

Fort San Domingo's Place in the Making of the First Chinese English Dictionary

Address on the Opening of the Fort San Domingo Museum – 8 November 2005

Dear People

You are the inheritors of the wisdom of Lao Tzu, Confucius, Mencius and Sun Yat-sen: the Kuofu. Men and Women of Taiwan, I bring you greetings from Australia.

Introduction

I am grateful to you all for inviting me to assist in remembering my great-grandfather, Herbert Allen Giles. He stayed in Taiwan for a year in 1869 at Kaoshiung, and then again for a longer period of time from 1885 to 1891 as Her Britannic Majesty's Consul in Tamsui, right here where we are now in Fort San Domingo.

I am humbled by the invitation to assist in the opening of this fine Museum, in which history will be protected from those who have a tendency to turn history into fiction.

First allow me to introduce myself by telling you what I am not. I am not a scholar. So those of you who are scholars may find fault with what I have to say. If I make any mistakes, please forgive me. I am a manager of universities. That has been my life-long work from my first job at the University of Western Australia in 1964 to my last job at the Australian National University in 1998.

My Great Grandfather's life was dedicated to publishing the truth about China and about the Chinese Language. He did this over a long period from 1867 to 1924. My life has been dedicated to preserving the truth by protecting universities from their enemies, of which there are many, both on and off the campus. But there the similarities end.

He was a truly great man, a stubborn man, a man directed from within himself, not by others. I have inherited some aspects of his character, but not his genius.

Herbert Allen Giles

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Herbert Allen Giles was an honest man, and therefore had many enemies. The Greek philosopher, Diogenes of Athens, said that an honest man says what he thinks; he does what he says he is going to do; and he *never* has a large circle of admirers.

Giles fits this description. Most of his enemies were people whose work he had criticised. Such people included E H Parker, a sinologist at Manchester University; Sir Walter Hillier a sinologist from London; and Sir Thomas Wade, Minister to China (1870-76 and 1880-82) and therefore Giles's superior in the Consular Service. Wade was later Professor of Chinese at the University of Cambridge (1888-95). Giles was to succeed him in this position in 1897.

Giles was also disliked by the Christian Missionaries whose work he despised. This antagonism was contrary to British Government policy, which saw the work of the missionaries as entirely legitimate and beneficial. Giles disagreed, and made his disagreement very open and public.

He found an echo of his own thoughts in *A Thousand Character Essay*, written as a primer for Chinese girls in the reign of Tao Kuang, which Giles translated in 1873-4. Here is one of the proverbs.

“Of all things most important, shun
The subtle priest, the wily nun...”

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Giles was also unpopular with the British traders because he opposed the overcrowding of emigrant Chinese on British ships. In 1881 he was presented with a Red Umbrella by the Hsiamen Chinese Chamber of Commerce in recognition of this service to the Chinese people.

But Giles did have a small circle of admirers. These people included the Chinese officials with whom he worked and a number of German academics such as Nicolas Trubner. One person who gave Giles much encouragement was the Marquis Tseng who was the Minister Plenipotentiary at the Court of St James.

He wrote to Giles in March 1880 after reading the *Liao Chai Chih I* saying “I congratulate you on having in this made the best translation of a Chinese work into English which has ever come under my notice. Whilst remaining faithful to the original, you have succeeded in a remarkable degree in preserving the spirit of the author.”... “You have placed Chinese Scholars under a deep debt of gratitude to you for the elegant manner in which you have set the work of their countrymen before the English reader...”

In 1883 Giles published a major work called *Gems of Chinese Literature* in which he wrote this preface “For the past sixteen years I have been a diligent student of the language and literature of the Chinese people. I have now attempted to render into the English tongue specimens of their standard authors of past ages, in the hope that my countrymen may thereby learn something of the literary achievements of a great empire, whose inhabitants held learning in high esteem when our own painted forefathers were running naked and houseless in the woods and living on berries and raw meat.”

I am not sure about how Giles could have proved this statement to be true, because the early Britons left no written record. The first written record came from Julius Caesar when he invaded Britain in 55 BC. However, not only do we have no proof that Giles was right, we also have no proof that he was wrong. We simply do not know how the ancient Britains lived and thought at the time of the birth of the Chinese civilisation in the Shang Dynasty in 1,766 BC.

