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Alsford, Niki (Ed.) (2015). *Chronicling Formosa: Setting the Foundation for the Presbyterian Mission, 1865–1876*.¹

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Chronicling Formosa: Setting the Foundation for the Presbyterian Mission, 1865–1876 is the first book published in a series of a compiled collection of the Presbyterian Church in England in Taiwan between the years of 1865 thru 1939. This first volume focuses on the first years of the first English Presbyterian mission in Taiwan, from 1865 to 1876. The book is an edited collection of more than just missionary sources from the Archives & Special Collections of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London. The archive materials written by missionaries at SOAS include: correspondence, minutes, reports, publications, as well as photographs, etc. There are also non-missionary manuscripts included in the archives. The book represents a great portfolio of archival materials and it is a very useful guide for researchers interested in Taiwan's history and the Presbyterian mission. The book publication and the whole project is financially supported by the Shung Ye Museum of Formosan Aborigines in Taipei.

The author, Dr. Niki Alsford, in this book, is introducing often marginalized or neglected missionaries' records. The book is a useful publication giving an insight into an encounter between Western travelers and missionaries and Taiwan. In general, the book gives the reader information about Taiwan's past – about the period of time when Taiwan was opened to the West after the Opium wars of the 1860s.

The book contains the author's introduction and the main body of the book is divided into three distinct parts. Every part has several papers selected from archival materials, showing certain contemporary discourse about Taiwan. Furthermore, at the end of every part, there is a chapter called "Further Reading" that recommends other secondary sources dealing with the issue of that particular part of the book. The last chapter of every part is called the "Plate Section" and it contains pictures, maps and contemporary photographs. I consider it to be an excellent ending of each part, because with its illustrations, it enables the reader to better visualize and understand the historical period in which the papers were written. Also, it shows authentic photos of Taiwan's inhabitants, especially

¹ This book review has been supported by Chinet.cz

aboriginal people, as well as pictures capturing the origins of the Presbyterian mission on the island.

The Introduction is written excellently, giving a sophisticated and rather detailed overview of Presbyterian history in Taiwan. The Presbyterian Church, based on Calvinistic theology, sent the first Protestant missionary Robert Morrison to China in 1807. Later, in 1865, Carstairs Douglas and H.L. Mackenzie arrived as first Protestant missionaries to Taiwan, and the first Presbyterian to permanently settle in Taiwan was Dr James Laidlaw Maxwell. With this missionary has its beginning the story of the book, the story of Presbyterian mission in Taiwan (4–8).

In the Introduction, the author also gives some notes on theoretical problems connected with the aim of his study. He is explaining that mission, which is the main topic of the book, should not be reduced to western colonialism and imperialism, but, rather, it should be analysed, suggested by scholar Dana Roberts, “as a complex, multi-cultural historical process” (3). The book is observing the mission within this viewpoint. Niki Alsford is also reminding to the readers a problem of incomplete mission sources, which parts might be located in different libraries, institutions or private collections. Nevertheless, the used sources and archives are very rich and detailed (2).

The last part of the introduction is explanation of structure of the book, which is very helpful for the reader. The book is divided into three parts. The first part focuses on landscape of Taiwan, the second one on the issue of representation of indigenous inhabitants, and the third one is dealing with mission and its contemporary problems.

The first part, “Narrating Formosa”, is made up of six papers written by missionaries and travelers who came to Taiwan after it was opened to the West in the 1860s. The earliest paper of this part was written in 1864 and the last in 1975. Most of the papers were published in the *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society* or in the missionary journal *Chinese Recorder* (xxv). The papers in this part are descriptions of the landscape of island’s different areas. In this part, writers focused on subjects like topographical features of the island, local production, characteristics of the indigenous people. The characterizations of these local people included some descriptions of their religious beliefs and traditions, descriptions of their clothes, jewelry, and houses, as well as the climatic conditions they lived in.

The second part, “Notes on the Ethnology of Taiwan”, has nine papers. The earliest paper was written in 1861 and the latest in 1876. In this part, in accordance with its title, the papers are more focused on etymology. An important part of a particular writer’s description is an observation of a distinct population of the Han people and of the aboriginal peoples (原住民 *Yuanzhumin*) who were the first settlers of the island. Besides this, a lot of attention was given to the way people behaved and to describing and understanding their social life. For example, many writers noticed the tradition of head-hunting and keeping the skulls of aboriginal people (216).

The third and longest part, “Establishing the Presbyterian Mission in Formosa”, contains papers written between 1851–1876. It has nineteen papers with some of them containing several letters. In this part, there are papers dealing with three main topics: missionaries’ reflection on local community (papers 1–4), the relationship with other foreigners in Taiwan and the disturbance of local people

(5–11), and the difficulties of establishing a medical mission (12–19). A very interesting part of this section is observing not only disturbances that missionaries faced but even more their reflection of it and their suggested solutions. For example, in the paper written by a missionary signed as H.G. (1870), we see a clear criticism of the collaboration between missionaries and the British consulate (307–313). But in the other paper, written by missionary James Laidlaw Maxwell (1869), there is proclamation about a need for such cooperation (351–353).

Thanks to many editorial notes, readings are much easier to understand. The reader does not need to read much secondary literature to be able to follow the contemporary papers that refer to different historical events and geographical places. For example, in the fifth chapter of the first part, the author is explaining how Qing authorities in Taiwan divided land as well as ethnicity into two categories – raw (savage) and cooked (cultivated) (93). Therefore, the reader is able to follow the sources mentioning the concept. Furthermore, the editor is re-writing all into simplified Chinese and pinyin, because contemporary writers used different types of transcript.

However, there are some things I consider to be confusing about the book and its structure. Firstly, even though the book is proclaimed to be mapping years between 1865 and 1876, five of the total 34 papers actually included in the book were written before these dates – the first in 1851. And secondly, papers in each of the sections are sorted according to topic rather than the year of their publishing. It would be more effective to sort the papers in chronological order to observe changes in attitudes and problems of missionaries.

I really enjoyed reading Niki Alsford's book and I will surely use it quite frequently for my own research and I happily recommend it for other researchers or even non-scholars interested in this part of Taiwan's history. I would like to conclude this review with the words of Prof. Murray Rubinstein, who has written the *Foreword* to the reviewed book, because I truly agree with him: "While Alsford is not a Protestant missionary, he is clearly a Taiwan hand – and one who has come to know the history of the Presbyterian enterprise better than all but a few Westerners" (xxxii).