


The Emergence of Hong Kong as a World Centre for Chinese Protestant Bible Publishing and Distribution, 1948–51

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The Chinese Civil War (1946–9) and the Korean War (1950–3) contributed to the beginning of Hong Kong's evolution from a British colony occupying a geographically peripheral position in South China, to a world centre for Chinese Protestant Bible publishing and distribution in the Cold War era. In 1948, the China Bible House (CBH), the de facto national Bible society of China, decided to establish an emergency office in Hong Kong, responding to the prospect of the Communist takeover of China. Subsequently, as the Korean War unfolded, the CBH, owing to political pressure, desired to sever its connection with the emergency office in 1951. This resulted in the transition of the emergency office into the Hong Kong Bible House (HKBH), the British and American Bible societies' agency for Chinese Bible publishing and distribution. Thanks to the work of the HKBH, Hong Kong came to be the major source of Bibles for Chinese Protestants outside mainland China.

INTRODUCTION

In his study of Hong Kong as a global frontier in the Cold War era, Prasenjit Duara suggested that 'while the spread of economic and migrant networks from Hong Kong has been well documented', less

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noted has been the historical role of Hong Kong as a space of facilitation which allowed religious networks to fan out from China to South East Asia.¹ Ying Fuk-tsang, a noted historian of Chinese Christianity, is one of the handful of scholars who have paid attention to this overlooked role of Hong Kong. In his recent study of Protestant Christian literature and publishing work in post-war Hong Kong, Ying pointed out that Shanghai [上海] in East China, Hankou [漢口] in Central China, and Guangzhou [廣州] in South China had long been the centres for Chinese Protestant literature and publishing before the Communist takeover of China in 1949, with Shanghai as the most important. However, from the 1950s onwards, they were replaced by Hong Kong thanks to the migration of renowned, experienced Chinese Protestant writers and publishing professionals, as well as the relocation of Protestant publishing agencies from mainland China.² During the 1950s and 1960s, these people and agencies produced in Hong Kong many hundreds of Protestant publications including devotional literature, evangelistic writings and periodicals. Given the difficulty of sending books from Hong Kong to mainland China owing to the latter's political situation, these publications increasingly targeted Chinese living outside mainland China,³ who, as suggested by the estimate of the American Bible Society (ABS), amounted to more than twenty million in total by late 1949.⁴

¹ Prasenjit Duara, 'Hong Kong as a Global Frontier: Interface of China, Asia, and the World', in Priscilla Roberts and John M. Carroll, eds, *Hong Kong in the Cold War* (Hong Kong, 2016), 211–30, at 211, 222.

² 邢福增 [Ying Fuk-tsang (Xing Fuzeng)], '文以載道：戰後(1950–1960年代)香港基督教文字出版事業的發展與評檢' ['Wen yi zai dao: Zhan hou (1950–1960 niandai) Xianggang Jidujiao wenzi chuban shiye de fazhan yu pingjian'], 'Literature as a Vehicle for the Way: An Assessment of the Development of Protestant Christian Literature and Publishing Work in Post-war Hong Kong (1950s–1960s)', in 黃文江 [Wong Man Kong (Huang Wenjiang)], 張雲開 [Zhang Yunkai] and 陳智衡 [Chen Zhiheng], eds, 變局下的西潮：基督教與中國的現代性 [*Bianju xia de xichao: Jidujiao yu Zhongguo de xian-daixing; Western Tides Coming Ashore in a Changing World: Christianity and China's Passage into Modernity*] (Hong Kong, 2015), 543–65, at 543–4, 561–3; 邢福增 [Ying Fuk-tsang (Xing Fuzeng)], '戰前香港基督教文字出版事工研究 (1842–1941)' ['Zhan qian Xianggang Jidujiao wenzi chuban shigong yanjiu (1842–1941)'], 'A Study of Protestant Christian Literature and Publishing Work in Pre-war Hong Kong (1842–1941)', in 國家宗教事務局宗教研究中心 [Guojia Zongjiao Shiwuju Zongjiao Yanjiu Zhongxin; Centre for Religious Studies, State Administration of Religious Affairs], ed., 基督教與中國文化 [*Jidujiao yu Zhongguo wenhua; Christianity and Chinese Culture*] (Beijing, 2013), 224–50.

³ Ying, 'Literature as a Vehicle for the Way', 561–4.

⁴ Philadelphia, PA, American Bible Society Archives [hereafter: ABS Archives], Janice E. Pearson, 'ABS Historical Essay #15, VII-F-2, Distribution Abroad, 1931–1966: China, 1931–1966' (1968), 207. The archival materials of the ABS are used with permission of the

According to Ying, at the same time, Hong Kong gained new status as the world's supply centre of Chinese Protestant Bibles. As early as the period from 1949 to 1952, twenty-eight editions of the Bible, twelve editions of the New Testament and nine editions of biblical portions, of which most were in Mandarin, and which in total amounted to 2,485,975 volumes, were published by the Hong Kong Bible House (HKBH). The HKBH was an agency which enabled the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS), the ABS and the National Bible Society of Scotland (NBSS), the three major Chinese Bible publishers and distributors in late Qing (1842–1911) and Republican China (1912–49), to continue their work among Chinese-speaking people after they were forced to withdraw from mainland China in 1951. The Chinese Bibles, New Testaments and biblical portions published by the HKBH were supplied not only to Hong Kong and Taiwan, but also to South East Asian countries, including Thailand, Indonesia and Malaya, as well as countries like New Zealand and the United States of America.⁵

As Bible publishing and distribution were not the focus of Ying's study, it is natural that he did not explore in depth why Hong Kong, a British colony occupying a geographically peripheral position at the southern end of China, became a world centre for Chinese Protestant Bible publishing and distribution. The brief account of the HKBH's work during the 1950s and 1960s in Ying's article is based on only a few published sources.⁶ Building on Ying's account, this study draws on the archival materials of the Bible societies connected with the HKBH to argue that the Chinese Civil War (1946–9) and the Korean War (1950–3) were catalysts for the British and American Bible societies' desire to have an agency in Hong Kong for Chinese Protestant Bible publishing and distribution. This resulted in the establishment of the

American Bible Society, Philadelphia. While the ABS has an inventory of its archival materials for internal use, 'ABS Historical Essays' are not included in the inventory. This accounts for the lack of detail as to how and where the ABS Historical Essays cited in this article can be located in the ABS Archives.

⁵ Ying, 'Literature as a Vehicle for the Way', 545–6, 564–5; David McGavin, 'Hongkong Bible House', *Bible Society Record* (December 1952), 152–3. Most of the Bibles, New Testaments and portions published by the HKBH in the 1950s were not distributed in Hong Kong. For instance, it was estimated that only ten per cent of the 700,000 volumes produced by the HKBH in 1959 were sold there. The remainder were supplied to churches in South East Asia and to the Chinese overseas diaspora: 師道弘 [Shih Tao Hung (Shi Daohong)], 教會事工平議 [*Jiaohui shigong pingyi; The Success & Failure of the Church*] (Hong Kong, 1964), 15.