Giles arrived in Tamsui on 10 November 1885. A year later he had been elected President of the Royal Asiatic Society. During his time here he published works on *Lao Tzu* and corrected a translation of the *Tao Te Ching* by Chalmers (1868) which had

previously been considered authoritative. In addition he translated the works of Chuang Tzu, a 4th Century mystic, moralist and social reformer.

Although Giles had been preparing the work for his dictionary for fifteen years, including much of his time here at Fort San Domingo, he would leave Tamsui on 13 March 1888 on transfer to Ningpo where most of the progress on the final draft of the dictionary was made. There was very little Consular work at Ningpo, which allowed Giles to put all his energies into this great work.

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In 1891 he was transferred to Shanghai and the first proofs of the 1,500 page *Chinese-English Dictionary* began to arrive. He suffered an attack of appendicitis at this time, but made a good recovery after surgery.

Giles finished his work in China in 1893 and returned to Britain to live in Aberdeen. Here he resumed work on his *Chinese Biographical Dictionary*, material for which he had been collecting since 1874. This great work would be completed in 1898.

In December 1897 Giles was elected Professor of Chinese at Cambridge University. He taught there until June 1928, resigning finally from Cambridge in 1932.

On 17 December 1921 Giles's second wife Elise Williamina Giles (née Edersheim) died. Giles wrote of her "In all those 38 years not a syllable came from my pen which was not examined by her and approved before publication." Elise was herself an author, her best known work being *China Coast Tales*, which she wrote during her time in Tamsui (1885-1888) and which she published under the pseudonym Lise Boehm.

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Final recognition of Giles's contribution came on 4 July 1922 when the Royal Asiatic Society awarded Giles their Triennial Gold Medal. His old friend L. C. Hopkins, in his speech during the ceremony, was reported by an observer to say this.

"If he were asked to formulate in a sentence the special mark and merit of Professor Giles's lifelong labours, he would say that beyond all other living scholars he had humanised Chinese studies. He had by his writings made more readers know more things about China, things that were material, things that were vital – he had diffused a better and a truer understanding of the Chinese intellect, its capabilities and achievements, than any other scholar."

Giles was also twice awarded the Prix Stanislas Julien by the French Academy, the second time in 1924.

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During the immense stretch of time that Giles was in China he was stationed variously at Peking, Tientsin, Kaoshiung, Hankow, Swatow, Canton, Amoy, Pagoda Island (part of Foochow), Shanghai, Tamsui, and Ningpo. There is not much of the coast of this great land that he did not know at first hand.

Apart from his best known works, Giles wrote and translated books and articles on Chinese cookery, instructions to coroners, opium smoking, foot binding, the position of women, slang, travel, spiritualism, astronomy, anthropology, cremations, fans, freemasonry the history of China, poetry, dreams, jade, palmistry, football and polo. All of them were subjects relating to China.

Lancelot Giles

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One of Giles's sons was Lancelot Giles, who was my grandfather. He was born in 1878 while Giles was in Swatow. He followed his father into China and was a diplomat in various parts of the country. He was a junior official in Peking at the time of the Boxer Uprising and was besieged in the Legations for 55 days between June and August 1900. During this siege he was forced by hunger to eat his horse.

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He kept a Diary of the siege which he wrote in order to inform Giles of the events. The Diary came down to me as the eldest grandson. I have donated the original hand-written Diary to the Australia War Memorial in Canberra, along with my Grandfather's medals.

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The Diary was published by the University of Western Australia Press. It was edited by Professor L. R. Marchant and contained a Foreword by Sir Robert Scott. It gave me great pleasure to present to Professor Pierre Yang a copy of this publication when he visited us at our home in Wollongong in April this year.

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Lancelot's later years were clouded by a rift with his father. As Professor Giles grew old he became more and more irascible and difficult to deal with. Lancelot had always written regularly to his father giving him news about China in the 1920s. But Giles began to return these letters to Lancelot embellished with savage and critical comments.

The relationship eventually broke down completely. He did not even write to Lancelot when my mother Rosamond wrote to Giles telling him that his son was dying of cancer. Lancelot died in Tientsin on 21 November 1934, seven years before I was born, and coinciding with the beginning of the Long March of Mao Tse Tung. I am sad that I never knew him. My father, Harold Pickford, was very fond of Lancelot and enjoyed playing Chess with him regularly.

Rosamond Pickford (née Giles)

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Lancelot and Marjory Giles had two daughters – Rosamond and Marjory. I am the son of Rosamond. My mother and father were married in All Saints Church Tientsin on 28 October 1930. My father was with the Hong Kong Shanghai Bank in Bombay, India, when I was born in 1941 and my sister Belinda in 1943.

