Paradoxes of Domesticity: Missionary Encounters in the Making of Christian Homes in Asia and the Pacific

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Vignette 1

One day in the 1890s, a group of Korean women gather together to pay a visit to the home of the local missionary from the United States. This was more than a social call; it was an expedition. The missionary home was filled with all manner of exotic stuff they had never seen before, and the Korean visitors were intrigued by the promise of what they might find there. In preparing to host her visitors, the wife of the missionary might take some extra care to highlight these attractions to make the experience all the more impressive for her guests—polishing the clock on the mantle, bringing the rocking chair into the sitting room, uncovering the typewriter on the desk. Here was an opportunity. Once these women were in her home and captivated by all of the exotica, she could talk to them about the Christian faith and start the process of bringing them out of their “paganism” into salvation. In the course of that afternoon visit, the missionary wife told the story of Jesus, and her guests listened politely, intently. To be sure, she imagined, some of those visitors would denounce their “traditional” beliefs to accept Christianity. And in the end one guest, a Korean shaman, expressed a readiness to accept Jesus Christ. However, that openness to Christ was not to the idea of a single God in the Christian tradition. Rather the shaman accepted Jesus as another in the panoply of spirits, reasoning that having one more god to worship could only be an added benefit.¹

April 3, 1820. A group of high-ranking Hawaiian women board the brig *Thaddeus* in the harbour of Honolulu to meet several Protestant missionary couples sent by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. They included two widows of King Kamehameha who had united the islands in one kingdom in the late eighteenth century and the wives of two of his senior advisors. The Hawaiian women admired the magnificent gowns of the seven American women who sat down with them on the decks to teach them the art of sewing. Mrs. Holman and Mrs. Ruggles got out their scissors and, using small patches of cloth, taught the Hawaiian women how to use a needle and thread. That day, the queen dowager Kalākua Kaheiheimālie ordered a dress for herself fashioned in the style of the missionary women, made out of white cambric and falling to her ankles. She wanted it finished quickly as they sailed along the western side of Oahu so that she might show it off to the King.

In subsequent decades noble Hawaiian women monopolised the arts of sewing and especially quilt-making. But they creolised the novel layering styles with those of their indigenous fabric *kapa* (barkcloth), eschewed laborious patchwork for the rarer appliqué technique and indigenised motifs. From the mid-nineteenth century the Hawaiian quilt became an icon of royalty, indigeneity and anti-colonial resistance. And although many Hawaiians embraced Christianity and relaxed the taboos (*kapu*) of their ancestral religion, which separated people by rank and gender, reverence for the indigenous gods of creation persisted into the twenty-first century.

These two vignettes reveal the powerful connection between the appeal of Christianity and the allure of material things, between religious conversion and capitalist commodities. The first vignette shows how material goods were useful as a device for instigating interaction. It was not just the exotic furnishings that served to draw in the Korean community. Even the daily necessities in the missionary home, like canned food, were tantalising in the eyes of the local women. Christianity, the new religion, was also a novelty, and despite the missionaries’ attempts to enforce the conventional Judeo-Christian concept of God, those local women interpolated their own familiar, indigenous and polytheistic belief system into their understanding of Christianity, thus demonstrating the dynamic and creative nature of missionary encounters. The second vignette shows how the new cloth became integral to the practice of Christianity. The power of this new foreign god was associated with such cloth and other goods which missionaries brought to the Pacific, but just as converting
to the new religion was not a matter of supine acceptance, adopting these novel commodities involved active appropriation and indigenisation of the power of foreign goods and the foreign god.

We call this volume *Divine Domesticities*. The double meaning of “divine” suggests both the sanctity in the notion of the Christian “home” and the sensuous beauty of a new way of materialising and embodying domestic life. Creating Christian homes was a central goal of evangelical activities. Christian spirituality was adorned with Western modern manners and material goods in the novel form of an ideal home life; however, as the stories told in this volume suggest, the nature of missionary encounters with indigenous populations was in no way a simple matter of transmission and acceptance. Rather, these encounters were dynamic and multi-directional.

Since the publication in 1984 of Jane Hunter’s book, *The Gospel of Gentility*, which pioneered a new direction of research in the field of missiology with its deliberate focus on women missionaries, a number of studies have explored the complex dynamics of gender, race and culture in foreign mission fields within the context of Euro-American imperial expansion. Western women missionaries constituted a group that was larger, better organised and more globally connected than any other organisation of women in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The extent of their global reach and connections with indigenous people and cultures was unprecedented. Earlier studies have demonstrated how the religious zeal to convert “heathen sisters” to Christianity drove thousands of European and American women out of the comfort of their homes and into the world with the conviction that they had a role to play in the “civilising mission.”

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Significantly, this missionary zeal was combined with a Victorian notion of domestic virtue and gentility that missionary women largely cherished as the true province of women. The establishment of “Christian homes” became the signature goal of women missionaries. However, commitment to religious piety coupled with their domestic ideals paradoxically allowed missionary women to engage in work in the public sphere, even at a global level. Women’s work in Christian missions was often spoken of as domestic duties and housework, a paradoxical metaphor since the work often took them far beyond the sphere of the home. As Susan Thorne notes, “Part of the transformative power of the missionary project was its sanctioning of transgressive behavior as religious exceptions to gender rules.”

Building on earlier studies, this volume advances both theoretical and methodological issues in three ways. First, we approach missionary encounters with indigenous people in Asia and the Pacific as indispensable to the development of distinct forms of “modern domesticity” in the various locales. The concept of modernity is notoriously complex and much debated. Many scholars speak of plural modernities. Recent research suggests that modernity did not originate in isolation in the West but rather emerged through the interaction between the West and its colonies. Like the notion of modernity, the concept of domesticity is also slippery and ambiguous. In “exploring the dramatic and spectacular changes in domestic life in the Pacific,” Margaret Jolly and Martha Macintyre point out that “everywhere colonialism had enormous effects, but these were regionally variable and rarely unitary. Rather than presuming the fatal impact of a monolithic colonialism we have tried to scrutinise the complexities of colonial processes.”

Eschewing a singular definition, we rather ask what constitutes the domestic in context, and how the existing practices—residential and architectural patterns, marital and parenting relationships, material cultures and bodily habits—change or continue. We see Christian missionary encounters as pivotal in the

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9 See Ram and Jolly, Maternities and Modernities.


development of diverse forms of modernity and central to the fashioning of diverse new domesticities. Contributors to this volume outline the specific contexts in and processes through which modern domesticities emerged. The dynamic interactions between longstanding beliefs and customs and newly introduced Christian doctrines, embodied practices and cultural meanings created environments in which earlier gender relations in the domestic sphere were simultaneously altered and/or reinforced.