⁶ See Ying, 'Literature as a Vehicle for the Way', 546 n. 16, 561 n. 72, 565 n. 82.

‘Emergency Office’ of the Chinese Bible House (CBH) in Hong Kong in 1949, which, in 1951, became the HKBH. Thanks to the work of the Emergency Office, and subsequently of the HKBH, Hong Kong was set on the path towards becoming a world centre for Chinese Protestant Bible publishing and distribution in the Cold War era, in contrast to its pre-war peripheral role in Chinese Protestant Christianity as a Western Protestant missionary society or denomination’s station in its South China mission, diocese or synod.⁷

THE CBH’S HONG KONG ‘EMERGENCY OFFICE’: A CONTINGENCY
MEASURE IN RESPONSE TO THE CHINESE CIVIL WAR

In Republican China, Chinese Bible publishing and distribution was mainly facilitated by three British and American Bible societies, namely the BFBS, the ABS and the NBSS, which had begun their work among the Chinese in the nineteenth century. For many years, they worked across the country without a clear division of territory, which unavoidably resulted in competition among them. This became more problematic when the Protestant church in China was making a transition from a mission to an indigenous church in the Republican era, since Chinese Protestants were generally unconcerned about ‘whether their books come from an American office or a British office’,⁸ whereas Western missionaries usually supported a specific Bible society corresponding to their country of origin.⁹ In 1932, delegates of the three Bible societies met in London to discuss ‘how to reach fuller co-operation in view of the present position and problems in the world’.¹⁰ One of the resolutions of this conference related to China, recommending that the three Bible societies should work together to encourage ‘the formation of a China Bible Society, which, having the same basic principles as the co-operating Societies, shall share with them in the world-wide work of

⁷ 邢福增 [Ying Fuk-tsang (Xing Fuzeng)], 香港基督教史研究導論 [*Xianggang Jidujiao shi yanjiu daolun; An Introduction to the Study of the History of Hong Kong Christianity*] (Hong Kong, 2004), 24–30, 180, 193.

⁸ ABS Archives, RG#27 China Mission, ‘China Matters: A Talk by Rev. Dr. G. Carleton Lacy, Agency Secretary of China Agency (now at home on furlough) Before the Committee on Foreign Agencies, Meeting in the Bible House, Oct[ober] 25, 1928’.

⁹ ABS Archives, Eric M. North, ‘ABS Historical Essay #15, Part V-F-2. Distribution Abroad 1861–1900. China’ (1965), 42.

¹⁰ James Moulton Roe, *A History of the British and Foreign Bible Society, 1905–1954* (London, 1965), 252.

the distribution of the Scriptures'.¹¹ In 1937, the BFBS and the ABS united their work in China under a single organization known as the CBH, which had its headquarters in Shanghai. With the integration of the NBSS's work in China into the CBH in 1946, the CBH was qualified to be considered as the national Bible society of China, since it functioned as the sole organization through which all three Bible societies carried out Bible publishing and distribution work in the country.¹²

Although it was the intention that the CBH would become a self-governing and self-supporting Bible society, it was not until December 1950 that Baen Lee [李培恩; Li Peien], former president of Hangchow University, was appointed as the first full-time Chinese general secretary.¹³ Before his appointment, except during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–45), when E. S. Yu [俞恩嗣; Yu Ensi] and Chester S. Miao [繆秋笙; Miao Qiusheng] served, for a brief spell, as honorary general secretary (1942–4) and acting executive secretary (1944–5), respectively, the CBH's executive heads, known as 'secretaries', were Westerners representing the three Bible societies.¹⁴ The first were George Carleton Lacy of the ABS, who resigned in 1941 on his election as bishop of the China Central Conference of the Methodist Church, and William H. Hudspeth of the BFBS, who was interned by the Japanese in October 1942 and released in 1945. They were followed by Ralph Mortensen of the ABS, who succeeded

¹¹ ABS Archives, Pearson, 'ABS Historical Essay #15, VII-F-2', 101.

¹² Cambridge, CUL, Bible Society's Library, Archives of the British and Foreign Bible Society [hereafter: BFBS Archives], 'Constitution and By-laws of the Chung Hua Sheng Ching Hui'. The materials of the BFBS Archives are used with permission of the Bible Society's Library, CUL. Although the BFBS Archives are represented on ArchiveSearch, the CUL's catalogue for archive collections, some sources in the BFBS Archives, such as this document, are uncatalogued. This accounts for the lack of detail as to how and where this document can be located in the BFBS Archives. ABS Archives, RG#1, Annual Reports, *One Hundred and Thirty-First Annual Report of the American Bible Society* (1947), 219.

¹³ BFBS Archives, BSA/D8/4/5/4, Minutes of a Special Meeting of the Executive Committee of the China Bible House, 12 December 1950.

¹⁴ Yu served as the CBH's honorary general secretary from 1942 to 1944 in response to the insistence of the Japanese authorities in occupied China that the CBH must have Chinese leadership. After his death in April 1944, Miao served as the CBH's acting executive secretary on a voluntary basis until the end of 1945: ABS Archives, Pearson, 'ABS Historical Essay #15, VII-F-2', 164–6, 171–2; BFBS Archives, BSA/D8/4/5/4, Minutes of the Executive Committee of the China Bible House, 7 February 1942; BFBS Archives, BSA/D8/4/5/3/1, Letter from C. S. Miao to J. C. F. Robertson, 12 May 1944; ABS Archives, RG#4.09, Minutes of Committee on Foreign Agencies, 24 September 1942.

Lacy but could not arrive in China until 1944, and David McGavin of the NBSS, who, after Hudspeth's relocation to Canada in 1947, also represented the BFBS.¹⁵ These Western secretaries were members of the CBH's executive committee and also accountable to the Bible societies they represented. Moreover, the three Bible societies furnished most of the CBH's budget until 1951, when, as will be discussed below, the CBH severed its relationship with them and no longer received foreign financial support.¹⁶

Shortly after the end of the Second Sino-Japanese War, China was again embroiled in conflict, through a civil war which raged from 1946 to 1949 between the Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) and the Communist Party of China (CPC). In 1948, given the prospect of the Communist takeover of China which could put an end to Chinese Bible printing in the country, the CBH began to consider plans to produce 'with all speed the greatest possible stock' of Chinese Bibles.¹⁷ One of the measures taken was to place an additional order for printing Chinese Bibles, New Testaments and biblical portions which amounted to two years' supply, and to deliver the books as speedily as possible. For example, a Lutheran mission aeroplane named 'St Paul' was chartered to 'make at least five trips transporting eighteen tons of Scriptures [from Shanghai] to Peiping [北平, now 北京; Beijing], Tientsin [天津; Tianjin], Sian [西安; Xian], Lanchow [蘭州; Lanzhou] and Chengtu [成都; Chengdu].'¹⁸ This decision was made at a

¹⁵ ABS Archives, Pearson, 'ABS Historical Essay #15, VII-F-2', 163–4, 166, 168, 223; BFBS Archives, BSA/C26/2, Minutes of a Meeting of the Overseas Administration Sub-Committee [hereafter: OASC] 'B', 16 October 1947; BFBS Archives, BSA/C26/3, Minutes of a Meeting of OASC 'B', 20 January 1949; ABS Archives, RG#1, Annual Reports, *One Hundred and Twenty-Seventh Annual Report of the American Bible Society* (1943), 201; George Henderson and David McGavin, *Bibles for China: An Account of Over 80 Years' Service by Two Bible Society Missionaries* (Edinburgh, 1969), 34.

