
The History of LDS Seminaries and Institutes in Taiwan

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Taiwan is a vibrant nation of approximately twenty-three million people, living in an area about one-sixth the size of the state of Utah. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints remains relatively small in Taiwan. Its 55,805 members compose just 0.2% of the population.¹ Yet the LDS Church is growing, and an important part of that growth is found in the Seminary and Institute (S&I) program.²

Early History of the Church in Taiwan

The first missionaries of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints arrived in Taiwan on June 4, 1956.³ These missionaries were part of the Southern Far East mission, which also included areas in Hong Kong, the Philippines, Guam, and other parts of Asia.⁴ Only four missionaries were initially assigned to Taiwan, all of whom had previously spent nine months serving in Hong Kong.⁵ By October a local congregation had been established in Taipei with a regular attendance of thirty-five people each week, which included missionaries, military personnel, and local Taiwanese individuals.⁶

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Although in the beginning missionary work centered in Taipei, it soon spread to additional cities. By 1958 there were 286 Taiwanese members of the LDS Church, two-thirds of whom were living in Taipei.⁷

In 1959, Elder Mark E. Petersen of the Quorum of the Twelve visited Taiwan—the first LDS General Authority ever to do so—and dedicated the land for the preaching of the gospel (although David O. McKay had dedicated the Chinese realm on January 9, 1921). By the end of 1959, after three-and-one-half years of missionary work, eight branches had been organized. Forty-five missionaries were serving on the island, fourteen of whom were local Saints.⁸

The Church grew slowly at first. By April 1960 there were fewer than five hundred members. Two years later that number had increased to 831.⁹ Major milestones in the 1960s and early 1970s included the publication of the Book of Mormon into Chinese (1965), construction of the first meetinghouse (1966), and the establishment of Taiwan as its own mission (1971).

Early Years of Seminaries and Institutes

As the Church began to take hold in Taiwan, efforts were made to hold religious classes for youth. Some of these classes were conducted by expatriates living in the country; others were organized by missionaries who had experienced the seminary program and wanted to establish a similar program. A few of these programs were called “seminary classes,” and in some

cases they may have attempted to use seminary materials (which had not yet been translated into Chinese).¹⁰ For example, one early attempt included a gospel study class for the youth organized in Taichung in 1965. This effort is an example of how early missionaries tried to duplicate seminary classes or weekday religious classes they had experienced in the United States.¹¹ Seminary officially started in 1968 and institute in 1973.¹² However, records of specific seminary or institute classes being held before 1973 are not extant.

The foundation for these official seminary and institute classes was laid in January 1973, when Alan Hassell received a life-changing phone call. At that time he was a full-time seminary teacher who had been home from his mission from Taiwan for just four years when he was invited by Frank Day, the Church Education System (CES) Zone Administrator for Asia, to help establish the seminary and institute programs in Taiwan. Hassell was asked to take the assignment probably because he was the only CES employee (that Day was aware of) who spoke Mandarin. The assignment was particularly challenging, because Alan and his wife, Michele, had only been married three years and had two young children (ages one and two).

The Hassell family arrived in Taiwan in July 1973 and spent several weeks obtaining housing, purchasing furniture and household items, and creating a classroom environment for the projected students. Because there were so few Taiwanese seminary students, Chinese translations of seminary materials did not exist. Hassell's secretary, Wang Li Ching, translated the Tom Trails filmstrip series so there would be some type of media resources for use in the classroom.¹³

One of the initial challenges Hassell faced was persuading parents to allow their children to attend seminary. The very competitive educational climate in Taiwan includes long hours at school, with frequent test preparation sessions after school hours. For the first year of seminary, a home study seminary class took the place of the weekly Sunday school class. Students would do independent lessons during the week, receive lessons on Sunday, and occasionally have activities on Saturdays to supplement their learning. Hassell and Malan R. Jackson, the mission president, also visited the branches to encourage parents and priesthood leaders to initiate the program. Both the parents and the youth responded to the seminary program with faith and excitement. By the end of 1973, sixty-four students had enrolled, and one year later the number increased to 104.¹⁴ Hassell also succeeded in establishing an institute program in the three largest branches—Taipei, Taichung, and Kaohsiung. He invited Ho Tung-Hai to be the first institute instructor in Kaohsiung. (Ho was later called to be the first stake president of the Kaohsiung Stake.)

Hassell worked relentlessly to establish the seminary and institute programs throughout Taiwan. He described a typical week as follows: "I would leave Taipei on Friday morning and head south. Friday evening in Taichung we had an institute class. Saturday I would continue south and visit the institute in Kaohsiung. Sunday I would visit some of the seminary classes. Monday I would head home. Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday were daytime and evening classes in the Taipei Institute."¹⁵

There were many logistical difficulties in these early years, some of which were, in retrospect, somewhat humorous. Hassell related the following incident:

We received a letter . . . telling us that we would be hosting the Commissioner of Church Education, Neal A. Maxwell, and his wife Colleen, for a couple of days. He was touring the Far East and would spend a couple of days with each of the international coordinators. We were told to be frank and honest with him and also to show him the sights, introduce him to some local food, and to be careful not to get them sick as they only had a few days per country.

CES had bought us a car, which was nice, but [it] had no air conditioning. Given the intense heat, I tried to get air conditioning but was told that there was no budget for it, and moreover there were no parts available in Taiwan. We picked up the Maxwells at the airport and took them to Mongolian BBQ, which he approached hesitantly at first and then with enthusiasm.

