nial subjects navigate other colonized spaces in ways that are both complex yet telling in the narrative of U.S. expansion during the early twentieth century. Indeed, the continued political and military presence of the U.S. in both the Pacific region and the Caribbean are reminders of this ongoing rearticulation of empire in the twenty-first century.

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Surely no American foreign mission has drawn as much attention, scholarly or otherwise, as the work of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) in the Hawaiian Islands. The ABCFM itself started the ink flowing with its early promotional efforts, which celebrated the importance of Hawaiian women of noble rank in the mission’s initial success. No one disputes that Ka‘ahumanu in particular played a crucial part in her role as kuhina nui or co-ruler. Contemporary scholarship has also deepened our understanding of the missionary wives, especially through the publications of Patricia Grimshaw and Jennifer Fish Kashay.

Jennifer Thigpen has nonetheless made a valuable contribution to this literature by connecting the dots in her book *Island Queens and Mission Wives: How Gender and Empire Remade Hawai‘i’s Pacific World.* She convincingly argues that it was the relationship between these women that gained the mission a favorable reception. The exchange of gifts between the women, not the preaching of the men, elicited the patronage of Ka‘ahumanu. The strength of Thigpen’s book lies in the way she contextualizes this relationship in the politics of Hawai‘i’s Pacific world. She emphasizes that the missionaries were by no means the first Westerners to have extensive dealings with Hawai‘i’s rulers. Ka‘ahumanu’s approach with the missionaries adopted the diplomatic style of Kamehameha, who had learned to deploy “symbols of Western civilization when they seemed beneficial or provided the opportunity to facilitate trade” (p. 11). The items of clothing that the mission wives produced for her served
as such symbols to enhance her position as the broker between Hawai’i’s rulers and the outside world.

Thigpen’s account stresses both contingency and misunderstanding. When the missionaries arrived in 1820 to find that the idols had been overthrown and the kapu system had come under assault, they interpreted it as a sign of providential favor assuring the triumph of Christianity. Thigpen sees instead “a politically destabilized, fractious environment” (p. 61) with a wide range of attitudes about the foreigners among the ruling class ali‘i. It could well have been the French, rather than the Americans, who gained the upper hand. Perhaps indeed the ultimate success of the ABCFM owed as much as anything to the fact that it had insisted on the men bringing wives with them. As these alternative possibilities played themselves out, Thigpen emphasizes the frustration of the missionaries over the delays and obstacles they encountered, but her point is a tad overblown. When one considers how many missionaries in other parts of the world labored for decades with virtually nothing to show for it, the progress of the Sandwich Islands Mission was certainly dramatic enough.

That the missionaries did not fully understand Ka‘ahumanu’s behavior is no surprise, but Thigpen skillfully interprets it. She sees the interaction between Ka‘ahumanu and the missionaries as mirroring the “system of reciprocal obligation” (p. 69) that generally structured relations between the ali‘i and the maka‘āinana or commoners. Where the missionaries might regard the generous provisions given to them as a blessing from God or expressions of gratitude from Hawaiians, those gifts instead represented the actions of a benevolent ruler who expected tribute in return. It did not take long, however, before the missionaries came to appreciate the importance of catering to Ka‘ahumanu’s demands, which allowed them to develop “a greater level of intimacy” (p. 71) with her.

The greatest shortcoming of this slender volume is its failure to deliver on the subtitle’s promise to explain how all this “remade Hawai’i’s Pacific world.” Thigpen’s thesis is that the relationships established by the mission wives created “an enduring cycle of exchange,” (pp. 1, 66) but she stops short of describing how that cycle endured and to what effect. The last chapter instead focuses on how Ka‘ahumanu and other women of rank entered into historical memory through the representations and misrepresentations of the ABCFM. If the book fails to capture the long-term results of these early female encounters, it nonetheless adds significantly to our understanding of the sources of American influence.

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