A recurrent theme in this volume is how the local negotiation of modernity has often led to seeming contradictions between the ideals of modern domesticity and the actual practices. We demonstrate a palpable tension between an abstract ideal of Christian domestic life for the modern era and the actual practices of both the Western women missionaries and their indigenous converts. Contrary to an idealised home life and the conventional role that women were supposed to play in it, these newly Christian women often moved into public, sometimes even global, positions through educational and transnational Christian alliances. The new woman in the home was also engaged in the exercise of novel power and authority through the command of the new “scientific” practices of childrearing, hygiene and household management. The modern ideal of domesticity was also actively incorporated into the imagination of modern nation-state building and nationalist movements in resistance to colonial powers, especially in Asia. Those competing demands constitute the “paradoxes of domesticities.”

We use “paradoxes” as an expedient concept for revisiting the division between the public and the private domain from a comparative perspective. Historians have shown how domesticity was not always limited to family life. Furthermore,


the tensions between the ideological poles of a feminine “domestic” and masculine “public” became even more pronounced in the era of imperialism when the transnational interactions between people, material goods, ideas and images intensified at an unprecedented pace. What followed was a major shift in perspective on the proper space for women and men and their engagement in the family and the broader society. The concept of “paradoxes of domesticities” captures the dynamic, fluid and sometimes contradictory currents in how modern domesticities that were shaped by the transnational encounters between disparate cultures and people within hierarchical power relations.

Second, as suggested above the essays in this volume demonstrate the agency of Asian and Pacific women in linking their past religious, familial and cultural practices with newly introduced “modern” Western ideals and practices. The two introductory vignettes above and the essays in this volume indicate that indigenous populations did not simply accept the newly introduced religion and lifestyle; rather the encounters are better characterised as creative interaction, resistance, transformation, even indigenisation. Previous studies have largely privileged the perspective of Western missionary women, in part because there is a relative wealth of archival materials written by and about Western women missionaries. In contrast, there is a relative paucity of materials created by indigenous women. To capture the dynamic interplay between the indigenous and the foreign, the old and the new, it is crucial to amplify the voices of local people so that their experiences form part of the narrative, along with those of Western missionaries. Thus contributors to the book have drawn their analyses and insights not only from Western archival sources but also from primary sources in Asian and Pacific languages.

Furthermore, given the low rates of literacy among indigenous women in certain places and periods and the consequent scarcity of written materials authored by them, contributors have utilised alternative sources including photographs, artefacts, architecture, museum collections, oral histories and ethnographic observations. These proved to be highly valuable in revealing the reciprocal flow of influences between Western missionaries and indigenous populations in Asia and the Pacific, from the nineteenth century to the present. In a later section of this chapter, we offer more detailed explanations of the different “ways of knowing” deployed and methodological challenges we faced, bringing into sharp focus the dynamic interplay between foreigners and locals in missionary encounters. Our contributors make copious but critical use of archival materials, keenly aware that available documents are partial in both senses, incomplete...
and inevitably saturated with colonial and missionary desires. Still, we are creative in admitting other modes of analysis when “written” documents and local voices are conspicuously absent.

Third, we bring together examples of missionary encounters in the region of Asia and the Pacific in order to highlight their breadth and complexity and to demonstrate how the different local and national histories and cultures engendered a wide range of perceptions, discourses and practices of domesticity. This vast coverage offers two distinctive advantages. It allows us to examine the impact that different kinds of colonial relationships had on indigenous populations. We illustrate how the status of missionaries and whether they were part of a colonial authority or not created different perceptions on the part of the local people. An exemplary comparison can be made between US missionaries in the Philippines, which was a US colony, Korea, which was colonised by Japan—a non-Western and non-Christian imperial power, and China, which was semi-colonised by Western powers and Japan. These differing colonial relationships served missionaries in their evangelising activities in distinctive ways, both positive and negative.16

The other advantage is that the breadth of the region we cover in this volume reveals not only tantalisingly diverse local cultures and histories, but diverse emphases in analysis. For example, the different salience of “written” and “oral” traditions in Asia and the Pacific help us contemplate an important methodological issue in how to analyse literacy per se in the dynamic interactions between indigenous people and Western missionaries. For instance, standard historical accounts in East Asia show how indigenous literacy for a small elite was crucially reconfigured by Christian mission education, catalysing the phenomenon of the “New Woman,” which proliferated in part through the thriving print media.17 Reading and writing women, who were largely educated at mission schools, pursued new ways of doing domestic life and beyond. In the Pacific there was no such indigenous literacy so Christianity brought not just the Bible but the written word. Christian projects simultaneously transcribed and translated oral languages into texts, pre-eminently Bibles, catechisms and

16 Hyaeweol Choi deploys the concept of “Christian modernity” in her analysis of American missionary discourses from Korea during the politically turbulent period between 1905 and 1910, when Korea was being colonised by Japan. She contends that while religion was deeply implicated in the imperial politics of Japan and the USA, the idea of Christian modernity running through different narratives emerges as a powerful way for the missionaries to resolve the tensions caused by the political turmoil intertwined with racial and cultural clashes. See her article, “Christian modernity in missionary discourse from Korea.”

hymns and introduced Pacific women to books in foreign languages for the first time. Indigenous language texts in the Pacific date back only to the first Christian missions. Indigenous languages persist in daily conversation, as cherished oral traditions and powerful spoken or sung words. These are crucial in charting changes in both the material and spiritual dimensions of domesticities.