When we picked them up at the hotel the next morning, he allowed Colleen to sit in the front and he took the back seat. It was a hot and humid August day in Taiwan. After ten minutes in our hot car he inquired why we had no A/C. I told him we had been told it wasn't in the budget. He stated the conditions were inhumane and no one should have to deal with that. Before they left the next day he asked to use the office phone, called Salt Lake and informed [the head of finance] that CES was going to purchase a car with air conditioning for the Hassells. Seven months later we got our new Toyota with A/C.¹⁶

In December 1974, just eighteen months after the Hassells arrived in Taiwan, they were transferred back to the United States.

Wan Kon-Leung (Joseph) succeeded Hassell as the CES coordinator of the country. Born in 1944, Wan joined the Church in February 1961, then later served as a missionary in the Hong Kong Mission from December 1965 to February 1968. In 1971 he moved to Kaohsiung, Taiwan, and began employment as a supervisor in a factory and also as an English teacher. Although single at the time, he was called to be the branch president in Kaohsiung. While serving as branch president, and unaware of Hassell's efforts in establishing the seminary program in Taipei, Wan, sensing that the young people in the branch needed gospel instruction and training, instituted a seminary-like program in Kaohsiung consisting of twelve students.

Before Hassell returned to the U.S., he secured permission for Wan Kon-Leung to be appointed the new seminary and institute coordinator.



Alan Hassell, Michele Hassell, Wan Ng Suk-Yi (Alice), and Wan Kon-Leung (Joseph), December 1974. Hassell served as the first CES coordinator in Taiwan, followed by Wan. Photograph courtesy Alan Hassell.



Wan Kon-Leung (Joseph) and institute students at an activity, December 1964. Photograph courtesy Alan Hassell.

Wan accepted and moved to Taipei on January 1, 1974. (He and his fiancée were married in the Salt Lake temple shortly thereafter.) At that time the CES program in Taiwan consisted of eleven seminary classes and seven institute classes—four in Taipei, and one each in Chia Yi, Kaohsiung, and Taichung.¹⁷ Efforts were made throughout the island to move the home study seminary classes to a day other than Sunday. As the program continued to expand, with additional seminary classes, and an institute class in Taichung, Wan hired Lee Ding Kuen to become the coordinator managing CES programs in Kaoshiung.¹⁸

Calling teachers to work with the CES programs was challenging in these early days. Many of the teachers were recent converts, still learning foundational gospel principles and doctrines. High turnover rates also made it difficult to maintain the strength of the program. During this time the two coordinators worked sixty to seventy hours a week training teachers, hosting “Super Saturdays,” visiting priesthood leaders, and motivating students.

Students also made sacrifices. At that time seminary and institute students were required to pay for their course materials (NT \$40 per seminary student and NT \$80 per institute student). In an environment where some students and their parents felt that seminary was a large sacrifice of time, requiring payment for instructional materials was an added burden. For those students who were not members of the Church, or who had parents who were not members, the difficulty was compounded. Nevertheless, through efforts with priesthood leaders, parents and youth were persuaded to make the additional expense.

Kong Lin Shu-Zhao (Kimberly), one of the first seminary teachers in Taiwan, serving from 1974–78, recalled: “It was difficult to motivate the students to complete their assignments, but many did it.” She also recalled with fondness that one of her students was not a member of the Church. Years later, after she had moved to another city and was visiting Taipei, a man approached her and said, “Hello, you were my seminary teacher!” She didn’t recognize him, but he told her that he had been her non-LDS student. He later was called to serve as a stake president, and seminary had been an important part of his preparation.¹⁹ Many others were similarly influenced by seminary at this time. Juan Jui-Chang, currently an Area Authority Seventy, said: “The reason I served a mission is because of [a] seminary teacher.”²⁰ Yang Tsung-Ting (Jared) was baptized in 1973, and was among the first institute graduates in 1977. He was blessed by participating in institute and would later serve as the stake president for the Taipei West Stake and as an Area Authority Seventy in Asia.²¹ Thus seminary and institute was laying the spiritual educational foundation for Church leaders in the decades to come.

Wan loved working with the youth and young adults. A particularly memorable event during those years occurred when Elder Gordon B. Hinckley of the Quorum of the Twelve came in 1976 to organize the first stake in Taiwan.²² Wan was teaching institute one night when missionaries came to inform him that Elder Hinckley wanted to meet with him. At the time, Wan was thirty-two years-old. As he walked into the room to meet with Elder Hinckley he recognized two other men who had been called as the stake president and the first counselor. These were more seasoned men, both in their late fifties. In extending a call to Wan, Elder Hinckley said: “We would like to call you to be the second counselor in the stake presidency. Would you like to work with these two old men?” Wan replied: “Who is older than Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ? Of course I would like to work with them.” Later, as he reflected on his years coordinating the seminary and institute programs in Taiwan, Wan said: “The Lord blessed us. The Lord did the job, I was just the tool. Seminary and institute are wonderful programs in the church, to help young people learn leadership and grow up in the church.”²³ In 1979, when Wan was transferred to Hong Kong to work with the seminary and institute programs, over 350 students were enrolled in seminary and over 400 students in institute.

A Period of Steady Growth (1979–1999)

Wang Lu Pao, a part-time teacher (and one of Hassell’s first institute students), succeeded Wan Kon-Leung as the CES coordinator in Taipei in 1979. That same year the Kaohsiung office in the southern part of the country was closed when Lee Ding Kuen moved to the United States. The Kaohsiung office was reopened in 1985 when Kuo Hung Chou was hired as a new coordinator in the south, but closed a second time at his departure in 1994.

