

Imagining Formosa: Victorian Writings on Taiwan, 1860-1885

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Abstract

Representations of Formosa (Taiwan), written and created during the mid-to-late nineteenth century, comprise the content of this study. The texts and graphic materials examined include those by long-term British and American residents in nineteenth century Formosa during the first generation of the island's treaty-port era, 1860-1885. The most prominent of these are works by early naturalists, ethnographers, explorers, and several early Presbyterian missionaries. Of particular interest are the natural history writings of early British Consul Robert Swinhoe (1836-1877); the ethnographic descriptions and diplomatic writings of U.S. Consul Charles W. Le Gendre (1830-1899), especially members of the Presbyterian Church of England, including Dr. James Laidlaw Maxwell (1836-1918), Hugh Ritchie (1840-1879), and historian William Campbell (1841-1921).

A comparison of these secular and missionary accounts of Formosa is central to this thesis. Common to the writings of both sets of authors is a fascination with the ethnography of Chinese and Aboriginal peoples in Formosa, a nexus which provides insight into both the uses and limits of post-colonial analysis and the history of Euro-American imperialism during these decades. This thesis is an interdisciplinary endeavor drawing on recent scholarship in literary studies, history, and anthropology, with special attention paid to critical works which have sought to historicize post-colonial analyses of travel literature. In addition to the textual analysis of the main body of the thesis, it is hoped that the appendices of primary research materials will be of value to future researchers.