
REVIEWS

Andrew Strathern, Pamela J. Stewart, Laurence M. Carucci, Lin Poyer, Richard Feinberg, and Cluny Macpherson, *Oceania: An Introduction to the Cultures and Identities of Pacific Islanders*. Durham, N.C.: Carolina Academic Press, 2002. Pp. 280. US\$30 paper.

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THIS BOOK is a collaborative enterprise between six scholars who have worked in different parts of the Pacific. It aims to provide an overview of the ethnography, history, and contemporary changes in a broad range of societies across the Pacific region and is designed for use in college-level courses in conjunction with more-specialized literature on specific areas. References are supplied at the end of each section for instructors to use in guiding students to more in-depth readings in the subject area.

The authors share the viewpoint that an interdisciplinary approach as taken in this volume is important to the overall understanding of the contemporary processes of change in Pacific societies. Anthropologists increasingly are using history to explain and add depth to their ethnographic fieldwork accounts. This holistic approach allows them to address international influences that go beyond the immediate area they write about, taking into account the effects of globalization on contemporary Pacific peoples.

The authors also acknowledge the importance of the extensive oral histories of Pacific Islanders. Such stories, passed from generation to generation, explain the origin and placement of peoples in their landscapes and their relationship to the spirit world; they can be used to authenticate the precedence of particular groups for land use and other resources. Moreover,

these stories help establish group identities and rights in their contemporary world.

The book is divided into three broad sections, each written by specialists who have lived and done extensive fieldwork and research in the particular area. The three sections are the "South-West Pacific," "Eastern Pacific," and "West Central Pacific." These areas equate roughly with the long-standing designations of Melanesia, Polynesia, and Micronesia, respectively. The change of names for these areas does not change the boundaries significantly, which is helpful for those familiar with the earlier designations. The name change does, however, help identify the geographical boundaries more clearly, and this augments the geographical and geological explanations of the migration patterns to settle these areas. The authors remind us throughout that boundaries are fluid, and they emphasize the historical and modern movements of people within and across these boundaries.

Each section incorporates discussion of the (1) prehistory, ecology, linguistics, colonial and postcolonial history; (2) ethnographic information and some detailed case studies; (3) patterns of change resulting from political and economic development; (4) impacts of religious change and the transformations of Christianity; and (5) assertions of renewed cultural and political identity. The style of presentation in the three sections is as varied as the cultures contained therein. An area map is an important inclusion at the beginning of each part of the book.

The references that end each section include lists of published biographical and autobiographical accounts of Pacific peoples. These, along with collaborative writing between Pacific Islander scholars and others, are recognized in the literature review for their growing importance. These reference sections are especially helpful to instructors in guiding students toward research in specific areas. Several pages of photos precede the bibliographies. For students unfamiliar with the Pacific, the pictures provide enough visual reference to give a general idea of the people, customs, adornment, and vernacular architecture of each area. The selection shows a balance of early (1960s to 1980s) and contemporary (late 1990s to 2000) photos, which helps to convey the idea of cultures as continuously changing and adapting.

The introduction and Southwest Pacific section were written by Andrew Strathern and Pamela J. Stewart. Strathern and Stewart provide an overview of that great arc of tropical islands beginning with New Guinea and going eastward to the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, New Caledonia, and Fiji. One or more case studies for each island group are presented. With its large size and diverse peoples, New Guinea understandably receives the most treatment. Strathern and Stewart stress that kinship and descent—and related practices of wealth exchange—provide the basic framework for the case stud-

ies. These studies address issues specific to an island group or area, such as "Chiefship and Political Change in Fiji," "Status Acquisition in Vanuatu: Art and Power," "Exchange and Social Change on Choiseul Island," "The Asmat of Irian Jaya: Art and Its Changing Meanings," and "The Use of Natural Resources in Papua New Guinea," to name a few.

Part 2 discusses the Eastern Pacific, written by Richard Feinberg and Cluny Macpherson. They give an overview of Polynesia, noting the relatively uniform cultures of this huge triangle of the Pacific while also pointing out exceptions to this general geographic designation. Among other commonalities is Polynesian seafaring, which played an important role in the distribution of these peoples throughout the Eastern Pacific. Physical appearance, language, and highly centralized and stratified social organizations are common traits found throughout Polynesia. A historical and cultural overview of the various island groups includes "Subsistence and Expressive Arts," "Central Themes in Polynesian Culture," and the impact of "European Contact." Discussions of contemporary issues feature case studies of Aotearoa's Maori, Samoa, and Anuta; these exemplify the differences encountered and cultural and political accommodations that evolved as Polynesians adjusted to resources in high islands like Samoa and atolls like Anuta, and to climate change when settling Aotearoa.

Laurence M. Carucci and Lin Poyer wrote Part 3, on the West Central Pacific, the area formerly known as Micronesia. These authors point out the importance of the sea, which, in the perception of these seafarers, served to link peoples together through well-traveled mariners' paths. The overview stresses "Ecology and Society," wherein the size, location, and resources of the islands have determined population and social development. The prehistories of "Western Micronesia" and "Eastern Micronesia" are treated separately, recognizing the diverse origins and periods of early migration, as is "Micronesia's Complex Chiefdoms." A review of the literature on social and political development discusses work by Paul Rainbird and James Peoples. "Exchange and Inter-Island Contacts" gives an overview of basic knowledge based on archaeological interpretation and points out that limited data are available to interpret the region's prehistory. Language diversity is treated as reflecting the duration of human settlement in the various island groups. A large portion of this section is devoted to the discussion of identity, shaped by varied colonial histories and contemporary political relationships. The complex history of the Mariana Islands is divided into issues particular to Guam and those of the Northern Marianas. Central Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, and Palau are each treated separately, recognizing their diverse histories and contemporary political development. Several case studies cover issues faced by other islands in Micronesia, namely, Kiribati, Banaba, Bikini,

and Pohnpei. Christianity's influence on the various islands is reviewed in terms of both history and influence on cultural identity. The section ends discussing the "Reification of Culture and the Politics of Tradition"—the emergence of political self-determination that has generated a renaissance of activities that exemplify and verify cultural identity.

This book is packed with information based on the latest published research data available. Its organization into sections allows the reader to select and focus on a particular subject area. The information is further exemplified in case studies to stimulate critical thinking about issues. Finally, the extensive bibliography provides a path for students to sharpen their research skills.