The Second World War came as close as Stalingrad, on the Caspian Sea. That is still a long way away. But even so, I can vaguely remember seeing the soldiers marching up and down, as the sub-continent prepared to meet Hitler at the Khyber Pass.

The only other thing I can remember about Bombay is being stung in the back of the neck by a wasp, and enjoying my favourite dish, chicken pilau. I can also remember going by ship to England for holidays at Dartmoor and the Channel Islands.

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After Bombay, my father's next posting was Tientsin, the port of Peking, where we witnessed another historic moment in 1948. My father was Manager of the Tientsin Branch of the Bank when Mao Tse Tung reached the second stage of the Chinese civil war. Mao had surrounded Chiang Kai Shek's militia in Tientsin. My mother and sister and I were evacuated on the Yugoslav Ship the SS Partisanka. Under orders from the Bank, my father stayed on to do business with the Chinese communists. We did not see him for a whole year, while we lived in Auckland, New Zealand.

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In 1949 my father told the Bank that it was not possible to do business with the communists. The Bank said it was possible and ordered him to continue. So my father offered his resignation. He joined us in Australia where we bought a farm. My sister Belinda and I grew up there and eventually we both went to the University of Western Australia where I took an Arts degree and she took a Science degree.

Works of Art

I will now take you quickly through some of the works of art that my family has collected over three generations. (Slides 13 through to 17)

China

Our family was a part of Chinese history for three generations. I believe we have made a difference in that time. But we made almost no difference to China itself. Where we did make a difference was in the way that the Western world saw China. Western perceptions of China were crude, arrogant and ignorant in the Nineteenth Century.

Through the work of my great grandfather and other gifted scholars, the West slowly came to understand the immense antiquity of the Chinese civilisation, its exquisite literature and art and its profound philosophers. We also recognise that it is in Taiwan where so much of this unique heritage is stored up and where it can be studied.

I venture to say that if Herbert Allen Giles were alive today, and if he could choose to live in China, he would return here to Fort San Domingo. I believe that he would hope to meet up here with his old friend Dr Sun Yat-sen, the Kuofu, if that were possible. However, both great men are now gone, and it is we who are left who must preserve the best, and protect the truth, for the future of the world.

Gift

(Slide 18) Finally, I would like to make three small gifts to the Museum. The first is a small ivory study of two Mandarin Ducks (Guangxu 1875, height 5.5 cm). This is my favourite of all the works of art that my parents brought back from China. To me, it represents faithful love, and it is with faithful love that I give it to Tamsui.

(Slide 19) The second is a carved fruitwood box of a finger-like lotus root form (Guangxu 1875, length 10 cm.) It has travelled around the world several times and has sustained some breaks. However, it is still a thing of beauty.

(Slide 20) Inside this box I have placed an opal, which is the national jewel of Australia. In this way I have joined Taiwan and Australia symbolically and made the bond visible to all future visitors to the Museum.

Conclusion

In closing I want to make this observation. It often seems to me that Australia will do anything to placate its most powerful neighbours. This is partly true. But in the bitter end, I am confident that the Australian people will do what is right. This was proven when the Australian Government temporarily set aside its obsession with appeasing Indonesia, and went to the aid of East Timor. Sometimes the will of a free people will cause governments to do things that do not make sense economically. This is the case with Australia and with any other true democracy.

References and Acknowledgements

I have drawn most of the historical details about Herbert Allen Giles from “The Memoirs of H. A. Giles” edited by Charles Aylmer and published by the Institute of Advanced Studies at the Australian National University in *East Asian History* Nos 13/14, June/December 1997. Other historical details are from what my mother told me, and from my memory.

I am indebted to Ping-wei Huang of Vacaville, California, a renowned Giles scholar, for his helpful suggestions and improvements; and also to Celia Stubbs of London who knows more than I do about my ancestors, and who provided many additional pictures.

I also thank Professor Mark Elvin, Professor of Chinese History and Geremie Barmé of the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies at the Australian National University, who commented on the text. Professor Elvin has provided this Sinological Note: “For most purposes Giles's massive dictionary has long passed its consult-by date, but in one respect it remains of long-lasting value. For some phrases of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, one can often find something in Giles that is in no other easily accessible dictionary either in English or Chinese.”

(Ends: 2,785 words)