

Betty Jean Lofland, Michael Nai-Chiu Poon, *Protestants in Nineteenth-Century Macao, an Anthology*, Macau, Instituto Cultural do Governo da R.A.E. de Macau, 2009, pp. 350.

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As written in the Introduction, this anthology “discharges a long overdue debt”. This historical debt has indeed remained unpaid for centuries, perhaps because the Portuguese have been the official administrators of the territory, as well as because of the predominance of the (Roman) Catholic Church in the territory. The presence of the Honorable East India Company, the English periodical *The Chinese Repository* and all those Protestants working for the Company or for their missions should also be considered deeply indebted. They have all been overlooked by many interested in the history of Macau. Not the true historian, of course, but by many visitors, including educated ones, interested in the historical significance of the tiny enclave before it was filled by casinos.

As an anthology, the book gives an impressionistic picture of some facets of the place. It can surely not be considered sufficient for a more complete understanding of its amazing past, but it is an instructive and pleasant read, with a useful page listing sources, including the addresses of electronic sites. The choice of texts is motivated by the authors’ acknowledged desire to reaffirm the importance of Macau for the development of Protestant missions in the city and in China; this underlying aim provides the book’s unity, without narrow-mindedness.

What will you find inside the book? Of course, pages of the Diary of the American Unitarian Harriett Low, as well as many documents about the Protestant Chapel and Cemetery, purchased and administered, not always smoothly, under the responsibility of consuls from Protestants nations. There are also inspiring chapters on educational and medical activities led by the missionaries with the assistance of other devoted Protestants. Like Roman Catholic Jesuit missionaries did before them, it is reassuring to read that printing was also developed.

The towering figure of the Scottish Protestant missionary, Robert Morrison is, rightly, very much a presence in the pages of the book, justly so since he was living in Macau for such a long time, working on his famous translation of the Bible into Chinese, and his equally famous dictionary. Portuguese officials were, at times, not very friendly towards these foreigners, among other more nationalistic motives because they were afraid to displease the Chinese authorities; nor the Catholic Church, reluctant to let (heretical) competitors come in. It is consoling to read articles strongly decrying the opium business, and the trade of miserable coolies sent to the U.S.A., Cuba and Peru.

The scenes of everyday life in the rather closed expatriate community depict a city full of colonial prejudices, as well as incomprehension of many Chinese customs. But portraits of innovative and sometime curious people show the courage and determination of missionaries and their wives who showed a remarkable interest for Chinese people and their welfare. Far from being apologetic the anthology invites the reader to reflect on years gone by, to draw inspiration. This makes its pages good reading, where one may choose freely this or that chapter after visiting the streets of Macau with yet many remains of its rich past.