Book and Media Reviews
Mari Japan Study Encouragement Award in honor of its contributions to scholarship that bears on Japanese history, I think a Japanese translation of this book, including a refinement and expansion on the Japanese dimensions of Nakayama’s life and career, would be welcome in Japan. Such an edition might highlight the often overlooked stories of Pacific Islanders of Japanese heritage in Micronesia, while exploring the complex transitions between prewar Japanese and postwar US domination in Northern Oceania.

Modern leadership by Islanders has long been framed, coached, or measured by the discourses of policy makers in metropoles like Tokyo, Washington, Canberra, Paris, or Wellington, but the careers of leaders like Tosiwo Nakayama demonstrate how this not need be the case. In bringing forth this book, Hanlon has given us not only a political biography but also a refreshing and bold revisitaton of Nakayama’s questioning of what it means to be Micronesian in the first place. This could not be more timely: in recent years, the future of the Federated States of Micronesia has become more and more uncertain as the termination of compact funding approaches in 2023, and even Nakayama’s childhood home of Chuuk has been considering secession. Making Micronesia provides a much-needed infusion of Nakayama’s innovative and hopeful spirit. But more importantly, this book is an empowering story of the fight for sovereignty and unity amid incredible adversity, with potential to inspire readers throughout Oceania.

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On the verge of a referendum concerning New Caledonia’s possible self-determination, The Kanak Awakening provides useful insight into the country’s recent political history, offering purchase on the historical complexity of the contemporary situation. A primary strength of this volume is the nuanced methodology employed by David Chappell, a long-established specialist in Pacific history. The various dimensions that led to the events described by the author are carefully contextualized as he navigates between individual trajectories and collective reverberations, local struggles and large national issues, while keeping the global context in sight. Revelatory focal events are situated historically, and repercussions in the present serve as harbingers of issues that arise over time.

As the title announces, the Kanak political awakening is the book’s singular and salient focus. Chappell highlights the fault lines of this evolving identity along various dimensions including key actors’ life courses, stances on independence or autonomy, reformist or revolutionary orientations, and positions vis-à-vis the urban-rural divide. Outside influences in consolidating this emerging Kanak discourse—for instance, the prominence of socialist influences—are shown to operate in parallel to the revival of custom in Kanak political
discourse. As Chappell documents both fault lines and connections, he offers a compelling discussion of the visceral links between culture, identity, and authenticity over the last few decades of Kanak experience in New Caledonia. He is especially sensitive to external exigencies, reminding readers that identities always shape themselves in reaction or even in opposition to others. Given the colonial context and the multiracial environment (in which internal contradictions are not unique to the Kanak community but are a common feature of local experience), any attempt to read regional history in terms of tired dualisms or simplifications is revealed as likely to result in unsatisfactory and inaccurate conclusions. Chappell, however, locates the story of the “Kanak awakening” in concrete events and lived experience, and he presents a specific tribute to the role of students, especially the founders of the Foulards Rouges, for example Nidoish Naisseline and Jean-Paul Caillard, who, torn between their attachment to traditions and their exposure to the French uprisings from 1968, took a leading role in the rising Kanak claims for recognition.

In the first chapter, the author describes the transition from an archaic colonial state of affairs to the post-World War II opening of administrative and political possibility that characterized the 1950s. The Indigénat regime was abolished, citizenship was granted to Kanak, and political reforms seemed to resonate with a sense of a greater autonomy. However, autonomy won was quickly withdrawn under the pressure of President Charles De Gaulle’s search for a faded French prestige, motivated by a nationalist desire to make a comeback on an international stage marked by Cold War tensions and the difficult processes of decolonization.

In the second chapter, New Caledonia’s interrupted decolonization is linked to ongoing French decolonizations and the rise of the Third World countries elsewhere. Moreover, while France attempted to launch a “democratizing decentralization” (71) in some former colonies, its grip on New Caledonia was only hardening under the shadow of a nickel boom. A response to these dynamics, among other things, fueled the commitment of Caledonian students in France, who experienced a transformation from reformists to activists in the 1960s and 1970s (77).

The third chapter grapples with the triple core of the book: “the Kanak awakening,” the birth of the Foulards Rouges, and the radicalization of young activists. If activism started simply, with graffiti and polemical tracts, the French powers replied severely, sending “troublemakers” to prison (76)—where incarceration, with a dark irony contra the state’s apparent intent, became the sign of individual commitment to the national emancipatory struggle for those agents of change. Moreover, while the importance of custom was affirmed and used in the legitimacy claims, the merging of local claims and global rhetoric of postcolonial discourses contributed to the visibility of New Caledonia on the international scene.

