
Implications of the Hokule'a

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The Hokule'a is a large double-hulled canoe; a replica of an ancient Polynesian voyaging craft. Constructed in 1975, the canoe is 60 feet in length and just over 15 feet in width. Weighing nearly 25,000 pounds, it is a very stable sailing craft which has meant different things to different people and groups.

Responsibility for the vessel lies with the Polynesian Voyaging Society, a non-profit organization dedicated to the research and education about Polynesian Voyaging Canoes, navigation systems and all other arts and artifacts that made the first Polynesian discovery and settlement of these high volcanic islands possible.

The canoe first became internationally famous when it sailed from the Hawaiian Islands to the Society Islands in 1976 as an official part of Hawaii's celebration of the United States' Bicentennial. The excitement generated by the successful roundtrip, without the use of any modern navigational instruments on the down-trip, is now history. One can reflect on the 1976 voyage and feel the *mana* that was created by people from many walks of life. After all, the project was the result of many minds and many hands from

throughout the community. The result of all that energy was the most outstanding of all Bicentennial projects undertaken in the United States during 1976.

WORLDWIDE RECOGNITION AND ACCLAIM

Probably more significant, was the tremendous impact that the Hokule'a had on people residing outside the Hawaiian Islands. The project was televised worldwide. It has been written up in various journals. It had extensive coverage by the news media and a book has been published on the voyage by one of the founders of the Society who was also a crew member on the 1976 down-trip. One can go on and on relating incidents of people residing outside Hawaii, who followed the trip.

However, the canoe naturally had the greatest impact on the people of Hawaii. It brought together people of varying ages from all the major islands within the boundaries of our state. It was cultural and it was spiritual. It was scientific and it was experimental. It was a community project that was Hawaiian in nature, yet representative of all ethnic groups.

Recently at a meeting of people interested in education throughout the Pacific Region, the question was posed

about how Hawaiians in the area of education could become more involved with other Pacific Islanders. For too long, it has seemed as though everything in the Pacific focused only on the South Pacific, and Hawaiians in the North Pacific were not part of the picture. What could we in Hawaii do to improve our position with our fellow Islanders? A couple from the South Pacific replied that the Hokule'a had initiated a beginning with its 1976 voyage. People throughout the South Pacific were very much aware of the Hawaiians and their voyaging canoe, Hokule'a, and regarded it as a very significant event for them too.

PACIFIC RESPONSE

While it would be brash for me to say that the canoe has had an impact upon people throughout the Pacific Region, it is probably safer to recall several events that did take place when the Hokule'a sailed the longest Pacific sea route between two major island groups. For example, an official holiday was proclaimed in Tahiti and three days of festivities and parties took place when the Hokule'a arrived there. It should be noted that the gathering for the arrival of the Hokule'a was the largest concentration of Polynesians witnessed in Tahiti in modern times. More people turned out to greet the canoe than to greet former French President Charles De Galle. In fact, rumor was that some of the French officials were worried because of the number of Polynesian gathered in Papeete.

Over 200 songs were written about the Hokule'a, which also attests to the *mana* of the canoe. A genuine cultural exchange took place and this relationship is still strong. Our sister organization, the Tainui Association in Tahiti has been building their own voyaging canoe which they hope to sail to Hawaii in the future.

American Samoa's Governor Peter Tali Coleman, who at the time of the 1976 voyage, was with United States' Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands,

sent a letter to the people of Hawaii and congratulated them on their achievement. An official holiday was also declared in Micronesia. This was significant as the chief navigator on the Hokule'a was a traditional navigator from the Western Caroline Island of Satawal in Yap, Federated States of Micronesia.

Upon the completion of the 1976 project, the canoe was dedicated to the people of Hawaii to be used as a "floating classroom." The canoe was sailed to all of the Hawaiian Islands during 1977 and Hokule'a crew members gave talks and presentations about voyaging and other relevant topics to many school children and communities.

Instructional materials that can be used to supplement Hawaiian Studies curriculum have been produced; workshops for teachers and the community have been conducted; and visitations to the canoe have been allowed when feasible. In addition, when the canoe travels, new crew members are included so that a cadre of qualified people will be available to sail the canoe, and perhaps even participate in a long voyage in the future.

The Hokule'a is a very important part of Hawaii and its people today, especially for our students. A few years ago many people would not believe that a replica of an ancient voyaging canoe could be sailed nearly 3,000 miles from Hawaii to Tahiti without the aid of any modern navigational instruments and aids. Though there remain skeptics, the larger percentage of the population, including those who actually sailed on the canoe, now have a better understanding of the skills and wisdom of the early voyager who sailed the Pacific Ocean. The Polynesians who discovered and settled in the many islands of the Pacific could navigate using the stars, the moon, the ocean swells and the sun. They also were extremely knowledgeable about the winds, the clouds and ocean currents.

While many of us have felt all along that the Polynesians had the talent required to endure long voyages,

the Hokule'a has provided us with the means to experience and express what was known to exist. The voyage was the embodiment of all things found in a culture, and for us in Hawaii, it is probably the most exciting and important cultural happening that has taken place since Cook's arrival.

COMBINING PAST AND PRESENT

Much has been said of the symbolic importance of the Hokule'a. For many, it represents the resurgence of interest and pride in Hawaii's past. However, Hokule'a is not only a symbol of things Hawaiian. It is also representative of the common elements - (the vast ocean, means of crossing it, and the courage and attitude needed to survive) - that link together islands as diverse as Satawal, Tahiti and Hawaii. Though a voyage into the past, it is also a

voyage of the present which allows sharing and learning amongst Pacific Islanders, many of whom have managed to maintain lifestyles in tune with traditional values.

One year ago, we were able to make a second successful voyage of 6,000 miles without the use of any modern instruments. This is significant as we did not stop our efforts of learning more about voyaging. Being out at sea on a canoe the size of the Hokule'a, is an experience of fulfillment that can only be realized by being a part of it. It is a challenge of the highest order as one has to maintain a strong relationship with an environment that is constantly moving and changing. Unlike the early farmer, fisherman or house builder, the voyager's only reward is one of survival. That's not a bad reward considering that the only other option is one of surviving.