang Ching-kuo was wise enough to allow more openness towards democracy. The one-party system also came to an end with the emergence of the Democratic Progressive Party (Minjindang 民進黨) in Taiwan.

For the Christian missionary work and the Church, the presence of the different population groups – Mainland Chinese, Taiwanese and indigenous peoples – made it necessary to decide on which entity to focus its work, in other words, among which population group there was the greatest possibility for the Church to develop rapidly. In the beginning, the leadership of the dioceses (soon there were seven) was still entirely in the hands of foreign bishops or bishops who had entered from the Mainland. The missionary personnel of the SVD (Fathers and Brothers) consisted exclusively of former missionaries to China from Europe or the USA and a few members from Mainland China who had been ordained and worked mainly in the Philippines but were then assigned to work in Taiwan. There was a natural tendency to make friends with Mainland Chinese, among whom there were already quite a number of Catholics and whose language was familiar to the missionaries. Especially since many among them were in difficult material circumstances, they were very grateful to receive relief supplies from the Church. The number of conversions increased rapidly, giving hope for the rapid development of the Church. In most of the other dioceses the experience was similar, so that the core of the dioceses and parishes was formed mainly by new Christians from among the Mainland Chinese. Thus, the missionaries soon began to impart Christian values through educational and social institutions and to make the Church known.

In the Catholic Church in particular, the idea was widespread that through this core of believers, who owed their Christian existence to the help and education of the Catholic Church, the Christian faith would also spread to the wider, local population. Over time that proved to be deceptive. Once the refugees from Mainland China were no longer dependent on aid and were able to live independently, religion and the Church began to lose their vital character for many, and their participation in the activities and faith life of the Church evaporated partially or completely. In the long run, the Church could no longer afford the escalating salaries for several catechists who had received appropriate training for their ministry and spoke both languages.

Of course, most Catholic missionaries and religious congregations also recognised the need to work among the local Taiwanese-speaking *bensheng* population. From the beginning the Protestant churches (especially the Presbyterian Church) had been mainly involved in evangelising this *bensheng* population and had also soon started to train local

pastors and helpers. They were very successful among the local population. On the Catholic side, it was mainly the Maryknoll colleagues from the USA who at that time turned primarily to the Taiwanese-speaking population in Nantou and Taichung and therefore preferred to learn Taiwanese in the first place and not Mandarin.

The evangelisation work was arguably most successful among the indigenous people in the mountains and on the edge of the mountains. The indigenous people were very open to the Christian religion and joined the Catholic Church in large numbers. They were rather more willing to abandon their religious traditions and customs, some of which were perceived as outdated, and join the Christian faith. Of course, the services provided by the Catholic Church in the form of education and social assistance played a significant part as a motivation. For the Catholic Church, the beginning of missionary work among the indigenous people (especially the Tsou people) was difficult, as Protestant churches – such as the Presbyterians and the True Jesus Church (Zhen Yesu jiaohui 真耶穌教會) – had already carried out intensive missionary work and founded parishes. Through contacts of members of the Tsou people to the outside world and to neighbouring indigenous groups, where the Catholic Church had already established itself with its rites and chants that the indigenous people found appealing, they became aware of the Catholic Church and asked the bishops for messengers of faith.



Fr. Weber with a group of young people on the Yu shan (Jade mountain) at an altitude of over 3,000 m, in the 1970s.
Personal photo.

The liturgical services and the teaching of the faith, especially in written texts, were conducted in Mandarin, which the younger generation in the mountain villages had also mastered due to their primary school education. Suitable helpers among members of the indigenous ethnic groups, who spoke both Mandarin and the indigenous languages, acted as translators and prayer leaders for the older generation. Written texts in the indigenous languages did not exist at first. It was also forbidden by the government at the time to bring non-Chinese texts written in a Latinised form into public use. The mistrust that texts containing a political agenda or inciting unnoticed sedition might be circulated, or that communist infiltration was creeping in, was definitely still present in Party and government



Church and priests' house in Tefuye. Personal photo.

circles. It was also a rule that missionaries working among the indigenous people had to carry a mountain pass (permission to enter the mountain region of the *yuanzhumin*), which had to be shown at the checkpoint when entering the mountain region. Even in the villages that the missionaries visited, they were obliged to register at the police station. The mountain pass had to be renewed every month (later every two months) by the central administrative authority in the city. I personally always complied with this regulation and was able to gain access to my destinations without any problem.