**Permeability and paradox: Revisiting domestic and public in Asia and the Pacific**

When missionary women arrived in their various mission fields, they brought with them a particular sense of civilisation based on Christian faith and more often than not the Victorian notion of domesticity. Based on these values and this worldview, they led a campaign to reform the “heathen family” into a Christian family. Yet, they had to deal with the existing gender relations and practices of the local people. For example, in East Asia, gendered spatial distinctions prevailed due to the Confucian-based dichotomy of “inner-outer” with women in the inner domain and men in the outer. From the perspective of missionaries the confinement of women to the inner, domestic space was a clear sign of oppression and cruelty, and yet, as historian Martina Deuchler argues in her analysis of women in Chosŏn Korea (1392–1910), the confinement of women (mostly of the upper class) to the domestic space did not necessarily prevent them from having an influence in the public sphere through their moral righteousness.18

Or, as Latu Latai’s chapter shows, the architecture of the traditional Samoan house, usually open without enclosing walls or doors, shocked women from the London Missionary Society due to the lack of privacy. Yet, the indigenous open design of the *fale* (house) was deeply divine—connecting its inhabitants with ancestors and the land. Ancestral religion conferred on women high status as sacred sisters and priests and yielded significant powers of mobility. It was under such richly diverse cultural circumstances that a missionary campaign to reform the “heathen family” into a Christian family was carried out with both intended and unintended outcomes.

Hyaeweol Choi’s chapter explores the complex notion of “home” that was negotiated in the transcultural encounters of Korean women and American women missionaries at the turn of the twentieth century. She details how the missionary home served as an “object lesson” to local women, who had the opportunity not only to see the Western-style missionary household and all of its accoutrements but also to witness the interactions between Western husbands and wives and the child-rearing styles of Western parents. To be sure, local women did not always accept Western-style domesticity. Many of

18 Deuchler, “Propagating female virtues in Chosŏn Korea.”
them could not afford modern products from Western countries or imported ingredients for a Western diet. Some found Western child-rearing practices or conjugal relationships inappropriate for the Korean context. Nonetheless, the missionary home presented a new model of domesticity embodied in material, familial and religious practices.

If the missionary home offered a small-scale object lesson to local women, mission schools for girls were a second key platform for cultivating and propagating Christian domesticity through the curriculum, extracurricular activities and perhaps most importantly dormitory life. As Laura Prieto shows in this volume, “dormitory work” provided missionary women with a “splendid opportunity for doing personal work” in the Philippines under United States colonial rule. The dormitory as a secluded and protected space served as a “Christian home” where Filipina students learned not only domestic skills and hygienic practices but broader secular knowledge and competitive sports.

Graduates from mission schools also played a significant role in social reform movements with a particular focus on home improvement and hygienic child rearing. Helen Schneider and Sonja Kim offer fascinating analyses of the dynamic interactions between newly introduced ideals of domesticity and locally appropriate and meaningful practices in their accounts of the social service programs in rural China and the “Better Baby Movement” in Korea, respectively. Schneider’s chapter uncovers the rich history of Chinese women’s involvement in social service programs that had been initiated by missionaries but further developed and indigenised by Chinese people. Such programs targeted less privileged families in rural communities through short-term training projects, hygiene movements, day-care and nursery programs, and model home exhibits in their immediate urban neighbourhoods or in more rural parts of China. These outreach projects were designed to define and address some of the modern social problems observed by foreign missionaries and Chinese elites, but they also provided practical training and experience for a growing cohort of professional women. Sonja Kim’s chapter focuses on American missionaries’ attempts to transform Korean practices in child birth and child rearing in collaboration (and sometimes in direct tension) with the Japanese colonial state which also actively instituted maternal and infant welfare programs for its industrial and military goals. More importantly, Kim demonstrates how the activities and demands of Korean clients and Korean nurse-midwives helped to shape these projects to enhance maternal and infant health.

Newly available scientific knowledge offered a wide range of information on nutrition, hygiene, and home finance. Modern material goods and ingredients exemplified ideas of elegant home interiors and tastes for a modern lifestyle. A well-educated mother and wife was considered better suited to manage a modern household than was the traditional figure of the sacrificing mother.
At the centre of these changes in East Asia was the introduction of home economics as an academic discipline. Missionaries and mission organisations played a major role in facilitating this process. Ava Milam (1884–1976) was a particularly influential figure in this regard. She was an American professor of home economics at Oregon State University who made a tour of East Asia, advocating the crucial importance of scientific homemaking for the broader society.\(^{19}\) Her influence was embodied in the establishment of home economics departments in China, Japan and Korea. Furthermore, future experts in home economics from the local populations were trained with scholarships provided by universities in the United States. These students expanded the scope of women’s work in the public sphere in the name of the ideal domesticity for the modern era. This creative tension between devotion to the private domain and an active search for public engagement often characterises the transcultural interactions between Western missionaries and indigenous women. While those interactions reinforced the assumption that women belonged in the domestic sphere, they simultaneously led women to greater national and even global engagement, thereby challenging established gender boundaries.

The paradoxes of domesticity become evident when we contrast the conventional image of missionary women as “maternal” and “domestic” with what they actually did or how they actually lived.\(^{20}\) As Latu Latai argues in this volume, British mothers of the London Missionary Society sent their children away from the mission field and thus failed to fulfil their idealised maternal duties.\(^{21}\) A missionary wife could also hire servants for extremely modest wages to perform childcare and other domestic chores that would normally have been done by the woman of the house. Local servants usually came from the poorest strata of the local community. In East Asia or the Philippines, a single US dollar went a long way toward covering the cost of maintaining household staff. The general expectation was that pastors, priests, nuns and missionaries would lead relatively humble lifestyles, so a missionary household with several servants was rather incongruous. Although there was a measure of public criticism on the seeming contradiction of maintaining a missionary home with servants, some missionaries argued that the hiring of servants helped them meet the greater goal of evangelism. The rationale was that having this assistance in the

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21 Living in the mission field included dealing with a remote environment, poor transport and communications and/or unhealthy tropical environments (often fused with notions of moral contamination). Any schools that existed were considered inferior to schools at “home.” Some missions established foreign schools (such as the P’yŏngyang Foreign School in northern Korea) specifically for the children of missionaries and teachers were hired from their home countries. Even this type of foreign school could not fulfil demands for a modern education beyond the secondary level and for higher learning the only option was to send children “home.”
home enabled missionary women to engage more completely in the mission’s evangelical and educational work with local women (see Choi this volume). Missionary women’s advocacy of Christian homes was thus made visible and public as they were relieved of the very domestic work they advocated.

Single women missionaries who had no explicit family obligations in the mission field also enjoyed the assistance of local servants and employees. Unlike married women, single women missionaries were more fully incorporated into the mission organisation as independent participants. For one thing, they were paid for their work, albeit usually at a rate lower than that of men. In contrast, married women did not receive a salary because they were considered dependants of their husbands. That difference in status reinforced a view in which single women missionaries were professionals paid to do the work of the mission; thus, for them domestic tasks were of lesser importance. In her chapter, Laura Prieto argues that single women missionaries “were themselves ambivalently domestic at best” and “embraced new ideals of public engagement, advanced education, professionalism, wage earning and physical vigour.”