¹⁶ ABS Archives, RG#27 H-1-3, Foreign Agencies, 301-12-83, Hong Kong 1957–1964, Ralph Mortensen, 'China Bible House, 1949–1959'.

¹⁷ Henderson and McGavin, *Bibles for China*, 34.

¹⁸ BFBS Archives, BSA/D8/4/5/4, Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee of the China Bible House, 10 November 1948; BFBS Archives, BSA/C26/3, Minutes of a Meeting of OASC 'B', 20 January 1949. It was reported that the plane also flew 'consignments of Scriptures' to Chongqing [重慶] and Kunming [昆明]: Edinburgh, Scottish Bible Society, Archives of the National Bible Society of Scotland [hereafter: NBSS Archives], *Forward in Unity: The Annual Report for 1948 of the National Bible Society of Scotland* (1949), 24. See also NBSS Archives, Letter from David McGavin to William C. Somerville, 3 December 1948. The materials of the archives of the NBSS are used with permission of the Scottish Bible Society, Edinburgh. Since the Scottish Bible Society does

time when John R. Temple, concurrently general secretary of the BFBS and the newly founded United Bible Societies, was visiting Shanghai in November 1948 as part of his final Far East tour. His 'wise words of counsel', for which the CBH's executive committee thanked him,¹⁹ could have been a factor leading to the CBH's decision, as revealed in a letter written by Temple on his way to Hong Kong after visiting Shanghai:

Many missionaries and business people are evacuating the country because of the Communist victories, and Shanghai itself is threatened. I was thankful to share with my colleagues the dangers: and *plan with them the sending of about 250,000 copies of the Scriptures to the threatened areas in planes flown to evacuate the missionaries*. Had I not been with them they would have hesitated to act in this way because of the expense. Hope the Committee [of the BFBS] will stand by me. It might be our last chance to get the Scriptures into Communist areas, and who knows how God can use them for the comfort and strengthening of His people in the hard days before them. They also may be used to convert many to the faith.²⁰

Additionally, the CBH's standing committee decided at its meeting on 10 December to establish 'an auxiliary headquarters' in Hong Kong, 'as soon as conditions require, in order to ensure adequate printing of Scriptures, and to leave to the judgment of the Secretaries the decision of when to start.'²¹ This decision was not surprising, as by the end of November 1948, the Communists had won the Liaoshen [遼瀋] campaign of the Chinese Civil War for control of Manchuria, while the Pingjin [平津] campaign was taking place in Peiping and

not have a catalogue of the NBSS Archives, no details can be provided as to how or where the archival materials of the NBSS cited in this article can be located in the NBSS Archives.

¹⁹ BFBS Archives, BSA/D8/4/5/4, Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee of the China Bible House, 10 November 1948. Temple attended the CBH's executive committee's meetings on 2 and 10 November as a guest.

²⁰ 'Copy of Dr. [John R.] Temple's Letter to Chairman of OASC 'B', 17th Nov[ember] 1948', in BFBS Archives, BSA/C26/3, China Enclosure (a) to Minutes of a Meeting of OASC 'B', 16 December 1948, emphasis added. According to McGavin, the cost of transportation for one full planeload of Chinese Bibles (weighing 6,600 pounds) to Peiping was £250, which 'may seem expensive' but 'is most reasonable', since 'a commercial plane with a similar load would cost three times as much': NBSS Archives, Letter from McGavin to Somerville, 3 December 1948.

²¹ BFBS Archives, BSA/D8/4/5/4, Minutes of the Meeting of the Standing Committee of the China Bible House, 10 December 1948.

Tianjin, and the Huaihai [淮海] campaign in Xuzhou [徐州].²² Given the proximity of Xuzhou to Nanjing [南京], the capital of Republican China, and Nanjing to Shanghai, if the Communists proved victorious in the Huaihai campaign, they would soon take over Shanghai, which could result in the closure of the CBH's headquarters.

Indeed, the idea of setting up an auxiliary headquarters in Hong Kong as a precautionary measure had been deliberated among the CBH's secretaries for some time. In a letter written on 9 December 1948 to William C. Somerville, the NBSS's general secretary, McGavin explained that he and Mortensen 'have been considering the advisability of arranging for printing to be done in Hongkong and it is felt that one of [them] ought to get down there to establish an auxiliary headquarters.' They also felt that 'it might be unwise to wait until the Communists, if they come, forbid us to continue further printing.'²³ Here McGavin and Mortensen shared a similar view with Temple, who believed that Hong Kong should be a base for Chinese Bible publishing and distribution if the Communists took over Shanghai. In a letter to William J. Platt, the BFBS's assistant general secretary, composed just two days before he died in Hong Kong on 30 November, Temple wrote:

Two days after I had been in Shanghai my mind was made up to press for your taking hold of the China Field – the greatest job in Bible work But what if the Communists overrun China? The South will never be completely conquered by the Reds and we must have a base in Hong Kong with 2 or 3 hundred Gutzlaffs penetrating China – see G's story in [William] Canton's history [of the BFBS] I am sure it can be done, though it will cost money. If Shanghai falls to the Reds then I would urge that we find immediately a base in Hong Kong – the one stable secure place in the Far East Let us lead and fight the Reds with the 'Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God'.²⁴

²² Hans van de Ven, *China at War: Triumph and Tragedy in the Emergence of the New China* (Cambridge, MA, 2017), 2. The Liaoshen, Pingjin and Huaihai campaigns were the three major military campaigns of the Chinese civil war.

²³ NBSS Archives, Letter from David McGavin to William C. Somerville, 9 December 1948. See also NBSS Archives, Letter from David McGavin to William C. Somerville, 25 November 1948.

²⁴ BFBS Archives, BSA/C26/3, Copy of Dr Temple's letter to Mr Platt, 27 November 1948. 'Gutzlaff' here refers to Karl Friedrich August Gützlaff (1803–51), an early Protestant missionary to China.