The rugged terrain (in the beginning, access to the individual villages went almost exclusively via narrow footpaths) was also a difficulty, especially for the transport of materials. The whole process of faith formation was thus relatively simple, but nevertheless strong and impressive. The first chapels were simple bamboo huts, often visited by rats and snakes. The rapid development of Taiwan also had an impact on the spread of the faith in the mountains. Electricity brought television, new roads with cars and motorbikes encouraged traffic and contact with the outside world, job-seeking and study in the city led to less constrained thinking and action. Faith and belonging to the Church entered into crisis, but at the same time there was also a consolidation of the faith of those who had found their way to the essentials of life through the Church community.

Basically, what can be said about the relationship between *benshengren*, *waishengren* and *yuanzhumin* is that over the years there has been more and more mutual acceptance and an awareness that we are all in the same boat and depend on each other. The demarcations were increasingly abolished. Children born into Mainland Chinese families grew up in friendship with Taiwanese youths, and were also able to communicate in Taiwanese.

There were *bensheng-waisheng* marriages. In the political, social and economic spheres, the native Taiwanese, the *benshengren*, gained more and more importance and influence.

The *yuanzhumin* remained a minority without much political influence. But due to the international attention that indigenous peoples received everywhere, their existence and self-expression was also recognised in Taiwan. The indigenous culture is no longer the victim of a misunderstood sinicisation process, but is perceived and appreciated as a value. Those who stand up for the indigenous culture and its language are no longer ostracised by the government, but rather receive an award. The indigenous peoples as a whole were also granted their own ministry, the Council of Indigenous Peoples (Yuanzhuminzu weiyuanhui 原住民族委員會), where they can express their interests, voice their complaints and make their demands to the government. In the Church, the three population groups have always been recognised as equal and treated accordingly. The fact that services are also held in different languages, depending on how far the concrete situation indicates or allows it, is not done out of mutual dislike, demarcation and distancing, but simply for practical reasons of understanding or also as a perception and cultivation of the people's identity.

3. You said that the Tsou were more attracted to Catholicism than to Protestantism. Can you elaborate on that?

Response: In the early 1960s, when Tsou people from the Alishan area attended a Catholic Christmas service at the homes of relatives in a neighbouring area, they came into contact with the Catholic Church and felt the need to get to know it better. At that time, the Protestant church (Presbyterian and True Jesus Church) had already been present among the Tsou around the Alishan for some time. Many had joined one of these two groups. However, a number of mainly older Tsou were still hesitant, including the head of the Tsou. They missed something.



The Ku'ba, the men's house and centre of the Tsou community, 1989. Personal photo.

When the Catholic Church became better known in the area through the missionary work of Fr. Rudolf Frisch SVD (1899–1982), it emerged that it was above all the idea of sacrifice, which is central to the celebration of Holy Mass, that particularly appealed to these people. In the Protestant faith, Mayasvi, the annual "tribal festival," originally a victory festival in which an offering to the Tsou spirits was an important part, no longer had a place and was abolished. When, instead, the holy Mass was celebrated in Tefuye at a Mayasvi festival on the large square in front of the Ku'ba (the men's house or centre of the Tsou community), many who had previously kept their distance from the Christian religion felt touched and attracted. Even the head of the Tsou himself was baptised soon after.

The relationship between the Protestant and Catholic Churches was of course accompanied by many tensions in the beginning. In the course of time, the negative attitude gave way and there was a growing mutual acceptance.



Dance during the tribal festival of the Tsou community. Personal photo.

4. What fascinated you most about the people of the Tsou?

Response: What fascinated and attracted me to some of the Tsou was their willingness to help with activities that affected the community and their faithfulness to their adopted beliefs. I am thinking of Francis Wang Chuanfa from Lijia, a village far in the mountains, a tall, strong, genuine Tsou. After he had become a Catholic, Fr. Frisch had given him an introduction to the fundamental beliefs of the Church and then made him a Christian leader and assistant catechist in Lijia. He carried out his ministry with great dedication and absolute reliability, presiding over the services on Sundays when no priest could come to celebrate the Eucharist, proclaiming the Good News in genuine, original Tsou language,



An elderly Tsou brings offerings to the altar during Holy Mass, 1980s. Personal photo.

and when the priest came to celebrate the Eucharist, he acted as translator and ensured that the liturgical celebration went well. He was also much appreciated by the faithful and among the villagers. Then came the time when he was appointed village headman and he was responsible for the affairs of the village and the success of worldly affairs. With such a change of responsibility and additional work, most people are out of the equation when it comes to the interests of the Church and the Christian community; they are rarely seen in church. Not so Francis Wang. Although he now did not receive any financial remuneration, he always came faithfully to church on Sundays whenever he could and helped to organise the service. He also made sure that the buildings and facilities were taken care of. He did this as a matter of course as a contribution to the congregation and without any claim to remuneration. I always had a good relationship with him.