Moreover, even if those missionaries were fully committed to the ideals of domesticity, their advocacy did not necessarily have the intended outcome. Rebecca Copeland’s chapter addresses precisely this issue by analysing the close relationship between Mary Kidder (1834–1910), a missionary from the Reformed Church in the United States, and her Japanese student, Wakamatsu Shizuko (1872–1895), an orphan who eventually became a prominent writer, translator and educator. In their longstanding relationship, the lessons that Kidder meant to deliver on the issues of domesticity, marriage and career did not have the expected impact on her student. Copeland concludes that both Kidder and Wakamatsu managed to conceal their own “need for agency and independence, behind the cloak of domesticity and mission.”

As each chapter in this volume demonstrates, the boundary between the public and the private in Asian and Pacific contexts was thus fluid and permeable. The missionary home served as a pulpit. Ideals of domesticity at mission schools were taught by missionary women whose professionalism, economic independence and pleasure in the modern leisure of sports deeply inspired indigenous girls and women, many of whom in turn chose to work in the public arena as teachers, nurses, doctors, writers, journalists or secretaries. Domestic ideals in abstract and practical terms paradoxically resulted in a cadre of new women equipped with modern knowledge and zeal for work in public and global realms.
Sacred and secular genealogies: Christian missions and states—colonial and contemporary

Western missionaries often established missions in places that had been colonies of their home countries. Comparison of the American missionaries who went to the Philippines, a colony of the United States, and those who went to Korea, a colony of Japan, shows how the ramifications of this nexus of the missionary enterprise and the colonial endeavour created different dynamics in the interactions between missionaries and the locals. Because Korea had been colonised by Japan, a non-Western and non-Christian imperial power, American missionaries were intricately positioned between the Japanese colonial authority and Korean nationals, who were often anti-Japanese. Koreans viewed American missionaries not as part of the official colonial power but rather as a potential ally in resistance to Japanese authority. This perception created unique opportunities for American missionaries in that they gained special favour from Koreans as “modernisers.” However, they also had to face another reality in that they were forced to collaborate with Japanese power in order to maintain and strengthen mission activities under Japanese rule. Even when they made careful choices in their collaboration with Japanese authorities, working with a non-Christian colonial power was not easy. Sonja Kim’s essay in this volume demonstrates how American missionaries were engaged in a “tacit partnership” with the colonial government to maintain their mission work, while they also felt compelled to promote their own distinctively Christian medicine as opposed to the secular medical service practiced by Japan.

The experience of American missionaries in the Philippines was different. In her chapter, Laura Prieto details the historical context of US imperialism in the Philippines, whose existing cultural inheritance had come from Malay tradition, Islamic influence and centuries of Hispanic Catholic colonisation. American colonial authority in the Philippines, Prieto suggests, was not seen as a force of “invaders or conquerors” but more as an agent of “benevolent assimilation,” whereby the United States would inculcate native peoples in the “individual rights and liberties which [are] the heritage of free peoples.” Thus American missionaries in the Philippines “saw themselves as partners of the federal government in education, filling in the religious components missing from a secular system.” In particular, the provision of education was a “cornerstone of benevolent imperialism,” and mission schools were designed to “help modernise and Americanise as well as ‘Christianise’ the Filipino people.”

Along with different relations to the respective colonial powers, vastly different histories and local cultures also generated distinctive receptions for the new

22 Choi, “Christian modernity in missionary discourse from Korea, 1905–1910.”
Christian faith and the changes it brought to women’s lives. The effects can be seen in the ways local people perceived missionary work and the work of newly-converted native Bible women. The opportunities Bible women had were similar in Korea and the Philippines. It was an opportunity for literacy, travel, employment, leadership and even social respect in the form of a diploma. However, the socio-cultural contexts in which they took up the work of the mission were vastly different. Filipina women had much more freedom and independence of action in daily business and social life. In contrast, Korean women, like many other East Asian women, were secluded and prohibited from the public domain. Thus in Korea the early groups of Bible women were subjected to criticism for their new religion and public activities, and sometimes even threatened in the streets. Filipina Bible women were not subjected to such treatment.

The complex and tense relationship between Christian missions and secular states in diverse local contexts plays out both in the colonial period and beyond, as chapters on India and Papua New Guinea (PNG) reveal. Kalpana Ram suggests there are sacred genealogies for the developmentalist state in India. Development, like Christian conversion, is an emotional and embodied process engaging a radical “turning” and a sense of rupture between past and present. Christian women of Tamil Nadu who became teachers, health practitioners and social workers in the employ of Catholic NGOs, contrasted the constraints and the irrational traditions of their mothers’ lives with their own mobility and the enlightened freedom of modernity. Ram discerns a longer genealogy connecting these contemporary twentieth-century women with their precursors—Bible women who were models of independent, professional women. Moreover, Ram suggests that Christianity, and in particular Catholicism in Southern India, was and is a crucial institution of governmentality beyond the state in both colonial and postcolonial periods. She argues, Christianity is relevant not only as a minority religion associated with remote, “backward,” low-caste groups or marginalised groups like the Dalits, but is foundational in much broader movements for emancipation in India, including feminism and socialism.

The chapters by Jemima Mowbray and Debra McDougall similarly address the question of the relation between Christian missions and the state. But in the Pacific, unlike India, Christianity is the majority religion. In the contemporary states of both PNG and Solomon Islands approximately 95 per cent of people proclaim they are Christian, and Christianity is, together with kastom (tradition/culture), fundamental to the avowed values of the independent state. Jemima Mowbray notes the lacunae in studies of the gender agendas of the colonial state in PNG and suggests that both Christian missions and early colonial administrators saw women’s hard physical work—cultivating taro and yams, looking after pigs, hauling wood and water and nurturing children—as the source of their low status. Yet colonial policies apropos land and labour in fact
increased women’s burdens in subsistence work and marginalised women from the processes of economic modernisation. Men, not women, were employed as indentured and later waged labourers on plantations, mines and in towns, even as domestic servants, and men alone gained the new knowledge of agricultural extension and modern education and assumed leadership roles in church and state. The distinction of domestic and public in the context of colonial PNG thus maps a distinction between a feminised subsistence sphere in the village and a masculinised modern sphere in the town.23

Mowbray complicates and nuances this narrative derived from colonial state archives with narratives of the lived experience of women of Buka Island. These women are committed Christians and proud to be ol meri bilong wok (hard-working women). Their work in the commodity economy was portrayed as maternal nurture, but they see a big difference between cash earned through cultivating cash crops and cash earned as independent workers. They see education, first provided by Christian missions rather than the state, as the privileged route to such good work and greater autonomy from the demands of kin.