The three Bible societies' archival records, despite not stating explicitly their reasons for agreeing with the decision of the CBH's standing committee, hinted at why Hong Kong was considered as a suitable location for the CBH's auxiliary headquarters. As recorded in the minutes of the BFBS's Overseas Administration Sub-Committee 'B', which oversaw the society's work in China, of a meeting on 16 December 1948, Platt, who succeeded Temple as the society's general secretary, had had talks with Canon Henry August Wittenbach of the Church Missionary Society, who had been a prisoner of war in Hong Kong during the Japanese occupation of the city,²⁵ and with Harold Burgoyne Rattenbury of the Methodist Missionary Society. These two former China missionaries 'spoke of the advantages of Hongkong as a base, should the Communists' invasion envelop Shanghai and South China.' One of these advantages was the stability of the Hong Kong dollar, which was pegged to the pound sterling.²⁶ According to Wittenbach and Rattenbury, the Hong Kong dollar 'even in the Japanese occupation had been used, by underground channels, to support the Chinese Church on the mainland'.²⁷ This financial consideration reflected an earlier observation of William Shenton, a member of the sub-committee who retired from Hong Kong in 1936 after a legal career there.²⁸ Referring at the sub-committee's meeting on 20 May 1948 to discussions with friends who had recently returned to Britain from China, Shenton commented that 'the normal currency has been very largely superseded by Hongkong currency'.²⁹

Another advantage of Hong Kong was its geographical location. In a letter to Arthur H. Wilkinson, another general secretary of the BFBS, dated 17 December 1948, McGavin indicated that Hong Kong was well-located for the Bible societies' work among the Chinese, suggesting that although printing in Hong Kong would cost more, the Bibles produced there would 'help to meet the need in southern areas

²⁵ Michael Poon, 'Introduction', in *Extract from H. A. Wittenbach's Report on his East Asia Tour 1953–1954*, online at: <<http://anglicanhistory.org/asia/sea/wittenbach1953.htm>>, accessed 9 September 2024.

²⁶ Tony Latter, *Hong Kong's Money: The History, Logic and Operation of the Currency Peg* (Hong Kong, 2007), 40, 43.

²⁷ BFBS Archives, BSA/C26/3, Minutes of a Meeting of OASC 'B', 16 December 1948.

²⁸ "Good Old Days" In Hong Kong: Sir William Shenton Interviewed', *The Straits Times*, 11 April 1936, online at: <<https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers/digitised/article/straitstimes19360411-1.2.66>>, accessed 9 September 2024.

²⁹ BFBS Archives, BSA/C26/2, Minutes of a Meeting of OASC 'B', 20 May 1948.

and in the many countries to the south from which come large orders for Chinese Scriptures'.³⁰ McGavin reiterated this view in a letter to I. C. Mawer, the BFBS's assistant secretary, a month later, in which he added that he expected to 'save something in shipping costs'.³¹

The availability of printing resources could also give Hong Kong an edge. Before the Chinese civil war, modern printing presses had already been available in Hong Kong.³² Two notable examples of printing establishments there were the Hong Kong Printing Works of the Commercial Press, and that of the Chung Hwa Book Company, established in 1924 and 1933 respectively.³³ Indeed, in August 1949, the Hong Kong Printing Works of the Commercial Press was commended as 'a good printing plant' in a conversation between McGavin, Paul A. Collyer, the ABS's associate secretary, and Gilbert Darlington, the ABS's treasurer.³⁴ Also, it was not difficult for Hong Kong to have a supply of paper for Bible printing through importation, given that it was a port city. It is thus unsurprising that in late 1948, thirty tons of paper were ordered by the CBH from Sweden for shipment to Shanghai, but with the option of landing in Hong Kong.³⁵ In addition, as revealed in the report of McGavin's conversation with Collyer and Darlington, Hong Kong had a supply of newsprint, a low-cost paper that could be used for printing cheap editions of the Chinese Bible for mass distribution.³⁶

³⁰ BFBS Archives, BSA/D8/4/6/1, Extract of a letter from David McGavin to Arthur H. Wilkinson, dated 17 December 1948, received 29 December 1948. McGavin later reported to Platt that printing in Hong Kong 'costs anything from sixty per cent to one hundred per cent more than it does in Shanghai': BFBS Archives, BSA/D8/4/6/1, Letter from David McGavin to William J. Platt, 3 January 194[9] (incorrectly dated '1948').

³¹ BFBS Archives, BSA/D8/4/6/5, Letter from David McGavin to I. C. Mawer, 17 January 1949.

³² Christopher A. Reed, *Gutenberg in Shanghai: Chinese Print Capitalism, 1876–1937* (Vancouver, 2004), 26, 41–2, 159, 238–9.

³³ Sino United Publishing (Holdings) Limited, 'Corporate Profile', online at: <<https://www.sup.com.hk/aboutus/history>>, accessed 9 September 2024.

³⁴ ABS Archives, RG#27, 301-12-83, Foreign Agencies, G-1-6, 'Report of Conversation of David McGavin with P. A. Collyer and G. Darlington at Bible House, New York City, Aug[ust] 2, 1949'.

³⁵ BFBS Archives, BSA/D8/4/5/4, Minutes of the Meeting of the Standing Committee of the China Bible House, 10 December 1948.

³⁶ ABS Archives, RG#27, 301-12-83, Foreign Agencies, G-1-6, 'Report of Conversation of David McGavin with P. A. Collyer and G. Darlington at Bible House, New York City, Aug[ust] 2, 1949'; NBSS Archives, Letter from William C. Somerville to David McGavin, 22 June 1951.

Eventually, the CBH's executive committee decided that McGavin should go to Hong Kong 'for a period in order to start printing going there just in case work on the Shanghai presses should prove to be no longer possible'.³⁷ McGavin rather than Mortensen was sent to Hong Kong because 'it was felt that, since there were only two Westerners' in the CBH's national headquarters in Shanghai, and McGavin happened to be 'the British member of the staff', it would be better for him to proceed to Hong Kong.³⁸ McGavin travelled to Hong Kong in early January 1949 'to see what can be done and to prepare for the printing of the Scriptures in Hongkong',³⁹ setting up the CBH's 'auxiliary headquarters' there, which later came to be known as the 'Hongkong Emergency Office'.⁴⁰ At the CBH's executive committee meeting on 23 March 1949, McGavin reported that 'in view of the possible need for emergency headquarters in Hongkong early in January 1949, he had arranged for the use of the veranda of the Bible, Book and Tract Depot, Hongkong, as his temporary office'.⁴¹ This arrangement was necessary because none of the Bible societies had 'any [office] accommodation of its own' in Hong Kong.⁴² Moreover, he had placed an order for the printing of 500,000 Gospel portions in Hong Kong, in addition to receiving estimates for the printing of Bibles and New Testaments. Six cases of shells (paper matrices for printing) and three cases of zinc plates had also arrived in Hong Kong for safe keeping. The shells included those of the Mandarin Bible, the Wenli (literary Chinese) Bible, the Cantonese Bible, the New Testament in the Fuzhou [福州] dialect, and the New Testament in the Nasu language (the Eastern Yi [彝] language); while the zinc plates were all of the Mandarin Bible.⁴³

³⁷ BFBS Archives, BSA/D8/4/6/5, Letter from William C. Somerville to W[illiam] J. Platt, 10 January 1949.

³⁸ BFBS Archives, BSA/D8/4/6/1, Extract of a letter from McGavin to Wilkinson, dated 17 December 1948, received 29 December 1948.

³⁹ BFBS Archives, BSA/D8/4/6/1, Letter from McGavin to Platt, 3 January 1949[9].

⁴⁰ BFBS Archives, BSA/D8/4/5/4, Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee of the China Bible House, 24 February 1950.