For the next two decades, Wang oversaw most of the development of seminary and institute programs in Taiwan. He was instrumental in the strengthening and steady growth experienced during this period, at times responsible for the northern region of the country when there was a coordinator in Kaohsiung, and at other times solely responsible for all the CES programs in Taiwan. He traveled throughout the island to train and support volunteer teachers and spent countless hours visiting various cities to meet with priesthood leaders, teachers, parents, and students. He played a key role in establishing both home study seminary and institute classes in nearly every ward and branch of the Church in Taiwan. During this time, students of high school age attended home study seminary (typically holding class on the weekend), while members ages eighteen and over (single or married)



Institute students in Taipei, Taiwan, November 25, 1993. Photograph courtesy Wang Lu Pao.

participated in institute. As in seminary, institute courses during this time followed the four-year scripture courses.

The Church experienced considerable growth in Taiwan during these years. In 1980, Lin Yang-kang, governor of the Taiwan province, visited Utah and signed a treaty of friendship with Utah Governor Scott M. Matheson. Lin also met with LDS Church President Spencer W. Kimball, and three months later Lin hosted Kimball in Taipei. At a formal luncheon Lin offered a toast to his guests, acknowledging that it was a Chinese custom to greet guests with wine. However, he made an exception. “In keeping with the Mormon custom,” he said, “we would drink 7-Up instead today and use the soda to express our best wishes.”²⁴ This experience demonstrates an increasing understanding in Taiwan of the Church and its beliefs.

The faith and dedication of the Taiwanese Saints helped the Church grow during these years. Overall membership in Taiwan increased from 10,016 in 1984, to 24,000 in 1998. During this same period of time seminary enrollment increased from 172 to 233, and institute enrollment from 325 to 1,333.

Changes Lead to Growth and Expansion (2000–Present)

In 1999, the Asia Area Presidency—Cree-L Kofford, Richard E. Cook, and H. Bryan Richards—spearheaded the change to convert the home study seminary programs into early morning classes in Taiwan. At that time, no ongoing early morning seminary programs functioned, except for an

expatriate branch in Taiwan. However, several obstacles existed, particularly the students' school and study schedule. Students generally attended school from seven-thirty a.m. until five-thirty p.m., followed by "cram school" (test preparation classes) from six-thirty until nine-thirty p.m., followed by daily homework. In short, many felt that there just wasn't enough time in the day to expect the LDS youth to make time for an early morning seminary class.

Elder Cree-L Kofford, the area president, visited Stan Peterson, CES Administrator of Seminaries and Institutes of Religion, and Ross Cole, the Zone Administrator over Asia, to request assistance regarding how to establish early morning seminary in Taiwan.²⁵ About this same time in the southern region of the island, Lee Shih Jung (Robert) had been called as the new stake president of the Kaohsiung Stake. On October 19, 1999, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland and Elder Kofford visited the Kaohsiung Stake, and President Lee asked for assistance in creating an early morning seminary programs in southern Taiwan. Shortly thereafter, in consultation with the Asia Area Presidency, CES officials in Salt Lake felt the timing was right to send Po Nien (Felipe) Chou, a newly hired released-time seminary teacher in Utah, to reopen the Kaohsiung office and begin an early morning seminary class. In January 2000, Elders Kofford and Cook (from the Asia Area Presidency) held a series of meetings throughout Taiwan, encouraging leaders and members to enroll more seminary students and organize early morning seminaries, promising them that if they would support the program they would do better in school. Furthermore, they would arrive to school already awake, be more prepared, and need less study time outside of class.²⁶

On January 18, 2000, Po Nien (Felipe) Chou and his wife, Mei Wah (Petra), moved their young family to Taiwan to reopen the Kaohsiung office and coordinate the CES programs in the southern region of the island.²⁷ Although Chou had been born in Taiwan, his family had left when he was two years old, and he did not learn Mandarin growing up. Petra, a native of Hong Kong, grew up speaking Cantonese but learned Mandarin on her LDS mission, which proved to be of great assistance to her husband's limited language skills during their first year in Taiwan. With persistence and his wife's help, Chou learned the language quickly. His secretary, Yan Shu-Wen, played a critical role translating correspondence and tracking enrollment and completion efforts.

Although it was in the middle of the school year when the Chou family arrived in Taiwan, under the direction of President Lee, Chou immediately began preparations for the first early morning seminary class in Kaohsiung. After securing housing and following the two-week Chinese New Year's break, the Kaohsiung stake presidency (Lee, Yang, and Chen) organized a youth conference (February 18–20, 2000) for their stake and invited Chou

to introduce and encourage enrollment in early morning seminary. With tremendous effort and support from the stake presidency, bishops, and parents in the Kaohsiung Stake, twenty-three students registered for the class at the Kaohsiung stake center, to be taught by Chou; and seven registered for the class at the Fengshan meetinghouse, to be taught by Kuo Yu-Lan, a volunteer teacher.²⁸

On February 29, the students who attended the first early morning classes in the Kaohsiung Stake came by car, scooters, or bicycles; but all who came demonstrated great faith and sacrifice to participate in pioneering the early morning seminary program. At the conclusion of the school year four months later, twenty-two of the thirty early morning seminary students in the stake received credit by attending at least eighty percent of classes.²⁹

On June 23, 2000, a seminary graduation was held at the Kaohsiung Stake Center, with Elders Kofford and Richards in attendance. A choir of early morning seminary students sang “We’ll Bring the World His Truth,” followed by talks from the two members of the area presidency. After hugging each student and expressing gratitude for their faith, President Kofford talked about his experience three years earlier in a meeting with leaders in Taiwan, and the



Photograph of the first early morning seminary students and their teachers at the time of the first seminary graduation exercises, Kaoshiung, Taiwan, June 23, 2000. Also pictured are Elders Cree-L Kofford (back row, right) and Elder H. Bryan Richards (back row, left) of the Asia Area Presidency. Photograph courtesy Po Nien (Felipe) Chou.

strong impression he had that it that the time had come for Taiwan to have early morning seminary to strengthen the future of the Church in Taiwan.³⁰ These students became the “vanguard pioneers” of early morning seminary in Taiwan, paving the way for others to follow.