Another person whom I admire very much to this day and whom I would like to call the happiest woman in the world, so to speak, is Wen Meimei, a girl from the Tsou people, married for many years to a Taiwanese man, a *benshengren*. I met her when she was a young girl. We always simply called her "Ohaesa" (a word from the Tsou language meaning little sister). She narrowly escaped the fate of many other girls from the indigenous population who were given away as wives by their own fathers to Chinese veterans from Chiang Kai-shek's army who could no longer return to Mainland China. Ohaesa fled from home with her mother and found shelter at the mission station of Fr. Anton Pott SVD (1903–1986) in Fenchihu, where she was received with great understanding. There she



Fr. Weber with Tsou people, second from left: "Ohaesa." Personal photo.

also received good training as a kindergarten teacher. She was appreciated and loved by all. Ohaesa had a fantastic way of dealing with children.

All that changed when in the South the wife of a catechist died, leaving five children – two sons and three daughters. In vain a woman was sought who could replace the man's wife and the children's mother. The almost unthinkable then came to pass: Ohaesa was willing to marry the widowed catechist. A failure of the marriage seemed almost pre-programmed. Difference in age, difference in character, danger of discrimination (among the Han Chinese, the indigenous people were considered rather second-rate), etc. It was indeed not easy for Ohaesa to be accepted in the family as a wife and mother. But what always gave her confidence and perseverance was her simple but deep Christian faith and the conviction that only always to be there for others can make one truly happy.

In the meantime, many years have passed. The children are all grown up and have their own well-off families. Ohaesa's own son is also happily married now. I have had several opportunities to visit the family. One is amazed at the love, respect and gratitude with which they all treat Ohaesa. It had not escaped their notice what this wife and mother had given them in love and care during the years as they were growing up. She also cared for her husband, who died recently, with great love and patience. What gave her such maturity was not further studies, but her openness, honesty and the natural manner with which she approached people, and the direct expression of her faith experience in practical life despite all the hardships and trials she had to go through.

A word about the characterisation of the different groups: Perhaps the different character of two ethnic groups is expressed in the way the question about the situation in which someone finds his/herself is answered. A typical answer of the indigenous people in Tsou

language was often: "Uk'ana peisu," which means, "I lack money." For the Han Chinese, the answer in the local Taiwanese language was rather: "Gua bo si-kan," which means, "I lack the time." Among the Tsou, who had to struggle to live in the remoteness of the mountains, it was usually the lack of money that was perceived as the great difficulty in solving problems or trying to do something. Among the Han Chinese, who were better off and were constantly planning or doing something, it was usually the time that they lacked to carry out something consistently.

5. Is there a list of your translations of biblical and other Christian texts into the Tsou language?

Response: There is no list of Christian texts translated into the Tsou language on my initiative. Such a list would be very short. There are only the Four Gospels with the title: *Buacou ci fuyin* (The Gospel in the Tsou Language)[2] and the texts for the liturgical Sunday service for the readings of years ABC with the title: *Hiesi to Amopepe / H'OE'EA TO MISA* (*Zhuri / gan'en jidian* 主日/感恩祭典; Day of the Lord/ Mass texts). The basic text of these translations was painstakingly transcribed into the Tsou language by John Zheng Zhenzong and partly by Mr. Wu Liangjue on the basis of the Chinese originals and then revised with me in a group of experienced Tsou people. The text of the Four Gospels was published in book form in 2012. In the meantime, the Mass texts are available in printed form and have been sent to the Catholic parishes in the mountains.

John Zheng also set some of the fixed prayer parts (in Tsou language) of the Holy Mass to music, in the style of the melodies of the Mayasvi festival. These are the Kyrie, Gloria, Our Father and Agnus Dei. These parts are very popular in the community and are still used in all villages today.