Chapter 4 further exposes the complexities of national transformation and nation shaping in the contradictory visions of sovereignty offered by participating actors. While socialist
discourse was crucial in the formation of an independentist project, the persistent multiracial factor is shown to have confounded a number of reform efforts, especially given the immigration policies orchestrated by the French government to outnumber the Kanak and make them a minority in their own land. Ultimately, this rigidified the terms of the dialogue, autonomy claims being overtaken by independence claims, and left departmentalization the most visible alternative.

However, “the fluctuations between bridge building and antagonisms at home” (161) only become more and more clear-cut over time, as observed in chapter 5. While the rehabilitation of the Kanak culture was carried on noticeably by Jean-Marie Tjibaou and the Festival Melanesia 2000, the effervescent rhetoric of multiculturalism entered every corner of the political sphere. The answer of the French government was translated in the Dijoud Plan, which was another (failed) political proposition that aimed at resolving the ethnic tensions and conforming to the United Nations Resolutions of 1960 and 1970 that recognized the Kanak right to self-determination.

The hardened positions and the exacerbation of antagonistic discourses from the main actors and the passive aggressiveness of the French government and its failed promises—as in the Round Table of Nainville les Roches in 1983—led to escalating acts of violence throughout the 1980s. In the sixth chapter, the author argues that this period explains “why now-autonomous leaders are pursuing a ‘common destiny’ through negotiation” (176). How the notion of a “common destiny” was finally heard, through articulations and reflections around the significance of a Caledonian personality, is taken up interestingly in chapter 7.

Chappell concludes by assessing the possibilities framed by the Noumea Accord that reconsolidate New Caledonia within France’s political sphere as its only sui generis territory (236); he notes that “after a century of colonial segregation, and half a century of fluctuating decolonization and recolonization, progress has been made toward a shared destiny” (242).

This extensive analysis of the historical and bifurcating complexity of New Caledonia striving toward independence is a timely contribution, as the territory has entered the ultimate phase of the Noumea agreement. It provides the reader with a striking and richly informed history that could be usefully complemented by political science–oriented and anthropological readings on the construction of a Neo-Caledonian citizenship, in tension especially with the particular legal status (or customary status) attributed to the Kanak.

However, the book overall is a perfect illustration of the issues surrounding nation building in a (post)colonial and multiracial environment. In the case of New Caledonia, the current status quo is defined by the Noumea Accord, a tridimensional power structure edged by politics, law, and history. This treaty is important because “after so many attempts by Paris to impose new status on New Caledonia, the reverse happened: France changed its own national constitution to accommodate Kanak hopes” (212). Chappell’s book is an important mile-
The work is divided into three main parts, beginning with expansive coverage of the French Pacific presence before 1996. Fisher broadly outlines the motives for French colonization, the evolution of colonial administration, and the often-ambiguous French policies toward development and local political rights in the colonies. She suggests that French motivations in the Pacific act as a source of thematic continuity as national prestige, national security, and latent commercial ambitions drive French policy in each period. Notably, these policy orientations explain decisions to grant or rescind local autonomy, detonate nuclear devises, bomb the Greenpeace vessel Rainbow Warrior, or deploy special forces to storm the cave on Ouvéa to end the 1988 hostage crisis.

The second part of the book follows the end of nuclear testing in French Polynesia in 1996 and devotes most of its pages to the political shifts, debates, and elections in New Caledonia after the 1998 Noumea Accord in anticipation of an eventual vote on independence. This period is characterized by experimentation with new policies on the part of the French state in its shifting responses to autonomy and independence demands from its Pacific territories. Frequently, however, the state’s meddling in local politics is argued to have produced mixed results, as attempts to ensure that pro-French political parties remained strong sometimes misfired or backfired. The final section of the book examines the continuing motivations for France to remain in the Pacific: the international prestige of being a global military power and the commercial potential of its vast exclusive stone in the understanding of these political developments.

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Denise Fisher makes a timely and unique addition to studies of the French-speaking Pacific with *France in the South Pacific*. Working to convey French thinking on the Pacific for an English-speaking audience, she offers important historical context for the forthcoming referendum on independence in New Caledonia and the recent reinscription of French Polynesia on the United Nations’ list of Non-Self-Governing Territories. Fisher’s service as an Australian diplomat in the French Pacific provides a distinctive lens through which she appraises, analyzes, and presents the role of France in past, present, and future Pacific worlds. Her analysis focuses primarily on politics and economics, with close attention to the intersections of France and Australia over the last century and the potential for closer ties between them as two of the larger powers in the South Pacific. *France in the South Pacific: Power and Politics* makes a clear argument that France will be a significant regional player as the twenty-first century unfolds.