

Modekngei: A New Religion in Belau, Micronesia, by Machiko Aoyagi. Tokyo: Shinsensha Press, 2002. ISBN 4-7877-0207-6; xi + 378 pages, tables, figures, photographs, maps, appendix, glossary, place names, notes, bibliography, index. ¥3500.

Originally published in Japanese in 1985, this is an ethnographic account about the Modekngei religion of Belau (the Republic of Palau) in western Micronesia. The religion was founded around 1914, during the Japanese occupation of the islands. Until now, most scholars who conducted research on Modekngei have characterized it as an anticolonial social movement, from its beginning and throughout the Japanese administration period, which took on the guise of syncretic religion. In this book, Machiko Aoyagi challenges the prevalent notion by providing counterhistorical narratives collected from Belauan people, and detailed descriptions of Modekngei theology and religious practices among the followers. She argues that Modekngei was not an anti-Japanese movement, at least at the time of its rise and in the early developmental stage, and has been a religion of Belau.

The outstanding characteristic of this book is no doubt the amount of information about Modekngei religion that Aoyagi makes accessible to readers. Perhaps due to the nature of Modekngei, most former researchers reported difficulty in obtaining much information about it; thus, very little has been written, especially with regard to its religious aspects. In this sense, the 128 Modekngei *kesekes* (hymns) presented in the appendix in

both Belauan and English are a collection of extremely important and rich oral accounts for exploring Modekngei history, cosmology, theology, teachings, rituals, symbols, and medical practices. Chapter VII of this book is devoted to a discussion of Modekngei theology, utilizing Aoyagi's analysis of the *kesekes*.

Many of her Belauan informants also provided Aoyagi with invaluable historical and cultural narratives, which had not previously been revealed to non-Modekngei people. Among them, and particularly interesting as to the rise of this movement, is the information given by Ramalii (Ngirameketii of Meketii lineage) in Chol village in Ngerard, where Modekngei religion was started by Tamadad (Kodep of Chomkuul lineage). When he was fifteen, Ramalii witnessed a series of unusual events surrounding the first establishment of Modekngei. His lively oral narratives concerned not only the rise of Modekngei itself but also the power struggles taking place around that time among clans in Chol and between Chol and nearby villages. The large number of *kesekes* and other oral accounts collected by Aoyagi attest that there is much room left to explore the Modekngei's religious nature and to trace the history of this movement.

The dominant discourse in the western Modekngei literature, which portrays it as an anticolonial movement, was first promulgated in a Coordinated Investigation of Micronesian Anthropology (CIMA) report written by Arthur J Vidich, in which Vidich provides a precise and highly convincing analysis of this social movement (*Political Factionalism in*

Palau, Its Rise and Development, 1949). Aoyagi's encounter with this report more or less motivated her Modekngai research to provide the public with an alternative view on the movement. Although her intellectual skepticism toward the existing knowledge and the effort she poured into her extensive research to challenge the prevalent notion are noteworthy, Aoyagi's quite lenient assessment and representation of Japanese colonial history in Belau (in chapter IV) raise questions as to where this new discourse might be headed.

Aoyagi's counterargument to Vidich is largely based on the information given to her from Belauan people. What accounts for the discrepancies between Belauan testimonies given to Aoyagi and those given to Vidich? The book also presents an excellent case to critically analyze the relationship between an ethnographer and fieldwork setting as reflected in ethnographic representations. From 1973 to 1984, Aoyagi conducted her fieldwork in Belau over seven visits ranging in time from one to four months. Considering the history of Belau during this time frame, her fieldwork almost completely overlaps with the period when Belau was struggling to adopt the nuclear-free constitution and was facing adamant opposition from the US government. Because the compact negotiation was hampered by Belau's lack of economic independence, criticism of US reluctance to help with economic development in Micronesia was rampant among Belauans, sometimes in contrast with the former Japanese administration. During the same period, Japanese businesses resumed exploring opportunities in Belau. This circumstance could have

influenced Aoyagi's fieldwork and, inevitably, the same can be said about Vidich's CIMA research. Nationalities of ethnographers and political and economic circumstances of the time of fieldwork may contribute to the outcome of research to a much greater degree than one might think.

English-language readers might be interested in a note on some differences between Aoyagi's 1985 Japanese text under the same title and this translated English version. One can say that the translated version is improved, especially in the quality and quantity of Japanese historical records presented. Some of the newly inserted information seemingly functions to somewhat undermine Aoyagi's argument; however, the author questions the validity of those historical records, considering the political status of the indigenous translator/informant who cooperated with the Japanese police at the time of the investigation. Another small but important change in the text is Aoyagi's deletion of a certain type of comment given by Belauan people. According to her Japanese text, Belauan people quite often greeted Aoyagi with warm, nostalgic comments about the "good old Japanese times" by contrasting their situation then with life under the US administration. This omission appears to be her strategy to conceal the likelihood that the information given to her was sometimes wrapped with Micronesian courtesy (or politics) and to put forth the impression of herself as a neutral investigator. There are more differences to be noted; however, the thesis of the book remains the same.

This account provides a great amount of valuable information, including unrevealed Belauan (and

some Japanese) oral accounts and translated historical records. The book clearly suggests that the nature of Modekngai, in the past and present, has been extremely intricate and constantly evolving through time.

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Oceania: An Introduction to the Cultures and Identities of Pacific Islanders, by Andrew Strathern, Pamela J Stewart, Laurence M Carucci, Lin Poyer, Richard Feinberg, and Cluny Macpherson. Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2002. ISBN 0-89089-444-2; vii + 272 pages, figures, maps, notes, photographs, bibliography, index. US\$30.00.

Creating a book with the scope promised by this title cannot have been an easy task. Fortunately, a reviewer's job is eased by the editors' clear statement of goals: "The book is intended primarily for use in college level courses for undergraduates" (3). I have taught different versions of a course on peoples of the Pacific to American undergraduates for about a quarter century and write my review with that experience in mind.

Differences between *Oceania* and any comparable texts are quickly apparent. Eschewing conventional "culture area" labels as anachronistic, the book's three main sections are entitled "The South-West Pacific," "The 'Eastern Pacific'" (note the additional quotation marks), and "The West Central Pacific." The first section comprises just a few pages more than either of the others, though the population represented by the first is about

five times that of the other two combined. All sections attend to issues of history and change, as well as basic ethnography, but each pair of authors has been allowed a distinctive style of presentation. Detailed "case studies"—ethnographic or thematic—appear in all sections.

"The South-West Pacific" here includes the islands of New Guinea, the Solomons, Vanuatu, New Caledonia, and Fiji. Presentation moves from the southeast to northwest with the most pages devoted to the largest populations, in the Solomons and New Guinea. The case studies include the specific (eg, "The Asmat of Irian Jaya: Art and Its Changing Meanings," which cries out for an illustration or two) and general (eg, a particularly effective treatment of "'Cargo Cults' and Millenarian Movements as Objects of Study"). This section is generously larded with comparisons of the authors' own work with Papua New Guinea Highlanders to that with other populations. Given the linguistic, cultural, and historical differences separating these Highlanders from all the Austronesian speakers elsewhere in the region, the comparisons are not always convincing. The final subsection, "An Overview of Political Problems," admirably fulfills the book's intention to make students aware that Islanders live with both tradition and modern institutions.

It is not clear why the next section is entitled "The 'Eastern Pacific'" since this authorial pair writes throughout of "Polynesia" and "Polynesians." This is perhaps the most conventionally presented section, beginning with geography and language, and moving on to subsections on prehistory, seafaring, subsistence, and expressive arts,