⁴¹ BFBS Archives, BSA/D8/4/5/4, Minutes of the Executive Committee Meeting of the China Bible House, 23 March 1949.

⁴² BFBS Archives, BSA/D8/4/6/5, Letter from David McGavin to W[illiam] J. Platt, 12 January 1949.

⁴³ BFBS Archives, BSA/D8/4/5/4, Minutes of the Executive Committee Meeting of the China Bible House, 23 March 1949; 'Copy of Memo from Mr. D[avid] McGavin to Rev. W[illiam] J. Platt, 3rd Dec[ember] 1948', in BFBS Archives, BSA/C26/3, China Enclosure

The CBH's executive committee subsequently agreed to 'approve the purchase of substantial stocks of Bible paper wherever available at reasonable prices for the emergency printing of Bibles and New Testaments in Hongkong and/or Shanghai.'⁴⁴

During the first year of its operation, the CBH's Hong Kong Emergency Office published the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles in Chinese, as well as the complete Chinese Bible.⁴⁵ In early 1950, the CBH's executive committee noted that 'besides publishing Scriptures [it] was doing good work in arranging for the distribution of Scriptures to such places that could not be reached directly from China'.⁴⁶ McGavin reported on his work in Hong Kong for 1950 that 57,080 Bibles, 42,000 New Testaments, and one million portions of the Bible in Chinese were printed during the year ending 31 October 1950.⁴⁷ These books were dispatched not only to Guangzhou, where the CBH's South China agency was located, to supplement the CBH's work in that region,⁴⁸ but also to many other parts of the world to meet the needs of Chinese residents there, including Indo-China, Burma, Siam, Malaya, Indonesia, Japan, the United States of America, South America, the South Seas, and New Zealand. Korea was also among the destinations of the Chinese Scriptures published by the Emergency

(d) to Minutes of a Meeting of OASC 'B', 16 December 1948; BFBS Archives, BSA/D8/4/6/4, 'Packing List of Shipment from China Bible House, Shanghai, To: Bible Book & Tract Depot, Hongkong', enclosure to Letter from David McGavin to W[illiam] J. Platt, 14 February 1951.

⁴⁴ BFBS Archives, BSA/D8/4/5/4, Minutes of the Executive Committee Meeting of the China Bible House, 29 March 1949.

⁴⁵ According to McGavin, 'the first Bibles came off the press in mid-January' 1950: NBSS Archives, David McGavin, 'Hongkong "Emergency Office" 1950'. However, the title-verso page of edition 556 of the Chinese Bible printed in Hong Kong and published by the CBH indicates that the year of publication was 1949. This information has been ascertained from the copy kept in the Newberry Library, Chicago. It is possible that it was intended that the Bible edition concerned be published by the end of 1949 but that it was only actually possible to print it in early 1950. Nonetheless, two days before the end of 1949, McGavin wrote: 'The first supplies of the complete Bible ... to be printed in Hongkong are now being delivered': NBSS Archives, Letter from David McGavin to W. C. Somerville, 29 December 1949. This may explain the difference between McGavin's account and the front matter of edition 556.

⁴⁶ BFBS Archives, BSA/D8/4/5/4, Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee of the China Bible House, 24 February 1950.

⁴⁷ NBSS Archives, David McGavin, 'Hongkong Emergency Office 1950'.

⁴⁸ NBSS Archives, Letter from David McGavin to W. C. Somerville, 14 August 1950.

Office: 'twenty-eight parcels containing 500 copies of Chinese New Testaments' were sent there for the use of the chaplain of the United Nations' Command in the Korean Campaign, Ivan L. Bennett, probably for work among Chinese prisoners.⁴⁹

After the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, Hong Kong became an important source for supplying Chinese Bibles to Taiwan, as exporting them directly from Shanghai to Taiwan was no longer possible. Therefore, it is not surprising that an order for printing 100,000 Chinese New Testaments was placed by the CBH's Hong Kong Emergency Office for Taiwan in early 1951, while a quarter of a million copies of the Gospel of John were shipped to the island for 'the special work being done there by the Youth For Christ Team and the Every Creature Crusade'.⁵⁰

The Chinese Scriptures published by the Hong Kong Emergency Office bore the imprint 'China Bible House'. This indicated its status as a branch of the CBH.⁵¹ However, 1951 witnessed the publication of the first Chinese Bible with the imprint 'Hongkong Bible House',⁵² which indicated the beginning of a new era for the Emergency Office.

⁴⁹ NBSS Archives, McGavin, 'Hongkong Emergency Office 1950'; McGavin, 'Hongkong Bible House', 152–3, at 153.

⁵⁰ NBSS Archives, Letter from David McGavin to W. C. Somerville, 28 March 1951. In addition, special orders of the Chinese New Testament had been printed and sent to Taiwan 'to aid the Evangelistic Campaign among Chinese soldiers' the previous year: NBSS Archives, McGavin, 'Hongkong Emergency Office 1950'.

⁵¹ The strong connection between the CBH and its Hong Kong emergency office is manifested by the procedure adopted for the latter in 1950. First, all official invoices were issued by the CBH, Shanghai. Second, records of stock were kept in a series of record books, stock ledgers, receipts and issues journals, cash and bank records, and forms of Scriptures issued. Third, weekly reports were made to the CBH's Shanghai headquarters on the basis of the above records kept in Hong Kong: BFBS Archives, BSA/D8/4/5/4, Minutes of the Thirty First Meeting of the Administrative Committee of the China Bible House, 22 March 1950.

⁵² According to the Bible publishing records in the Archives of the Hong Kong Bible Society, the first book published with the imprint 'Hongkong Bible House' was an edition of the Chinese-English New Testament, known as 'Edition 1001'. The first complete Chinese Bible printed under this imprint was 'Edition 1002', which contained a complete translation of the Chinese (Mandarin) Union Version. Hong Kong, Archives of the Hong Kong Bible Society, 'Edition Numbers', 28 June 1951–7 July 1958. This archival material is used with permission of the Hong Kong Bible Society. Since the Hong Kong Bible Society does not have a catalogue of its archives, no details can be provided of how or where this archival material can be located in its archives.

FROM AN EMERGENCY OFFICE TO THE BIBLE SOCIETIES' SOLE AGENCY
FOR CHINESE BIBLE PUBLISHING AND DISTRIBUTION

Although the Korean War, which began on 25 June 1950, was originally a military conflict between North and South Korea, security concerns – and specifically its fear of a growing military threat from the United States – led the PRC to enter the war in October–November 1950.⁵³ As the war unfolded, the Communist Chinese government accelerated the implementation of its policy aimed at purging Western-imperialist influences from China – and thus from Chinese Christianity – in order to stabilize the nascent regime.⁵⁴ The consequent political pressure led to the severance of the CBH's relationship with the three foreign Bible societies and thus to the end of its foreign financial assistance. In 1951, the CBH was taken over by a Chinese board of directors; by that spring, all the CBH's foreign staff had withdrawn except Mortensen, who failed to secure an exit permit from the Communist Chinese government and remained in Shanghai until January 1953.⁵⁵ The CBH's board decided at its meeting on 14 March 1951 'in order to realise in their best effort the new movement of self-support', to 'receive from the year 1951 no more contributions from friends of the American Bible Society'. This was followed by its decision in May to 'cut completely the relationship with the U.S.A. and to decline acceptance of the £5,000 remitted by the British & Foreign Bible Society through the Kincheng Bank', which 'will be reported to the Government Bureaus concerned in order to express the Board of Directors' strong support' to the

⁵³ Hao Yufan and Zhai Zhihai, 'China's Decision to Enter the Korean War: History Revisited', *The China Quarterly* 121 (1990), 94–115, at 115.