Expanding Early Morning Seminary to Central and Northern Taiwan

A video of the Kaohsiung early morning seminary program (including a typical class experience, along with testimonies of leaders, parents, and students) was produced and used to promote early morning seminary in other stakes and districts throughout Taiwan. The success of the early morning program in the south led to additional classes established in May and June 2000 by Wang Lu Pao in the northern region of Taipei, as well as classes in the central region of Taichung by Chou.³¹

The beginnings of the first Taichung early morning seminary class parallel the experience in Kaohsiung. With support from the stake presidency and other Church leaders, as well as parents and students, this first early morning seminary class in central Taiwan began with twenty-one students on August 28, 2000. The dedication of stake leaders in Taichung to help the parents and youth understand the importance of early morning seminary could not be mistaken. Brother Lin, a member of the stake high council, was released from the high council to serve as the first early morning seminary teacher for this class. Members of the stake presidency and the bishops visited the class regularly to bring breakfast for the youth and encourage them to maintain their attendance to qualify for completion and graduation. After Lin was released as an early morning seminary teacher, President Juan Jui-Chang, the Taichung stake president (currently an Area Authority Seventy), served as an early morning seminary teacher for a period of time, while concurrently presiding over the stake.³²

Besides the principal cities of Kaohsiung, Taichung, and Taipei, early morning classes were also established in other cities, including Taoyuan, Hsinchu, Nantou, Changhua, Chiayi, Tainan, Pingtung, and others. By January 2001, Wang and Chou’s combined efforts resulted in increased seminary enrollment and the establishment of early morning classes in every stake in Taiwan. After the establishment of the first early morning seminary class in Kaohsiung, seminary enrollment increased dramatically from 257 in 1998–99 (9 early morning, 248 home study), to 345 in 1999–2000 (61 early morning, 284 home study), to 402 in 2000–01 (213 early morning, 189 home study). to 480 in 2001–02 (296 early morning, 184 home study).³³

The early morning seminary teachers made valiant efforts to initiate early morning classes. Lin Mei Lan, one of the first early morning teachers in the Taipei West Stake, reported:

The bishopric and I would visit students and their parents to explain the reasons why we had to obey the invitation to start the early morning seminary and to ensure them heavenly blessings that would come upon their heads if they would attend. Some parents would bring up their concerns during our visits. Besides their children's busy schedules, another concern was the children's safety. Home study was once a week in the morning or afternoon—transportation was not difficult. But leaving the house at 5:00 a.m. was a large concern, given that it was dark and some homes were in more remote areas or inside dark alleys. In response the bishopric organized volunteers (mainly men) to take students who would attend the daily seminary to the chapel every day. There were many difficulties, and yet there are many blessings. The bonds between the students are much stronger, since they meet each other every day. In addition, more of their real life problems are discussed in class, so they know better how to apply gospel principles.³⁴

Tsai Shu Min, one of the first early morning seminary teachers in Kaohsiung, also experienced both difficulties and rewards. She prepared her lesson materials for her classes and arrived at the chapel every day, but no students attended. However, she persisted, and soon the ward members told the students they should be ashamed that they were making her go every day without supporting her. Students began attending, and the class was completed with great success. Tsai's determination and perseverance are a legacy that continues to inspire seminary teachers today.³⁵

Yang Chin Chen, one of the first students to transition to early morning seminary, recalled that "Getting up early in the morning was the hardest thing, especially in winter days of rain." However, he added, "I am grateful to have attended seminary. I did not know why I had the courage to join the classes at that time, but now I know it was part of God's plan for me."³⁶ Another student said: "Many of my classmates have very bad language. Coming to early morning seminary reminds me every day that I have to keep my mouth clean and cannot say the same thing like my classmates do. At first my classmates would think that I just pretending to be different and would tease me. Yet after a while, they knew that I did not talk as they did. They would not say bad words if I am around."³⁷

Promises and Blessings from Early Morning Seminary

When early morning programs started, some raised concerns that attendance might adversely affect grades and educational opportunities for these youth. The Asia Area Presidency responded with a promise that those who attended seminary would become the best students in Taiwan. Feng Cho-

Chien (Jimmy), the first early morning seminary class president in Kaohsiung, attended early morning faithfully, but received grim news that his early admission application to a local college was rejected. Like other students, he had to decide between attending the newly organized early morning seminary class or take additional cram/tutoring classes instead to prepare for the national college entrance exam. He chose to continue with early morning seminary. When he took the national college entrance exam the summer following successful completion of early morning seminary, he placed in the top one hundred students out of the over 67,000 students who took the national exam that year. He went on to attend Tai-Da University, the country's most prestigious university, and later served a full-time mission and was sealed to his wife in the Taipei Temple.³⁸