6. How can Christian concepts be translated into the Tsou language? What are the characteristics of this language and what are the difficulties in translating?

Response: From the beginning of the evangelisation work among the Tsou, there was of course a need to convey religious content and statements through the medium of their own language and in the context of the Tsou tradition as an introduction to the life of faith. When translating religious, biblical and liturgical texts into the Tsou language, the process is the same as when translating texts into other languages. The meaning and content of the passage to be translated must be clearly grasped and thematically summarised in a statement. Then it proceeds to the concretisation of the content in individual statements in the form of sentences, whereby the translators into the Tsou language try to follow the Chinese text. It is then important to find parts of sentences and words from the target language that come closest to the intention of the original. For our members of the Tsou involved in the translation, only the Chinese text used in the Catholic Church could serve

2 On this also see A. Weber, "Das Evangelium in der Muttersprache: Publikation der vier Evangelien in der Ureinwohnersprache der Cou in Taiwan" (The Gospel in the Mother Tongue: Publication of the Four Gospels in the Native Language of the Cou in Taiwan), in: *China heute* 2013, No. 1, pp. 6-9. Editors' note.

as a model. Personally, of course, I had the possibility of using the Latin, Greek, English and German texts for comparison.

Since most of the faithful were also familiar with Chinese or Japanese, depending on their age, there was always the temptation for the translators to render more difficult words and contents such as God, grace, prayer, kingdom of heaven etc. in Japanese expressions. These Japanese expressions had gradually become so familiar to the listeners that they already felt as though they belonged to their own language, as it were. We then retained these loan words – such as "*Seilei*" (= Holy Spirit). Otherwise, we took great care in the final formulation of the written texts to find Tsou expressions that corresponded to the original meaning of the texts, but also conveyed to the people the feeling that they were grounded in their own tradition, so that they could feel at home when listening to the texts.

For instance, "*kamisama*" for God was replaced by "Amopepe" (= Father in heaven), "*megumi*" for grace by "*ma'cinghi*" (= turning of the heart), "*oinoli*" for prayer by "*euho-ho'ü*" (= turning trustingly to a higher power).

Of course the Protestants were also faced with the problem of the correct rendering of biblical texts in the Tsou language. Both churches have their own version. In the Catholic version, as already mentioned, the expression for God is "Amopepe," while the Protestant version uses the expression "Hamo" for God. This is the Tsou people's name for their God. We intentionally did not adopt this expression in the Catholic version in order not to associate false connotations with the name in the imagination of the faithful, but rather to emphasise the reference to the God of Jesus Christ as the only God.

As in other languages, the beauty of the Tsou language lies in the art of rendering encounters, relationships, ideas and actions in a structured form that is perceptually appropriate. The basis and starting point is always the concrete realm of experience and ends with a statement that touches on the realm of human existence. In Tsou consciousness, the subject-subject reference has a very strong effect on the language structure, whereas in other languages the subject-object reference is more decisive. E.g., "*Os 'o cu aiti e amo-su*" (= I have already seen your father). This "your father" is perceived as a subject rather than an object.

The formation of sentences is also influenced by whether something is visible or invisible, near or far, real or imaginary within the scope of the statement. Furthermore, whether a process has already been completed or is still in progress, or whether it is a condition or a one-off event. In the above example, it is said that I have already seen (*os 'o cu aiti*) the father as a visible person (*e amo*).

One difficulty in translation arises, of course, from the fact that an indigenous people is a people that has lived secluded in a natural environment for centuries, with language formed in a long process as an instrument of communication. They moved in a different world of imagination, experience and expression than a people dwelling among many peoples with a distinct culture of communication. The basic features of the human world of experience with its psychological contexts, which has a great wealth of expressive possibilities, are naturally also present in an indigenous community. In a translation of religious texts, these cultural contexts must be taken into account and reproduced in an ap-



Village Tefuye in Fr. Weber's mission area. Personal photo.

propriate linguistic form. The extent to which the social and historical development over the years, especially in the wake of modernity, also affects a change in language, would have to be determined in an individual study.