Debra McDougall’s chapter likewise charts how the domestic and public realms have been reconstructed by the interaction of Christian missions and state in neighbouring Solomon Islands. Based on extended ethnography in Ranongga in the Western Solomons and a group portrait of one prominent family, McDougall explores the processes whereby women have been recently included in realms of customary authority previously restricted to men. She stresses women’s past strong leadership roles as chiefs in the matrilineal clans of the region. She affirms the central importance of women in the collective conversion to Christianity which opened up new spaces for women to lead in the public sphere. As in PNG, men dominated in the sphere of modern economics and politics introduced in the colonial period; this domination is now often considered kastom. McDougall examines the complementary partnership of Joyce Dunateko and her husband Simion Panakera as an example. He became an influential leader in “native administration” and a successful entrepreneur. She managed a large, bustling and very clean household. She also became prominent in the Methodist women’s group.24 Their daughter Marina Alepio, was recently elected to the position

24 Such church groups are, as Anne Dickson-Waiko observes, the “missing rib” in studies of Pacific feminisms. See Anne Dickson-Waiko “The missing rib: mobilizing church women for change in Papua New Guinea,” Oceania 74(1–2) (2003): 98–119, p. 103.
of “tribal” chief, legitimised by locals espousing values of human rights and gender equality. But, McDougall argues, the power of chiefs is parlous and “domesticated” in an era where state politicians prevail.25

The architectonics of home and emotion: New Christian families in conversion experiences

As we have already observed, Christian missionaries confronted vastly different forms of domestic dwelling across the region, many of which they designated “houses” or “huts” rather than “homes” because they lacked privacy, conjugal seclusion and the emotional intimacy they associated with “home, sweet home.” As Hyaeweol Choi shows (this volume), American Protestant missionaries saw Korean houses as small, dark and dingy in contrast to the large homes of the first missionary couples, which emitted a divine “glimmering light.” They were not just glowing with space and exotic modern furnishings but with the love of an intimate couple and a novel nuclear family.

Similar questions about the material and emotional texture of the new Christian families fashioned not only in houses but in mission dormitories and refuges emerge in several chapters focused on children: Annie McCarthy and Jessica Hinchy on colonial India, and Sue Gronewold and Shih-Wen Sue Chen on China. McCarthy grapples with Christian child rescue as exemplified in the relationship between Miss Amy Carmichael, an Anglican missionary from Keswick, and Preena (aka Pearl Eyes and “the Elf”), the first child she rescued from the fate of being a temple dancer and wife to the Hindu gods (devadasi, but in British eyes, a “prostitute”). Carmichael aimed to rescue Preena from what the British saw as “sexual slavery” to the gods, a judicial invention at odds with the complexities of being devadasi. The discourse of child rescue in colonial India, as in many contemporary Christian NGOs, creates the child as victim. But, as McCarthy shows, Preena was in Carmichael’s words “wilful,” playfully subverting Biblical lessons. Preena’s recalcitrance continues as she matures from impish child to a Christian teacher, and ultimately a nun in Carmichael’s new order, Sisters of the Common Life. As her compound swells, Carmichael increasingly legitimates this new Christian home with the language of family—she is their mother and they are all servants of God. But, unlike the devadasi, these servants are celibate.

These novel forms of extended holy Christian families were in the contexts of British colonial India distinguished from the “deviant domesticities” which are the subject of Hinchy’s chapter. Diverse Indian families were marshalled by the British into “normal” conjugal families. But only those of subalterns were

subject to imperial intervention. After the Indian Revolt of 1857, despite the new official policy, the colonial state and Christian missionaries continued to intervene by attempting to rescue children born into the families of both female prostitutes and transgender eunuchs, especially hijra. Both evinced the spectre of sexualised childhood but whereas the removal of children from families of eunuchs was legislated, it was not for families of female prostitutes. The British sought to prevent “emasculating” and sodomy in the hijra domestic space, and conceived it as dark, criminal and inscrutable. The complex realities of hijra relationships were obscured by British claims that children were kidnapped and coerced into such identities and that hijra exclusively threatened procreative sex (rather than blessing as well as cursing fertility). “Rescuing” the children of hijra had practical limits in the problematic co-operation between levels of government and between the colonial state and Christian missions. Moreover, hijra children themselves often subverted their rescue and reform. They were not perceived as innocent victims but as dangerous and corrupting. Yet, despite the British efforts to exterminate eunuchs, they resisted and persist to the present.

Gronewold’s chapter deals with “deviant domesticities” in Shanghai, where a Christian refuge for Chinese prostitutes was opened by an interdenominational committee of Western women in 1901. Prophetically called the Door of Hope, this was a rescue mission that recuperated prostitute women and their children. From the early twentieth century and especially after the Communist victory in 1949, it was critiqued as foreign intervention. The Communists expelled all Western missionaries in 1951, and the Door of Hope was firmly closed. Gronewold shows how, despite the maternalist coercion and discipline on the part of the German and American women who ran the refuge, the dominant memories on both sides were of “tender ties,” a cosy home, a new family. Elderly Chinese women recollected that they had indeed been “saved”—from cold, poverty and starvation, and their souls claimed for Christ. Western women managers were perceived as “mothers”; co-residents were sisters, aunties and nieces. In their memory work Western women also emphasised enduring familial bonds and their love for younger girls. This was a “tough love,” a love mixed with coercion and confinement. And no doubt the rosy, even romantic memories of the Door of Hope were, for its erstwhile Chinese residents, amplified by being marginalised as “foreign lackeys” by the Communist regime while for the Western women they were fuelled by the Cold War and inflated in their own life trajectory as they moved from being powerful saviours to frail elderly women.