President Chang, first counselor in the Taichung stake presidency, invited his nonmember brother to drive his sons to early morning seminary. This man went from waiting for his nephews by sleeping in the car in the parking lot, to having gospel discussions with other parents outside of the class, to taking missionary lessons and ultimately becoming a member of the Church. According to Chang, waiting for the boys to finish early morning seminary resulted in his joining the Church.³⁹

Huang Shang Ting, an early morning seminary student in Kaohsiung, shared with her nonmember father a lesson she learned in seminary about temples and the concept of eternal families. After listening to his daughter share her desire that they might one day be an eternal family, he was baptized and brought his less active wife back to church. They were later sealed as an eternal family in the Taipei Temple, and he was called to serve as a branch president.⁴⁰

The Asia Area Presidency encouraged CES teachers and leaders to renew efforts to reach out and invite new converts and less active members to participate in seminary and institute. When Kuo Tseng Tsai-Fen from Toufen was asked to serve as a volunteer seminary teacher, not a single seminary student attended in her branch. However, after consultation with the CES coordinator, she contacted ten converts in her branch who were seminary age but who did not attend church, and six of them enrolled immediately. While the nonmember parents of these seminary-age converts objected to their attending church on Sundays, they did not restrict their children from attending seminary classes held during the week.⁴¹

These recruitment efforts also took place in institute. For example, in XiaoKang, Petra Chou's class started with two institute students, but by the end of the semester over thirty attended, nearly all of whom were new converts.⁴² Institute enrollment grew from 1,279 in 1998–99, to 2,665 in 2001–02.

Institute “Gathering” of YSAs and First Institute Councils

Besides inviting new converts to institute classes, other changes helped the institute program grow and expand. Changes to institute programs also included gathering young single adults into larger classes, installment of the first institute councils, expansion of institute course offerings, and the establishment of summer institute classes.

The establishment of institute classes in nearly every ward and branch was a significant undertaking in the 1980s and 1990s. However, by the late 1990s a large portion of institute students were married and over the age of thirty, the result was that many young single adults (YSA) ages between the ages of eighteen and thirty chose not to attend institute. One ward had forty-five YSAs, but only five attended institute. Typically, a ward/branch institute class had twelve to fifteen students, less than half being YSAs. Beginning in 2000, in the southern region of the country, Chou received an impression to invite the few young single adults “scattered” in institute classes in every ward and branch in the stake to “gather” to the stake center for an institute class designed specifically for them. A YSA institute class in Kaohsiung, which began with some fifteen to twenty students in 2000, grew to between fifty and sixty by 2002. The same pattern followed in Taichung, averaging 70–100 students by 2004, and Taipei, averaging 120–170 students by 2005. In addition, the first institute councils were established in Taiwan to assist with institute activities for YSAs. About this time, stake centers in Taiwan also received satellite dishes and began broadcasting general conference. The institute programs took advantage of the new equipment to encourage the young people to also participate in the CES firesides. The first institute council was organized in Kaohsiung in 2001, followed by Taichung in 2002, and Taipei in 2004. All these efforts resulted in many YSAs who were not attending institute to participate in the larger “YSA only” institute classes.⁴³

Expansion of Institute Courses and Summer Classes

Moreover, institute course offerings in Taiwan were expanded and summer institute classes were established. Before 2000, institute course offerings consisted mainly of the four-year scripture-based curriculum (Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, Old Testament, and New Testament). These courses were retained in the wards and branches, but beginning in 2000, institute course offerings were expanded to include other courses for the YSA institute classes taught in stake centers. These course offerings included the Pearl of Great Price, Latter-day Saint History, Teachings of the Living Prophets, Preparing for an Eternal Marriage, and Presidents of the Church. With the addition of summer institute classes,

the two-semester institute year was expanded to three semesters. The first summer institute classes began in the southern region in the summer of 2000, despite some concerns it might be poorly attended. Chou would travel and teach at a different stake/district each night of the week, from Tuesday to Saturday, covering five stakes/districts in central and southern Taiwan that summer.⁴⁴ The combined enrollment for these first five summer institute classes was 907 students, including 174 new students who had not attended during the regular school year but were home for the summer. Following the success of these first summer classes, volunteer institute teachers were enlisted to expand summer class offerings, and summer institute became a typical part of the CES offering.

Institute Centers Built

The changes made to institute programs in the southern region (new convert enrollment efforts, gathering YSAs into larger classes, institute councils, larger institute course offerings, and summer institute) caused institute enrollment to double in the southern region within a year's time. To assist with the institute growth in the southern region, Chou established a CES office in Taichung, where he supervised the work of John and Janice Sipherd, the first CES missionary couple in Taiwan. Although they did not speak fluent Chinese, they taught with the assistance of local translators, had a great love for the students, and were vital in supporting the growth and expansion of the S&I programs in central Taiwan until they completed their mission in 2002.⁴⁵

In 2002, Chou moved with his family to Taichung to continue the efforts to stabilize the early morning seminary program and continued to supervise the programs in central and southern Taiwan. He helped train and supervise President Lee Shih Jung (president of the Kaohsiung Stake), who was hired in 2002 to become the coordinator in Kaohsiung. The continued growth of institute enrollment resulted in the first institute centers being built in Taiwan. These institute centers, incorporated into the new stake centers, were completed in Kaohsiung and Taichung in 2004, providing offices and two dedicated CES classrooms in each location. A larger institute center, incorporated in the new multistory Church Administration Building in Taipei next to the Taipei Temple, was completed and dedicated in 2005. Following an open house in January 2005, this building, along with the institute center, was dedicated by President Gordon B. Hinckley on August 1, 2005.⁴⁶

