**Cultural Survival**

Talk at USP, Fiji, September 1991

Micronesia has had a long and interesting history–one with many challenges to people’s survival.

*First Settlement*

* Settled by ocean-going people, Austronesian speakers, who made their way into the Samoa-Fiji-Tonga triangle about 1000 BC. They sailed up the Tuvalu-Kiribati chain into Micronesia.
* Settlement of the larger high islands first, then washing back into the atolls to the east. They brought root crops, and maybe pottery as well. They formed distinct language groups.

*Polynesianization of Eastern Micronesia*

* Canoes came from somewhere to Kosrae, where they built stone fortifications and established a chiefly system similar to Polynesia. They planted kava there and ruled for a couple of hundred years.
* Strangers came to Pohnpei “west from Katau”. Built a stone city at Nanmadol, introduced kava and unified the island under a class system. With Isokelekel’s uprising years a couple of centuries later, the present political system began.
* Canoes arrived in Chuuk c 1300 AD with Soukachau and Souwoniras heading a small contingent. Settled on Weno, built up the present clan system (although not the chiefly structure that existed on Pohnpei and Kosrae. Perhaps too tired by this time? Possibly they introduced different varieties of breadfruit that could be more easily preserved.

*Yap and Palau*

* Uncertain where the Yapese came from–as also Palauans–but there was contact between Yap and Palau and the PNG area.
* Common features: style of the men’s house (similar to Melanesia); relationship between *pebai* and *bai*; women serving in the men’s house in Palau and Yap.

*Christianity in 19th Century*

* Missionaries brought the faith, but would have liked to change other elements in the culture, which they described as a “viscous mass of humanity.” They promoted individualism, and tried to stamp out kava and parts of the chiefly system.
* Results of the missionary impact on culture varied. Kosrae, with its dramatic population decline, needed new political forms; it took over American democratic ones. Pohnpei, on the other hand, resisted and kept its old chiefly system, along with kava. Chuuk got rid of long hair, turmeric and warfare, but kept its dances and the old social system.
* Conclusion: people take what they need and want from outsiders; so they pick and choose from foreign systems.

*Foreign Governments in Micronesia*

* Yapese under German rule encouraged public works projects: Tegeren Canal, road and docks around the island. Yapese were used to doing this kind of work for village chiefs. So chiefs stood to gain because German authority enforced and strengthened the power of village chiefs. Everyone got what they wanted from this arrangement. (But Yapese did not cooperate in the same way with Japanese.)
* Chuuk, by contrast, was in a constant state of warfare and wanted peace under a single rule (even foreign rule)/
* Loan word as testimony to change and adaptation. Examples: skokie, baseball terms in Japanese, genjo, denki, kasarampu (gas lamp).

*Today’s Attitude*

* People today feel they may have gone too far in adopting the US political system and the cash economy. Where have all the old values gone?
* But Micronesia’s history (like that of all places) is one of borrowing–words, systems, material objects. People have changed and developed all the while.
* That does not mean we should not check for social viruses as people change–eg, suicide and family problems–so that treatment can be given, just as medicine was used to combat measles and the flu.
* Past give us confidence for our future–that we can adapt to changing situations. Our work, then, is to produce the “person of tomorrow”–one who is able to feel at home at a cocktail party and in the *nahs*.