7. How can the Tsou culture be preserved?

Response: In a considerably late development the government of the Republic of China / Taiwan has recognised the value and importance of indigenous cultures (there are several peoples and ethnic groups, each with their own emphasis in the realisation of their cultural consciousness). The shaping of cultural expressions (traditional costumes, dances, songs), which these days certainly receives the approval of the government, nowadays usually boils down to attractive events to promote tourism. Some ethnic groups also succeed in bringing in essential elements of their specific indigenous culture when organising such events. This has its value, especially if it succeeds in involving the youth in the perception, interest and organisation of such events. This is happening here with the Tsou in the village of Shanmei (Saviggi), for example, with the establishment of the Tanaiku programmes, where attempts are being made to involve the Han Chinese who visit the village in large numbers, in the essence of Tsou culture and to encourage respect for the *yuanzhumin*.

But the language, which reflects the culture of a people in particular, merits above all to be preserved and cultivated. This is happening too little. In the Tsou villages, too, the Min-

istry of Education has now introduced the teaching of the indigenous language into the primary school curriculum. But that is not effective if the language is not cultivated in the family and if it is not systematically promoted in the local community. The youth is falling more and more victim to a process of sinicisation. The language is only incorporated into a particular song culture as a kind of curiosity to increase its attractiveness, but that is not enough to maintain the expressiveness and communicability of the language on the level of people's consciousness. It is therefore all the more important that in the Church services, which take place regularly and to which every believer and non-believer has access, the communication of the Good News and the celebration of the liturgy are cultivated in the Tsou language. That is the reason for the effort over many years to make the entire texts available in written form, so that people can gradually settle into their use with growing enthusiasm. Of course, this would require regular attendance at Church services.

8. What other events and encounters did you experience as formative during your time in Taiwan?

Response: I never kept a diary or registered special events as such. All the mission work on Taiwan was a formative event mixed with success and failure, but I am not really inclined to see it as such. God can also draw fruit from failures, we cannot judge that. Perhaps I may mention a small, very inconspicuous event that was significant for me in the sense of encouragement at a time that was rather marked by disillusionment. As a young missionary, you are motivated by the hope and desire to build thriving Christian communities. I worked as a missionary in Taiwan for 35 years after completing my studies. After studying the Chinese language for two years, I was sent to the Tsou people in the mountains. The indigenous people, as described, have their own language and culture. While the young people had already adapted to the Chinese context in language and culture, the older generation felt even more connected to the tradition of their ancestors.

But they were open to Christianity, and a large number of the indigenous people had also joined the Catholic Church. A community of believers in Christ had formed in every village. By the time I started working, however, the novelty experienced by these believers towards Church and religion was already over. The faith attitude of many proved to be superficial and motivated by false expectations. It became more and more difficult to win the faithful over to a well-ordered, profound life of faith. The crisis had become palpable. The challenges to a young missionary were considerable. He asked himself: What do I want here? What really matters? Is the Christian message understood and accepted at all? Does it have a chance of contributing to the shaping of a new society in the spirit of Christ?

One experience from that time remains unforgettable to this day; it was decisive for my further commitment to the implementation of Jesus' mission. I had to hike for hours over narrow, often steep mountain paths and over suspension bridges to visit the individual villages. There were no roads in the mountains at that time. On one such hike, I once passed a mountain hut where the indigenous people used to store their tools. Dead tired, I sat down to rest a little. Then I saw some Chinese characters on a bamboo post opposite me. I went closer to find out what was written there in this remote mountain area. And lo and behold, it was the sentence from the Gospel of John: "For God so loved the world

that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish …". It was truly a revelation to me at the time. Someone had actually grasped what it was really all about. That became a tremendous encouragement for me and a confirmation that the Christian message can indeed fall on fertile ground and that it is important to continue to put oneself fully at its service.

9. What would you see as personal successes or failures of your work as a missionary?

Response: As indicated above, I have never looked at my mission work in terms of success or failure. There was never a wave of conversion within my area of responsibility, neither among the indigenous people nor among the Han Chinese in the plains. The storm on the baptismal font was long past. I saw my main task in better locating the faith in concrete life, in expanding the knowledge of the faith and in deepening and activating faith awareness in the congregations and families. I succeeded in various ways, but it remained rather exceptional. Among the indigenous people as well as among the Han Chinese, people occasionally said to me: "Father, until now my understanding of faith and my sense of belonging to the Christian community was very superficial, but since you have been leading the congregation and giving us the opportunity in the Bible group to exchange about the contents of faith, I understand much better what it is really about, and I have learned to appreciate my faith."