In 2004, Wang Lu Pao retired, and Po Nien (Felipe) Chou was transferred to Taipei to take responsibility as the country director for the CES programs in Taiwan. He helped prepare Wu Chung Kai (Ken) and Wang Jung Lin (Ri-



Wang Lu Pao (Taiwan coordinator/country director, 1978–2004), Po Nien (Felipe) Chou (Taiwan CES coordinator/country director, 2000–2005), John and Janice Sipherd (CES missionaries, 2001–2002), Tim Kwok (Asia CES area director), Taichung, Taiwan, April 4, 2001. Photograph courtesy Po Nien (Felipe) Chou.

ley), who were hired in 2004 to coordinate seminary and institute programs in Taichung and Taipei respectively.⁴⁷

A significant change occurred in 2005, when the Asia Area Presidency sent a letter of instruction to Church leaders in Taiwan inviting them to reclassify institute classes with students who were predominantly or exclusively married and over the age of thirty. These classes were renamed “stake gospel study classes” or “adult religion classes,” and attendees were no longer considered institute students. As a result of this change in how the number of students were counted, the number of institute students dropped after 2005. However, this change allowed CES leaders and teachers to focus on YSAs and align the institute program to better serve those for whom the program was designed. Felipe Chou served as the country director over Lee Shih Jung (Robert) in Kaohsiung (south), Ken Wu in Taichung (central), and Riley Wang in Taipei (north).⁴⁸ When Chou and his family were transferred back to the United States in 2005, enrollment for the 2004–05 school year included 487 seminary students (295 early morning, 192 home study) and 2,787 institute students.

Robert Lee, Ken Wu, and Riley Wang continued to work tirelessly to increase seminary and institute enrollment, and to transition more home study programs into early morning seminary classes. They also worked to provide



Po Nien (Felipe) Chou instructs volunteer seminary and institute teachers in Taichung, Taiwan, August 23, 2003. Photograph courtesy Po Nien (Felipe) Chou.

more daytime institute classes at the three institute centers built in Taiwan. In 2009, Wu left S&I employment to pursue other interests, resulting in a vacancy in the Taichung office. Weng Wen Shuai (Eric) was hired in 2011 to coordinate the programs in Taichung and central Taiwan. At the close of the 2011–12 school year, there were 706 students enrolled in seminary, and 1,630 institute students in Taiwan.⁴⁹

Impact of Early Morning Seminary and Institute

The dedicated service of the priesthood leaders, volunteer teachers, and CES coordinators continues to strengthen and expand seminary and institute programs in Taiwan. Because of their concerted efforts, early morning seminary became the ideal and the norm in Taiwan, rather than the exception. Institute programs were expanded and aligned to serve the YSAs. Liang Shih Wei (Carl), the current stake president of the Taipei Central Stake, believes that early morning seminary has been a major factor in the increasing number of missionaries from his stake.⁵⁰ This assessment was corroborated

by a number of interviews with seminary and institute students. For example, Mao Jiemei, a full-time missionary from Taichung, related this story:

I found my testimony of Joseph Smith in seminary. I was fourteen years old, and had missed too many days of seminary from sleeping in. I had to do makeup work in order to graduate, and I was assigned to study sections relating to Joseph Smith History. I had always thought of Joseph Smith as just as man, but as I was studying I realized I really need to know for myself if he was a prophet, or if I was just following my parents' church. Even though I was young, some of my friends at school had told me that my church wasn't the right one. So I started to pray every day, and over the next month I fasted two times. One night while I was praying, a feeling opened up in my heart and mind—I could feel Heavenly Father loved me, and I knew Joseph Smith was a prophet.⁵¹

When Fang Mei Yi attended seminary (2004–08), her mother was her teacher. One lesson Mei Yi vividly remembers was from Doctrine and Covenants/Church History. They were studying Zion's Camp, and the principle they focused on was being obedient, even if we don't know why. Her mother said: "We don't know we have been asked to have seminary so early in the morning, but it doesn't matter if we can't see all the Lord's purposes—we obey!" This testimony, along with other teachings in seminary, gave Mei



Institute students in Taipei, Taiwan, November 22, 2012. Photograph courtesy Wang Jung Ling.

Yi a strong background that prepared her for her service as a missionary at Temple Square in Salt Lake City. Now home from her mission, she is the early morning seminary teacher. A full-time college student, she is at the chapel every day at five-thirty a.m., instructing twelve students, most of whom ride their bicycles to class.⁵²