⁵⁴ See 劉建平 [Liu Jianping], 紅旗下的十字架: 新中國成立初期中共對基督教、天主教的政策演變及其影響 (1949–1955) [*Hongqi xia de shizijia: xin Zhongguo chengli chuqi Zhonggong dui Jidujiao, Tianzhujiao de zhengce yanbian ji qi yingxiang (1949–1955); The Cross Under the Red Flag: The Policy Changes of the Chinese Communist Party Towards Protestantism and Catholicism and its Impact in the Early PRC (1949–1955)*] (Hong Kong, 2012); Fuk-tsang Ying, 'The CPC's Policy on Protestant Christianity, 1949–1957: An Overview and Assessment', *Journal of Contemporary China* 23/89 (2014), 884–901. For information about the CPC's implementation of its policy of aiming to purge Western-imperialist influences in other areas, see, for example, Jack Neubauer, 'Adopting Revolution: The Chinese Communist Revolution and the Politics of Global Humanitarianism', *Modern China* 47 (2021), 598–627.

⁵⁵ ABS Archives, Pearson, 'ABS Historical Essay #15, VII-F-2', 178–9; Roe, *A History of the British and Foreign Bible Society, 1905–1954*, 360.

Communist Chinese government for its stance against the United States in the context of the Korean War.⁵⁶

Moreover, the CBH intended to sever its connection with the Hong Kong Emergency Office in May 1951. Baen Lee wrote to McGavin on 14 May 1951, informing him that 'it is the intention of the Board to have your office entirely separated from the C.B.H.' Lee indicated that at the board meeting on 11 May 'discussions were made as to how the Hongkong office may be made independent of China because the Board feels that close relationship at the present time is undesirable', although the minutes do not mention such discussions. He asked McGavin whether it was possible for the Emergency Office 'to become an agency of the BFBS, NBSS, or such organisation', suggesting that it would be 'much more convenient' for McGavin to 'take care of other areas than China for the supply of Chinese Bibles and Scriptures'. He also proposed that if the Emergency Office, after being separated from the CBH, received orders of Bibles for the overseas Chinese but could not supply them, it could order them from the CBH 'by paying cash', and the CBH 'can export such Scriptures as ordered upon the receipt of the remittance, especially earmarked for the purchase of Scriptures'.⁵⁷ A subsequent letter from Lee to McGavin, which was received by the latter in early June, explicitly requested that 'it is hoped that in the future you will change your letter heads ... This will avoid the difficulty of misunderstanding by outside people'.⁵⁸ The separation was just a matter of time.

By the end of June 1951, all three Bible societies had reached a consensus that the name of the Emergency Office would be changed to the HKBH, which was originally suggested by McGavin as an unofficial name.⁵⁹ The HKBH was later officially confirmed as a joint agency of the three Bible societies under the BFBS's administration,

⁵⁶ BFBS Archives, BSA/D8/4/5/4, Minutes of a Special Meeting of the Board of Directors of the China Bible House, 14 March 1951; and Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors of the China Bible House, 11 May 1951.

⁵⁷ NBSS Archives, Copy of Letter from Baen Lee to David McGavin, 14 May 1951; BFBS Archives, BSA/D8/4/5/4, Minutes of the Meeting of the Meeting of the Board of Directors of the China Bible House, 11 May 1951.

⁵⁸ BFBS Archives, BSA/D8/4/6/1, Letter from David McGavin to W. J. Platt, 6 June 1951.

⁵⁹ BFBS Archives, BSA/D8/4/6/1, Letters from David McGavin to W. J. Platt, 6 June 1951 and 27 June 1951; Letter from W. J. Platt to David McGavin, 18 June 1951; Letter from William C. Somerville to William J. Platt, 20 June 1951; and Letter from Paul A. Collyer to David McGavin, 2 July 1951.

being financially supported by them: the ABS and the BFBS each contributed forty-five per cent of the funding, and the remaining ten per cent came from the NBSS.⁶⁰ As indicated by the minutes of the NBSS's board meeting quoted by Somerville in a letter to Platt dated 11 July 1951, the renaming of the Emergency Office resulted from the Bible societies' acceptance of the CBH's recommendation that the Emergency Office should no longer be reckoned as part of the CBH.⁶¹ The change of the Emergency Office's status could be understood as an outcome of mutual understanding, rather than a forced action due to the CBH's unilateral decision. Strictly speaking, the HKBH was not established as a successor to the CBH, as the CBH still operated at least till the end of the 1950s.⁶² The HKBH's establishment should therefore not be regarded as a result of a move by the CBH from Shanghai to Hong Kong.⁶³

The Korean War contributed to the renaming of the CBH's Hong Kong Emergency Office as the HKBH, which marked the office's beginning as the three Bible societies' sole agency for Chinese Bible publishing and distribution. However, it also gave rise to the possibility

⁶⁰ NBSS Archives, Letter from David McGavin to William C. Somerville, 4 July 1951; and Letter from William C. Somerville to William J. Platt, 11 July 1951. In 1955, the NBSS increased its share to one-third. Thus, each of the three Bible societies had an equal share in the HKBH: NBSS Archives, Letter from William C. Somerville to Laton Holmgren, 7 March 1955; and Letter from William C. Somerville to Douglas Lancashire, 7 March 1955.

⁶¹ NBSS Archives, Letter from Somerville to Platt, 11 July 1951.

⁶² ABS Archives, RG#27 H-1-3, Foreign Agencies, 301-12-83, Hong Kong 1957–1964, Mortensen, 'China Bible House, 1949–1959'. It has also been suggested that the CBH most probably came to an end during the Cultural Revolution: '中華聖經公會' ['Zhonghua Shengjing Gonghui'; 'Chinese Bible Society'], in 基督教大辭典 [*Jidujiao da cidian*; *The Dictionary of Christianity*], ed. 丁光訓 [Ding Guangxun] and 金魯賢 [Jin Luxian] (Shanghai, 2010), 841.