As far as the work among the indigenous people is concerned, my main task was to continue Fr. Frisch's work of building up the community. For example, we succeeded in getting a number of couples to participate in a Marriage Encounter programme organised by the Social Institute in Taichung. This activity proved to be quite helpful in that these families then also fulfilled their role model function for the shaping of family life in accordance with Christian values. The Church also made a significant contribution to raising the level of education in the mountainous region by offering students the opportunity to attend middle school in Chiayi city after completing primary school. The pupils could be accommodated and cared for in a hostel in the immediate vicinity of the Fu-Jen Middle School. The administration of Fu-Jen Middle School was very accommodating and cooperative in their efforts to provide the young people from the mountains with a good education. Of course, this was also linked to the idea that in the future they would take on important positions in the field of government, education and administration in the mountain villages, which did then happen. Thus, this commitment in the field of education proved to be a success.

But success and failure are sometimes very close together. I would also consider my efforts to preserve and use the Tsou language a success. The fact that written texts of the Bible and the entire Sunday service of the lectionary years ABC are now available and that Holy Mass has been able to be celebrated in the Tsou language since quite a long time is remarkable. However, the fact that it has not been possible to inspire the youth of the Tsou for the consistent use of the language of their people and thus to guarantee the preservation of the language as the most precious cultural asset, I consider a failure.

10. Who continued your work when your returned to Germany?

Response: The provincial and district administration of the SVD missionaries in Taiwan has ensured that the evangelisation work and pastoral outreach in the parishes continues. The staff has been greatly rejuvenated and quite a number of the appointed priests and brothers now come from Asia. As for the continued promotion of the Tsou language, the priest Norbert Pu Ying-hsiung, a Tsou member and nephew of the Tsou leader, a diocesan priest working in a Chinese-Taiwanese parish, is very interested in maintaining the use of the mother tongue in the liturgy in all Christian communities in the mountains. There are also powerful voices among the people in the mountains – not forgetting Sr. Lisa Wang OP, Norbert Pu's aunt – who have campaigned and continue to campaign for the survival and use of the indigenous language. In SVD circles, however, the view seems to be gaining ground that it is not worth spending time and personnel on learning and propagating the Tsou language, as sooner or later the language will disappear from the scene and Chinese will prevail at all levels and in all areas. Today approximately 6,500 people still feel that they belong to the Tsou people.

11. After your return from Taiwan, did you have an opportunity to continue your work, e.g. through new translations?

Response: I was called back to Germany in 2000 to accompany and support the Chinese students from Mainland China (priests, seminarians and religious sisters) who were studying theology at the SVD Faculty of Philosophy and Theology in Sankt Augustin. After taking over the leadership of the China-Zentrum in 2005, I had more frequent opportunities to visit Mainland China and also Taiwan to promote contacts with China. In this respect, I was able to continue my ministry in and to the Chinese Church. The visits to Taiwan were mainly concerned with continuing and completing the translation of the liturgical texts for the Sunday service, the wedding liturgy, the funeral liturgy, the celebration of the New Year and other festivals into the Tsou language. That work was completed in 2017. There is no need for new translations of any further texts. I would not be able to do them on my own here in Germany. For such work, one is absolutely dependent on the direct cooperation of qualified, experienced native speakers who are connected to the tradition and still have the original feeling for the language.

12. What advice would give a missionary who is going to Taiwan today to work with the Tsou or other *yuanzhumin*?

Response: Looking back, I would of course do some things differently. Above all, I would seek much more direct contact with the people, individuals and in families and groups, for whose care I have taken responsibility. That is the only way you can gain access to background experiences and become familiar with forms of language, life and behaviour that contribute to a better understanding of people's way of life and prevent misunderstandings. Experience would also be gained for the living use of the language. This would then make it easier to avoid what the Chinese express with the beautiful idiom: *bi men zao che* 閉門造車 – which means "acting out of touch with reality." Especially as a newcomer,



Fr. Weber in the Alishan region in August 2003. Personal photo.

it is easy to be too cautious in order to avoid mistakes. This must not become a habit and thus hinder the steps towards real solidarity with the people. Nevertheless, prudence and a certain restraint are always in order, so as not to be taken in by behaviour that could tarnish the missionary's reputation. The *yuanzhumin* are very open-minded, emotional and community-oriented people who value friendship and have an uncomplicated basic religious consciousness.