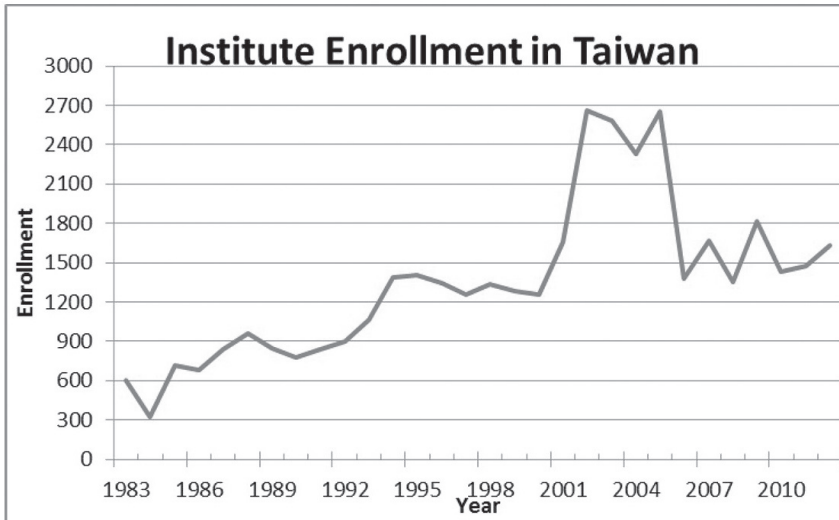
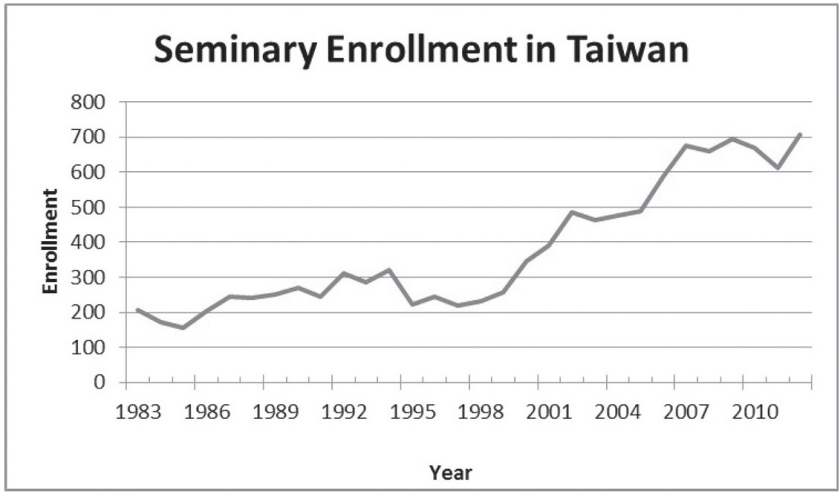
Lai Xiang Xien, who was baptized at the age of fifteen, was similarly blessed by participating in institute. Being new to the Church, she found seminary difficult to attend, and she did not graduate. However, one summer she enrolled in institute and attended the “Principles of Leadership” course. During a class that focused on scripture study, her teacher said that she made it a point to study her scriptures before doing anything else in the morning, including brushing her teeth! Xiang Xien was so impressed that she determined she would start seriously studying her scriptures every day. As she did so, her testimony grew to the point that she was certain the Church was true. She served a mission, and now serves as a seminary teacher.⁵³

Yang Xiao Han likewise believes that institute greatly strengthened her testimony. She was baptized in 2011, and currently serves as a multi-stake coordinator for young single adult activities. She said: “Institute has really helped me a lot. I have had so many questions answered! I feel like it’s a place I can make friends and talk about my feelings about the gospel. When I hear my peers share their testimonies, it really strengthens my own.”⁵⁴

Conclusion

A look back forty years since the first seminary and institute classes were initiated reveals remarkable progress and great changes. What began as a home study program has blossomed into eighty-one seminary classes and 107 institute classes. The facilities currently in use have come a long way from time when Alan Hassell had to borrow tables and chairs to create a makeshift classroom. Today there are dedicated institute facilities in Taipei, Taichung, and Kaohsiung, all equipped with modern conveniences and the latest teaching technologies. For example, the Taipei institute facilities include two classrooms, a library, kitchen, offices, and a student recreation area. Seminary students taught in chapels throughout Taiwan also enjoy a conducive and inviting learning environment.

Inspired changes will continue to take place in the seminary and institute programs in Taiwan. Nevertheless, a foundation has been laid to position the Seminary and Institute (S&I) programs in Taiwan to help individuals, families, and the Church, better prepare the rising generation in for missions, temple marriages, and leadership positions in Taiwan and throughout the world.



The large spike in 2001 institute enrollment is partially due to institute program changes made at that time. The large drop in 2006 is due to the reclassification of students who were married and over age thirty. Before 2006, any adult (whether married, single, and of any age) enrolled in institute was counted as an institute student. However, in 2006, only non-married single students thirty years of age or younger were counted, resulting in the decline in reported enrollments.

Appendix A

Timeline of Major Events Related to the LDS Seminary and Institute Program in Taiwan

January 9, 1921	Elder David O. McKay of the Quorum of the Twelve dedicates the Chinese realm for the preaching of the gospel.
June 4, 1956	The first LDS missionaries begin serving in Taiwan.
June 1, 1959	Elder Mark E. Petersen of the Quorum of the Twelve dedicates Taiwan.
December 20, 1965	The Book of Mormon is published in Chinese.
1966	The first church building is dedicated in Taiwan.
1968	The first seminary classes begin in Taiwan.
1971	The Taiwan Mission is established.
1973	The Church Educational System is officially established in Taiwan, office in Taipei established, first institute classes begin.
1974	The CES Kaohsiung office is established.
August 14, 1975	The First Area Conference is held in Taiwan; approximately 2,500 people attend.
April 22, 1976	The first stake is created in Taiwan.
1979	The CES Kaohsiung office is closed.
Nov. 17–18, 1984	The Taipei Taiwan Temple is dedicated.
1985	The CES Kaohsiung office is reopened.
1994	The CES Kaohsiung office is closed a second time.