In dealing with the contrast between indigenous and introduced Christian ideas of home and family we need to consider how ideas and emotions are materialised in architecture. Latu Latai depicts how the architecture of the Samoan fale with its vaulting dome, its formidable wooden posts tied together with intricate
lashings and its openness to the tropical air was iconic of the free flow of the extended family, or *aiga*. In such open spaces Samoan women moved about expansively, gathering power over the course of their lives from their sacred role of sisters to their later status as wives and mothers. The early missionary wives of the London Missionary Society who dwelled in the *fale* were aghast at the lack of privacy, at the prospect of having to fashion the “object lesson” of the domestic life of a Christian home on an open stage, and they were hugely relieved when they could move into their own homes with white limestone walls, partitioned rooms and picket fences. One hundred and eighty years later Samoans are devout Christians, yet the indigenous *fale* persists. Latai insists that the foundational love and respect for the sacred sister perdures alongside that of wife and mother, which is more privileged in Christian theologies. Yet, as we have witnessed in East Asia, the establishment of mission schools in Samoa also promoted the value of education for women and opened up independent vocations for women as teachers, nurses and secretaries.

In stark contrast to the Samoan *fale*, the form of the indigenous house of the Huli of PNG was small, snug and enclosed by deep trenches and tall stands of trees. Until recent decades husbands and wives lived, ate and slept separately, with men peripatetically moving between clan men’s houses, their own small houses or visiting their wives (several if they were polygynous) and women living with other women, including their affines. Holly Wardlow observes that there was arguably no domestic sphere which men and women shared prior to Christian conversion. In the pre-Christian past, a moral and fertile union was seen to require the rigorous separation of men and women, husbands and wives, subduing and containing uncontrolled desires. Despite theological differences, all the diverse denominations to which the Huli converted from the late 1950s required that Christian converts be monogamous and that husbands and wives live together. But, as Wardlow argues, conversion is not a singular event but a protracted process, even a troublesome struggle. Living together has proved difficult for Huli husbands and wives, even more so than ending polygyny. Many Huli struggle to embody this new spatial, emotional and ethical practice; it becomes an *askesis*—a self-discipline of everyday life—enhancing both the person and the collectivity. Not all have embraced it and, for those who have, the close physical proximity brings the peril not just of sexual pollution but of emotional intimacy. Husbands seem especially worried about the eviscerating power of a proximate wife’s breath, smell, words, emotions and thoughts lying heavily “on the skin.” Wardlow’s chapter thus underlines the close association between the materiality of the Christian home and its sensuous, emotional and ethical character. Christian projects of conversion have tried not just to transform the fabric of houses but the gendered embodiment of persons, refashioning
both what lies on the skin and beneath. This is focal to the final four chapters:
Shih-Wen Sue Chen on China, Laura Prieto on the Philippines, Anna-Karina Hermkens on Papua New Guinea, and Margaret Jolly on Hawai‘i and Vanuatu.

On and beneath the skin: Embodiment and sensuous agency

Shih-Wen Sue Chen’s chapter explores the trope of child rescue in China and the horrors of female footbinding in works published by the London Missionary Society in the early twentieth century. Back in Britain performances of dramas such as *He and She from O’er the Sea* evoked Chinese cruelty (and in particular binding the feet of young girls to make them dainty and sexually alluring “golden lilies”) graphically depicting the excruciating pain which young girls suffered and the cruelty of their mothers and fathers. Girls who converted were portrayed as unfettered and emancipated from a cruel patriarchy, as in the transformation of one character from Little Bitterness to Little Happiness. Chen argues that such performances not only raised crucial funds for missionary efforts but inculcated a sense of responsibility on the part of British children for “saving” Chinese children. For the child actors the multi-sensorial experience of music, memorising lines and donning costumes entailed “literally putting themselves in someone else’s shoes.” Such performances often occluded the difficulties of missionary efforts and reinscribed the confident presumption that Chinese women’s lowly status was a sure sign of a stagnant civilisation. At the same time, for actors (and perhaps audiences) these performances also troubled gender constraints at home; exemplified by tight-laced, deforming corsets in dramatic contrast to free-flowing Chinese costumes.

Transforming what is on and beneath the skin is also focal to Laura Prieto’s chapter. She focuses on Filipina residents of dormitories and Bible women working for American Protestant women in the period 1900–1930, a period characterised by a new image of the modern Christian woman who was not sequestered in domesticity and practising pure piety, but rather was confidently entering the public sphere through the opportunities afforded by higher education and corporeal reshaping. The dormitories of mission schools were both refuges designed to protect the purity of young girls and women and hot houses in the creation of “New Women.”26 Central to this was a kind of corporeal confidence cultivated through athletics like baseball and basketball, feminine

forms of “muscular Christianity.” However, the figure of the modern Christian woman was not just an American imperial imposition; Filipinas vigorously transformed introduced models. Prieto illustrates this through the *terno* or “butterfly dress,” the preferred formal attire of Bible women and some white American “sisters.” This dress was not a form of “native dress,” nor modelled on either the clothes of American missionary women or the global style of the “Modern Girl.”

Creolising two Spanish styles, it was a distinctive design with butterfly sleeves symbolising both nationalism and femininity, sovereignty and modernity. It was associated with both suffragists and beauty queens, making “suffragists seem less radical and beauty queens more progressive.” Its material elegance and exotic appeal likely attracted American missionary women to collect and wear the *terno*. In Prieto’s terms this imperial refashioning was “the antithesis of assimilation and Americanisation.”

Anna-Karina Hermkens similarly sees corporeal transformation as central to Anglican missionary efforts in the Collingwood Bay region of PNG from the 1890s. This involved stripping away the signs of savagery and heathenism on women’s bodies: their tapa skirts, their necklaces and armlets, their coconut oil and especially their facial tattoos. Such designs visualised clan ancestral histories, custodianship of land and the changing relations in a person’s life cycle, signs on the skin which penetrated deeply into the bone of a person. The process of corporeal conversion is evinced in a missionary’s account of the story of Manua, “transformed from a frightened, dirty and smelly heathen girl into a nice-looking clean young Christian women dressed up in western clothes.”

Although it seems that wearing Western clothes was less critical to Anglicans in this region than missionaries elsewhere in the Pacific, changing what was on the skin was still seen as central to changing what was beneath: corporeal and spiritual conversion were thus intimately linked, in both foreign and local Christian perception. Hermkens also points out an interesting paradox in this process, as foreign male missionaries eagerly collected “old clothes,” along with other “curios.” These exchanges were not only crucial to local relations but were disseminating evidence of the progress of their mission to the world beyond. They eagerly collected the materials of “satanic” practice and sent them off to museums in Port Moresby, Australia, Britain, Europe and the United States. They thus visualised and materialised the changes, the “vanishings” they had helped to effect, and refashioned themselves as both Christians and agents of a secular, scientific imperialism.