⁶³ Indeed, the suitability of relocating the CBH's headquarters to Hong Kong was questioned. For example, shortly before the CBH's standing committee decided to establish an auxiliary headquarters in Hong Kong, Somerville wrote to McGavin that 'it would be unwise to centre China Bible House in Hongkong itself as that is not China.' Somerville felt that anything centred in Hong Kong 'would be British and it would be "foreign" to the Chinese.' To him, Guangzhou, where the South China agency of the CBH was located, would be a much better option, 'if matters could be so arranged'. However, McGavin replied to him that centring the CBH's work in Guangzhou 'is hardly possible' simply because printing facilities there were 'very poor' and 'it is not possible to have our class of work done there': NBSS Archives, Letter from William C. Somerville to David McGavin, 2 December 1948; Letter from David McGavin to William C. Somerville, 17 December 1948.

that Hong Kong might be 'liberated' by the Communist Chinese government owing to the United Kingdom's involvement in the Korean War. This was one reason why McGavin suggested the advisability of shipping the shells and plates of the Chinese Bible from Hong Kong to some other place for safe-keeping.⁶⁴ However, the decision-makers at the headquarters of the three Bible societies had a more optimistic outlook for Hong Kong than McGavin. Eric North, the ABS's general secretary, wrote: 'I find it very difficult to think that anything would happen to Hong Kong until after something critical has happened about Formosa'.⁶⁵ Although he also suggested that duplicate sets of plates of the Chinese Bible could be sent to Japan for storage and, if necessary, printing, North felt that the situation in Hong Kong was unlikely to 'increase in difficulty unless British strategy involved negotiations for transfer of Hong Kong to Communist China', which he 'would really doubt'.⁶⁶ Platt of the BFBS, who agreed with North that Japan would be the best place for this purpose, also felt that 'things will settle down and there will be no incident beyond Korea'.⁶⁷ Somerville of the NBSS was less optimistic than his English and American counterparts, but still told McGavin that his feeling and hope were that 'there will be no war and that printing may be possible in Hongkong for a long time to come'.⁶⁸ Nonetheless, for safe keeping, two sets of shells for printing the Mandarin Bible and one for the Mandarin-English New Testament were shipped from Hong Kong to Canada, while three sets of shells for printing the Bible, the New Testament, and the Gospels and Acts in Mandarin were shipped to Japan.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ BFBS Archives, BSA/C26/3, Minutes of a Meeting of OASC 'B', 22 February 1951; BFBS Archives, D8/4/6/4, Letter from David McGavin to W. J. Platt, 18 January 1951.

⁶⁵ BFBS Archives, BSA/D8/4/6/4, Letter from Eric M. North to W. J. Platt, 26 January 1951. Taiwan was at that time known as Formosa.

⁶⁶ BFBS Archives, BSA/D8/4/6/4, Letter from Eric M. North to W. J. Platt, 9 March 1951.

⁶⁷ BFBS Archives, BSA/D8/4/6/4, Letter from W. J. Platt to David McGavin, 6 February 1951.

⁶⁸ BFBS Archives, BSA/D8/4/6/4, Letter from William C. Somerville to David McGavin, 24 January 1951.

⁶⁹ BFBS Archives, BSA/D8/4/6/4, Letter from David McGavin to W. J. Platt, 27 August 1951; Letter from Ian H. D. Findlay to the Secretary of the BFBS in Canada (J. A. R. Tingley), 10 October 1951; Letter from J. C. F. Robertson to J. T. Watson, 1 October 1958.

Like the Emergency Office, the HKBH's chief concern in its early years was to print and distribute Chinese Bibles to Taiwan and the overseas Chinese, the majority of whom lived in South East Asia.⁷⁰ The printing of these Bibles was mainly done by the Printing Works of the Commercial Press, and sometimes by that of the Chung Hwa Book Company.⁷¹ The former even allowed free storage of the plates and book stock of the HKBH.⁷² As the BFBS reported in its periodical *The Bible in the World*, 'over a million copies of the Scriptures in Chinese' were printed in Hong Kong during 1951 for use among Chinese populations outside China.⁷³

The work priorities of the HKBH could be due to three factors. First, opportunities arose from the influx of Chinese immigrants in countries neighbouring mainland China. For example, in the few months after the Communist takeover of China, more than twenty million Chinese left for Hong Kong, Taiwan and South East Asian countries. This, together with the fact that South East Asia was a major geographical destination for Chinese evangelicals as missionaries at that time,⁷⁴ gave rise to great demand for Chinese Bibles for special campaigns of evangelism, such as those among refugees and Chinese soldiers.

Second, the Korean War led to a prohibition on the importing of Chinese Bibles from Hong Kong to mainland China, which had previously been possible and had allowed the Hong Kong Emergency Office to supplement the work of the CBH. For example, according to a report from McGavin in November 1951, the CBH had ordered the printing of two editions of a cheap newsprint Chinese Bible to be sent

⁷⁰ ABS Archives, RG#27 H-1-3, Foreign Agencies, 301-12-83, Hong Kong 1957–1964, Mortensen, 'China Bible House, 1949–1959'.

⁷¹ Archives of the Hong Kong Bible Society, 'Edition Numbers', 28 June 1951–7 July 1958.

⁷² ABS Archives, RG#1, Annual Reports, *One Hundred and Thirty-Eighth Annual Report of the American Bible Society* (1954), 311; BFBS Archives, BSA/C28, Minutes of Asia Sub-Committee, 16 March 1967.

⁷³ BFBS Archives, BSA/G1/3/3, 'News and Notes: Hongkong Staff', in *The Bible in the World: Record of the Work of the British and Foreign Bible Society* (March–April 1953), 31. These figures correspond to those provided by McGavin, who reported that 'during the year he has seen through the press 65,000 Bibles, 200,000 Testaments and 800,000 Portions, mainly in Chinese, produced with funds supplied by the three Bible Societies': NBSS Archives, *The National Bible Society of Scotland Annual Report for 1951* (1952), 13.

⁷⁴ Joshua Dao Wei Sim, 'Making the South Seas a "Chinese" Mission Field: Chinese Evangelical Missionaries to Southeast Asia, 1920s to 1950s', *Mission Studies* 39 (2022), 304–30, at 305.

into mainland China. Unfortunately, after 1,500 copies were forwarded, the CBH had to request the HKBH to 'send no further supplies' until the CBH received an import permit from the Communist Chinese government. Once it became clear that the CBH could not expect to receive such a permit, it agreed that the HKBH should 'dispose of the books wherever they are required'.⁷⁵ Given the Bible societies' policy that they should not operate contrary to the laws of any country, the HKBH had to target the Chinese-speaking populations outside mainland China.⁷⁶

Nevertheless, the HKBH initially continued to be able to do what Baen Lee proposed in the aforementioned letter from him to McGavin on 14 May 1951, namely ordering supplies of the Chinese Bible from the CBH, by which it provided additional funds for the CBH's work.⁷⁷ For instance, reflecting its position as a Bible supplier for the overseas Chinese, the HKBH ordered supplies of certain luxury Chinese Bible editions from the CBH in 1951 since, whereas these editions had 'little or no sale' in mainland China, there was 'a fair demand for these more expensive books' outside China, while the HKBH at that time restricted itself 'to the production of "Missionary" editions', as its priority was 'to meet the need from many quarters'.⁷⁸ However, in early 1954, the Communist Chinese government prohibited the export of Chinese Bibles since this was deemed to reflect the CBH's dependence on a foreign organization. Although the ban was lifted shortly afterwards, Douglas Lancashire, McGavin's successor, thought it unwise to continue importing Bibles from mainland China.⁷⁹

A third factor was the sole agency rights of the Bible, Book and Tract Depot (BBTD) for the distribution of Chinese Bibles in Hong Kong before 1955, which meant that during its early years, the HKBH 'was unable to sell Scriptures direct to any person or organization in the

⁷⁵ BFBS Archives, BSA/D8/4/6/5, Letter from David McGavin to W. C. Somerville, 2 November 1951.