January 2000	The CES Kaohsiung office is reopened.
February 29, 2000	Early morning seminary is inaugurated in Taiwan, the first class in Kaohsiung.
June 23, 2000	The first students complete early morning seminary and are recognized at the combined Kaohsiung/Pingtung seminary graduation exercises, the members of the Asia Area Presidency presiding.
June 2000	The first summer institute classes are organized.
2001	The first institute council for Taiwan is organized in Kaohsiung. The first CES missionary couple is called to serve in Taiwan to coordinate programs in Taichung.
2002	The CES Taichung office is established. The first institute council in Taichung is organized.
2004	The first institute council in Taipei is organized. The first institute centers are completed and dedicated in Kaohsiung and Taichung.
2005	The Taipei institute center is completed in a multistory Church Administration Building dedicated by President Gordon B. Hinckley.

Notes

1. See the LDS Church 2012 year-end report at <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/facts-and-statistics/country/taiwan>.
2. On December 12, 2007, the LDS Church Board of Education changed the title of the Church Education System (CES) to Seminaries and Institutes (S&I).
3. R. Lanier Britsch, *From the East: The History of the Latter-day Saints in Asia, 1851–1996* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1998), 253.
4. Britsch, *From the East*, 236.
5. Feng Xi, “A History of Mormon Chinese Relations: 1949–1993” (PhD diss. Brigham Young University 1994), 152.
6. Britsch, *From the East*, 253.
7. Britsch, *From the East*, 254.
8. Janice Clark, “Taiwan: Steep Peaks and Towering Faith,” *Ensign* 5, no. 8 (August 1975): 55.

9. Britsch, *From the East*, 259.
10. In the case of English-speaking expatriates, they could use English materials.
11. Richard B. Stamps and Wendy J. Shamo, *The Taiwan Saints* (n.p.: Cultural Dynamics, 1996), n.p.
12. *Seminaries and Institutes of Religion Annual Report for 2013* (Salt Lake City: Seminaries and Institutes of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013), 3.
13. In Chinese, the surname or family name is given first. For example, with the name Wang Li Ching, Wang is the surname, Li Ching the given name. This format is used throughout this article, except as requested otherwise by the individual being discussed.
14. While official seminary and institute records are not available for this time period, an overview titled “The early development of church education in Hong Kong and Taiwan” lists these numbers. See <http://www.lds.org/hk/en/index.php/key-stages/134-stage-006>.
15. Alan Hassell, “Personal History of Seminaries and Institutes,” copy in possession of the authors.
16. Hassell, “Personal History of Seminaries and Institutes.”
17. Alan Hassell, interview by E. Dale LeBaron, May 17, 1991, Medford, Oregon, transcript copy in possession of the authors.
18. Wan Kon-Leung, interview by John Hilton III, May 15, 2013, Taipei, Taiwan.
19. Kong Lin Shu-Zhao, interview by John Hilton III, May 17, 2013, Taipei, Taiwan.
20. Juan Jui-Chang, interview by the Family and Church History Department, October 20, 2001.
21. Christopher K. Bigelow, “Taiwan: Four Decades of Faith,” *Liahona*, May 1999, 29.
22. The Taipei Taiwan Stake was organized on April 22, 1976.
23. Wan Kon-Leung, interview by John Hilton III, May 15, 2013, Taipei, Taiwan.
24. Xi, “A History of Mormon-Chinese Relations,” 191–92.
25. Po Nien (Felipe) Chou, personal history and journal entries, 2000–2005.
26. Liang Shih Wei, “Leadership Pattern Asia—Building Capability,” April 25, 2013, internal memo to Church employees in Asia, copy in possession of the authors.
27. Po Nien (Felipe) Chou, “CES Coordinator in Kaohsiung,” *Liahona* (Chinese), October 2000, n–16.
28. Chou, personal history.
29. Po Nien (Felipe) Chou, “Early Morning Seminary Special Report: Kaohsiung Stake,” *Liahona* (Chinese), October 2000, n–13.
30. Po Nien (Felipe) Chou, “CES Activity Report: Kaohsiung-Pingtung Area Combined Graduation,” *Liahona* (Chinese), February 2001, n–12; and Chou, personal history.
31. Chou, “CES Activity Report,” n–12.
32. Chou, personal history.
33. Po Nien (Felipe) Chou, “Seminary and Institute,” *Liahona* (Chinese), October, 2004, n–10.
34. Lin Mei Lan to John M. Hilton III, May 26, 2013.
35. Lee Shih Jung, interview by John Hilton III, May 23, 2013, Taipei, Taiwan.
36. Chin Chen Yang to John Hilton III, May 16, 2013.
37. Lin Mei Lan to John Hilton III, May 26, 2013.
38. Chou, personal history.
39. Chou, personal history.
40. Chou, personal history.
41. Chou, personal history.
42. Chou, personal history.

43. Chou, personal history.
44. Chou, personal history.
45. Chou, personal history.
46. "President Hinckley Travels the World," *Ensign* 35, no. 10 (October 2005): 72.
47. Chou, personal history. In 2011, Weng Wen Shuai (Eric) replaced Wu Chung Kai.
48. Chou, personal history.
49. *Seminaries and Institutes of Religion Annual Report for 2013*, 3.
50. Liang Shih Wei, interview by John Hilton III, May 15, 2013, Taipei, Taiwan. In addition to the early morning seminary program, President Liang also points to the 2006 "all-island" youth conference as another key identifying factor for the increase in the number of full-time missionaries.
51. Mao Jiemei, interview by John Hilton III, May 14, 2013, Taipei, Taiwan.
52. Fang Mei Yi, interview by John Hilton III, May 12, 2013, Taipei, Taiwan.
53. Lai Xiang Xien, interview by John Hilton III, May 13, 2013, Taipei, Taiwan.
54. Yang Xiao Han, interview by John Hilton III, May 16, 2013, Taipei, Taiwan.