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“‘The New Women’s movement’ in 1920s Korea: rethinking the relationship between imperialism and women.”

Margaret Jolly’s chapter, relates the twin histories of the Hawaiian quilt and the “island dress” of Vanuatu, both dating from the mid-nineteenth century. In Oceania, as elsewhere, the adoption of cloth and the sewing skills associated with Christian missions have been unduly seen as an imperial imposition and thus a form of capitulation to the gendered corporeal codes of Christianity. In the case of the Hawaiian quilt, the predominant patchwork forms taught by New England Protestant missionary women to high-ranking Hawaiian women were within a few years transformed into distinctive local forms, using the rarer and more valued appliqué technique with a cut-out layer on top of a bottom layer of a different colour (for example red on white). Layering techniques and aesthetic associations were suffused with the materials and meanings of the indigenous cloth, kapa, which was earlier used both to clothe bodies and wrap sacred things. The motifs of Hawaiian quilts swiftly transformed from snowflakes and log cabins to local flora and fauna. More than a depiction of local landscapes, these were claims to indigenous custodianship of land and ocean in the face of American imperialism and celebrations of the power of Hawaiian royalty against the invading cartels of mercantile, plantation and missionary influence.

The story of “island dress” in the independent state of Vanuatu yields distinctive echoes. From the 1840s missionaries from the several Christian denominations working in the archipelago were eager to clothe the indigenous population, both men and women, since exposed breasts, testicles and bottoms were seen as symptoms of spiritual depravity. The Presbyterians concentrated in the central and southern islands were especially eager to cover the offending body parts, and one particular form of the “island dress” worn in contemporary Vanuatu is derived from a design for a night-gown that appeared in a late nineteenth-century Presbyterian magazine. Though this may be seen to be a capitulation to Christian codes about sexuality and modesty, Vanuatu Christian women eagerly embrace this style as their own and use bright fabrics with tropical Pacific motifs and adornments of lace and ribbons to sew dresses which are “flash.” Island dress is simultaneously a sign of the independent nation of Vanuatu, of collectivities of women (for example church groups and NGOs) and of individual tastes. Still, these days younger and single women often refuse to wear island dresses saying they are hot, ugly and old-fashioned. The disciplining efforts of jealous boyfriends, husbands and male chiefs who insist that women should wear island dress reveals that clothes are statements as much about intimate, domestic relations and sexual morality as national and Christian dispositions. Thus, the history of island dress is not a matter of either / or but rather both / and.
Ways of knowing

This volume offers novel insights into the paradoxes of domesticity which emerged for women through the encounters between Western missionaries and people in Asia and the Pacific. And, as many chapters affirm, such insights are grounded in distinctive ways of knowing. These are alert not just to the words of the archive but the multi-sensorial, embodied character of past and contemporary experience. There has been much reflection of late on the complicit relation between the assemblage of archives and formation of nation-states and about the embodied experience of working in archives. The missionary archives which are foundational for most of the chapters of this volume are not as heavily implicated in the formation of national histories as state archives, and even though they have been used to write histories of emergent nations such as China, India, Korea and Vanuatu, they also reveal the transnational even universal character of the Christian missionary project. Like all words from the past distilled in documents, these archives are partial in both senses: partial in the sense of an incomplete congregation of written words preserved on paper; and partial in the sense of being written with a particular purpose, which in the case of Christian missionaries was to promote and record the process of conversion and modernist visions of civilisation.

As we witness throughout this volume the diaries and letters of individual missionaries, the records of missionary organisations and churches, and the magazines used to promote missionary causes and raise funds are replete with stories of how Christian missions tried to change the very idea of “home” in Asia and the Pacific. These voluble voices articulate and amplify the words of Jules Michelet: that the archive is not a place of silence but a noisy place resounding with the loud voices of the dead. This imagined conversion of the written word into an aural experience alerts us to another important perception: work in the archive is a multi-sensorial and embodied experience. Who is not prone to the malaise of “archive fever” as one touches, often with tentative white gloved fingers, a bundle of dusty, decaying papers with barely perceptible ink scrawls? Or as one feels the indented press of a red pen correcting a

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29 See Steedman, The Archive and Cultural History; reflecting on Michelet and also on the idea that the historian reanimates the dead by breathing in dust of the archive.

typescript which caused such agony to the author who never published it? The palpability of the pulp of paper is felt by any historian and the process whereby historians faithfully transcribe with their sharpened pencils, word for word (including errors), the jottings of a past author is a process whereby the researcher re-embodies experiences of the past in the present, a sort of “ghost-writing” across decades or even centuries. Technologies of replication from archaic microfilm to the latest digital cameras can, as Carolyn Steedman and others observe, detach and distance us from communing with the pages of the original but the latest technologies also allow us to magnify and read inscrutable handwriting and to digitally trawl through documents searching for thematic connections and key concepts occluded by the lineality of reading in a strict chronology, from start to finish.

These reflections on access to the written texts of the past reverberate differently in our two regions. In Asia there are centuries of indigenous literary traditions and copious texts written in local languages before, during and after Christian conversion. While this longstanding tradition of literacy in Asia was an entitlement of the privileged classes for centuries, the vast majority of women had been excluded from access to the tradition. Missionary work in education began to change this gender disparity in literacy and education. Indeed, local populations were attracted to mission schools in part because of the possibility of becoming literate. Together with enthusiastic local responses, women missionaries pioneered work in girls’ education. By the early twentieth century, educational institutions for girls and women in China, Japan, Korea, the Philippines and other countries were largely run by missionaries and their local colleagues.