⁷⁶ Leslie Howsam and Scott McLaren, 'Producing the Text: Production and Distribution of Popular Editions of the Bible', in John Riches, ed., *The New Cambridge History of the Bible, 4: From 1750 to Present* (Cambridge, 2015), 49–82, at 75.

⁷⁷ ABS Archives, Pearson, 'ABS Historical Essay #15, VII-F-2', 185.

⁷⁸ BFBS Archives, BSA/D8/4/6/5, Letter from McGavin to Somerville, 2 November 1951.

⁷⁹ NBSS Archives, Letter from Douglas Lancashire to J. T. Watson, 11 February 1954; ABS Archives, Pearson, 'ABS Historical Essay #15, VII-F-2', 185.

Colony'.⁸⁰ An independent and interdenominational body, the BBTD was solely a distribution agency for Bibles and Bible portions issued by Bible societies, and Christian books and tracts in Chinese and English.⁸¹ In 1948, a sole agency agreement had been drawn up between the CBH and the BBTD, and the BFBS obtained the BBTD's shares in 1949.⁸² In November 1954, the BBTD decided to relinquish its sole agency rights, which allowed the HKBH to completely take over Chinese Bible distribution in Hong Kong in 1955 and to develop its work in the city.⁸³ Nonetheless, special business discount arrangements were continued in view of the BBTD's long-standing service to the Bible societies: the discount on Bibles supplied to the BBTD was increased from thirty per cent to thirty-five per cent after it relinquished the sole agency rights, while the discount to other Christian bookshops in Hong Kong was fixed at twenty-five per cent.⁸⁴

CONCLUSION

Circumstances make the marginal begin to be central. Providing insights into a hitherto understudied aspect of the history of the British and American Bible societies, this study has attested to what Craig Browne and Philip Mar suggested about Hong Kong's peripherality: 'Hong Kong demonstrates that the periphery is not a static category and that the periphery can undergo major transitions in relation to a

⁸⁰ ABS Archives, RG#1, Annual Reports, *One Hundred and Thirty-Eighth Annual Report of the American Bible Society* (1954), 311.

⁸¹ Milton T. Stauffer, Tsinform C. Wong and M. Gardner Tewksbury, *The Christian Occupation of China: A General Survey of the Numerical Strength and Geographical Distributon [sic] of the Christian Forces in China, Made by the Special Committee on Survey and Occupation, China Continuation Committee, 1918–1921* (Shanghai, 1922), 451.

⁸² BFBS Archives, BSA/C26/3, Minutes of a Meeting of OASC 'B', 20 October 1949; ABS Archives, RG#1, Annual Reports, *One Hundred and Thirty-Eighth Annual Report of the American Bible Society* (1954), 311; BFBS Archives, BSA/D8/4/6/4, 'Report on Hongkong & Formosa'.

⁸³ BFBS Archives, BSA/D8/4/6/4, Letter from Douglas Lancashire to W. J. Platt, 6 November 1954; BFBS Archives, BSA/C26/4, Minutes of a Meeting of OASC 'B', 18 November 1954. The BFBS's general committee passed the resolution on 6 December 1954; BFBS Archives, BSA/D8/4/6/4, Letter from J. T. Watson to Douglas Lancashire, 9 December 1954.

⁸⁴ ABS Archives, Pearson, 'ABS Historical Essay #15, VII-F-2', 186.

dominant center.⁸⁵ Hong Kong, a location for a mission station in South China, was considered of relatively little weight in Chinese Protestant Christianity before the Communist takeover of China. Nevertheless, this study has shown that the British colony began to emerge as a world centre for Chinese Protestant Bible publishing and distribution at the turn of the 1940s and 1950s, thanks to two decisive wars for modern China, which led to the birth of the CBH's Hong Kong Emergency Office and subsequently the HKBH, through which the BFBS, the ABS and the NBSS maintained their presence among Chinese-speaking people, so as to continue their century-long work of Chinese Bible publishing and distribution. This reflects Hong Kong's role in Chinese Protestant Christianity in the 1950s: thanks to its peripheral autonomy as a British colony separated from the PRC, Hong Kong became a place for Western missionary societies and missionaries to continue to implement their visions for China.⁸⁶

Moreover, the Chinese in China had been regarded as the central group and the overseas Chinese the relatively marginal group in the context of the Protestant mission effort among Chinese-speaking populations. Printing and distributing Chinese Bibles to Taiwan and the overseas Chinese as the HKBH's chief concern in its early years reminds us that since the PRC was inaccessible to Western Protestant missionary societies or denominations, the overseas Chinese, who used to be the marginal, began to be made central.

McGavin, who oversaw the Emergency Office's establishment, wrote to Platt shortly after its becoming the HKBH in 1952, expressing his view that 'it is a fact that, for supplying Scriptures to Chinese outside of China, the Hongkong Bible House has replaced the China Bible House.'⁸⁷ Indeed, to McGavin, the HKBH's significance was more than that, since its work 'is not that of a normal Bible Society Agency but is rather that of a manufacturing centre, producing Scriptures in various languages for the whole of South East Asia and even further afield',⁸⁸ as attested by its publication of not only the

⁸⁵ Craig Browne and Philip Mar, 'Hong Kong as a Dual Periphery', in Arthur Bueno, Mariana Teixeira and David Strecker, eds, *De-Centering Global Sociology: The Peripheral Turn in Social Theory and Research* (New York, 2023), 96–110, at 96.

⁸⁶ Ying, *An Introduction to the Study of the History of Hong Kong Christianity*, 82, 173–5.

⁸⁷ BFBS Archives, BSA/D8/4/6/1, Letter from David McGavin to W. J. Platt, 12 September 1952.

⁸⁸ BFBS Archives, BSA/D8/4/6/5, Letter from McGavin to Somerville, 2 November 1951.

Chinese Bible but also, for instance, the New Testament in the Lisu language and the Gospels and Acts in Vietnamese.⁸⁹ According to Atalanta Myerson, by the early 1960s, it was evident that Hong Kong was going to evolve into a major international printing centre.⁹⁰ As the process of such evolution overlapped with the later development of the HKBH, it is reasonable to ask whether the latter was among those contributing to the former. A foundation for further research into this question has been laid by this study, which itself has offered insights into the Christian dimension of the emergence of Hong Kong's global relevance in the Cold War era.

⁸⁹ McGavin, 'Hongkong Bible House', 152–3.

⁹⁰ Atalanta Myerson, 'East Asia', in William Roger Louis, ed., *The History of Oxford University Press, 3: 1896 to 1970* (Oxford, 2013), 693–720, at 712.