In the Pacific by contrast, although there were graphic forms used in designs of pots, tapa and tattoos, there were no indigenous forms of writing. Indigenous literacy thus emerges first through European contacts and preeminently in missionary projects from the first Catholics in Micronesia in the seventeenth century. Christian texts such as the Bible, catechisms and hymn books were not just circulated in metropolitan languages like English, French, German, Spanish and Latin but were frequently translated into local languages. Missionaries

31 This is Margaret Jolly’s memory of working in the John Layard Archives in San Diego.
32 See especially Steedman, “After the archive”; and Derrida, Archive Fever.
33 Choi, Gender and Mission Encounters in Korea.
34 Missionaries made a substantial contribution to the development of national languages. In East Asia, written Chinese had prestige and was widely adopted as a lingua franca before Protestant missionaries arrived in the nineteenth century. Vernacular writing systems were not appreciated by the Chinese-reading literati class. However, missionaries discovered that it was the Korean vernacular that allowed for the faster dissemination of the Bible. As such they strongly advocated the use of Korean han’gag. Subsequently, missionaries’ educational work for women combined with this emphasis on vernacular languages contributed both to the formation of a class of educated women and an appreciation of the vernacular languages. See Ross King, “Western Protestant missionaries and the origins of Korean language modernization,” Journal of International and Area Studies 11(3) (2004): 7–38.
Paradoxes of Domesticity

were enthusiastic language-learners and even linguists in places like Papua New Guinea, Solomons and Vanuatu, where the diversity of local languages was a huge challenge (880 in Papua New Guinea, 77 in Solomons, and 110 in Vanuatu still extant today). Islanders thus combined their indigenous oral traditions with introduced literate traditions, rendered both in metropolitan and local languages. If we use the sources written in local languages and especially by Islander authors, new perspectives emerge. Latu Latai’s research on the crucial significance of Samoan missionary men and women in the conversion of the western Pacific has revealed the critical importance of using not just the copious and well-thumbed texts of Western missionaries but archival sources in Samoan language and combining these with Samoan oral histories and subsequent ethnographic and historical materials.

More recently, historians of Christianity have been complementing these written sources with the visual record of drawings and photographs; they are reconnecting to the past through the preserved materiality of houses and dress; they are even excavating the past through archeological digs, not just what has been controversially called the “pre-history” of those without writing, but the more recent historical archaeology of Christian missions in Asia and the Pacific. Many of these different ways of knowing the past are exemplified in this volume.

Photographs are crucial to the stories of Christian conversion told in several chapters. Through a selection of superb black and white photos, Hyaeweol Choi lets us imagine the “sightseeing” that Korean women did in the homes of American Protestant missionaries, not just witnessing but perhaps even coveting the grandeur and novelty of these dwellings with their cosy interiors outfitted with chairs and tables, rugs and soft furnishings, all part of the “object lesson” of the true Christian home. These photographs also suggest the central role of Korean nannies and domestic servants in maintaining the cleanliness and order of the homes of the American missionaries and document the emergence of centres of higher education in home management like Ewha College where Christian values and professional home economics were taught together. Anna-Karina Hermkens’ ensemble of missionary photos from the Anglican Archive of Collingwood Bay PNG illustrates the dramatic corporeal transformation of Maisin girls as they converted to Christianity: their valuable body ornaments and tapa skirts removed, their identifying facial tattoos banned, their bare breasts covered with new cloth.

In her story of the relation between the Protestant missionary Amy Carmichael and Preena (the child Carmichael claimed to “rescue” and convert), Annie McCarthy uses the evidence of photographs to open up a space between Carmichael’s violent maternalism and Preena’s resistant agency. Early photographs in Carmichael’s books present children like Preena not as individuals but in “ethnographic” mode, as typical representatives of their Hindu religion and caste, girls
destined to become devadasi. Later photographs taken both by Carmichael and a professional photographer are rather more personalised and familial, evoking the way in which Carmichael increasingly authored herself as a “mother.” While Carmichael’s texts offer many glimpses of Preena’s witty cheek and subversive questioning, the posed photographs rather suggest a poised Preena sitting in pure, virginal white robes or confidently teaching a class of younger converts.

Finally, Laura Prieto’s chapter suggests that, in the context of the American Protestant mission in the Philippines, photographs are not just ephemeral illustrations of what can be discerned in texts. A photograph taken in Mindanao before April 1922 is exemplary: it shows two American Protestant missionaries, Isabelle and Florence Fox, with four Filipina women who in the caption are collectively designated as “girls.” Although Prieto suggests that the erasure of indigenous individuality is “emblematic of the colonial archive,” here rather their particularity is pictorially evoked and their mutual relation suggested, across the borders of nation and race. Prieto reads self-consciousness, wariness and weariness in their expressions but also observes their connections through costume. They stand together in a row with the white women at either end, “enclosing” the unnamed Filipinas who are simultaneously subjects of Christian conversion and agents changing their clothes and changing their lives.

Other ways of knowing are employed elsewhere in the book. Anna-Karina Hermkens’ research was enhanced by working with the materiality of museum collections as well as texts, photographs and ethnographic observation and interviews. Margaret Jolly has learnt a great deal from looking at collections of Hawaiian quilts in museums and galleries in Honolulu and through observing, touching and wearing both indigenous “grass skirts” and introduced “island dress” in Vanuatu. Latu Latai and Holly Wardlow respectively offer a graphic sense of the materiality of the Samoan and the Huli house through the experience of their own dwelling in such houses. We have not in this volume made use of archaeological techniques to track the transformations of domesticities but historical archaeologists are at work digging in the diverse sites of Christian missions across the Pacific and Asia. All of these non-textual techniques evince a strong sense of the embodied material character in transformations in domestic and public life.

**Positionality and our present**

Finally we want to briefly reflect on our own positionality as authors in this volume. We are a diverse congregation, some of us writing about the places where we were born or from where our ancestors came, others about places to which we have travelled as scholars, either through the embodied process
of “fieldwork” or through long sojourns in the archives. We are aware that regardless of our positions it is too easy to adopt a position of knowing scholarly superiority in relation to people living in the past or in a present remote from our own familiar experience. Indeed in response to our problematic of “paradoxes of domesticity,” articulated at our international conference, one of our authors felt compelled to ask “whose paradoxes?” and to ask whether our own lives were not also saturated with similar paradoxes. They surely are.

Writing from Australia, where our first woman (now past) Prime Minister was cruelly attacked not just for her policies but for her looks, for her living with an erstwhile hairdresser in a de facto relation, for not being a mother and for not being Christian, one can discern the ghosts of past debates about good Christian homes and the rival claims of married maternity and public professional independence. We live in an era where diverse new families are being created through new regimes of fertility control, adoption and gay marriage but where some are keenly resisting these changes with appeals to the traditional values and practices of Christian families. Perhaps this volume has shown that these “traditions,” forged in the fire of global Christian modernities, are rather less ironclad and more flexible and sinuous than some proclaim.
This text taken from *Divine Domesticities: Christian paradoxes in Asia and the Pacific*, edited by Hyaewool Choi and Margaret Jolly, published 2014 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.