

Palau: Impacts of Education and Cultural Changes

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Introduction

The Republic of Palau has been heavily impacted by four countries: Spain, Germany, Japan, and the United States of America, which can be seen in the daily lives of Palauans. For example, on any typical Sunday, after attending a Catholic mass, a Palauan woman may drive her Toyota vehicle (with the steering wheel on the right side of the car) to the grocery store to use her United States currency to purchase some mochi rice, pickled daikon radish, and canned food items. This research was conducted in order to understand the history of education in Palau and cultural impacts to native Palauans. I hypothesized that the more formal education received, the less likely a Palauan was to participate in traditional customs. These were the questions I pondered: How was knowledge passed on to children before formal education was introduced? Who established formal schooling in Palau? How has formal education and foreign influence affected native Palauans? Are the Palauan language and traditional customs in danger of disappearing?

Location and Population of Palau

The Republic of Palau, also known as Belau, is an archipelago made up of more than 340 islands “of which only 9 are inhabited. They are: Kayangel, Babeldaob, Koror, Peliliu, Angaur, Sonsorol, Pula Anna, Hatohobei, and Helen Reef” (Bureau of Budget and Planning Office of Planning and Statistics, 2008). Palau is part of Micronesia and located approximately 7 degrees north latitude and 134 east longitude. Other islands that are part of Micronesia include Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Republic of Nauru, and the Republic of Kiribati (Rechebei & McPhetres, 1997, p.4-5). There are 16 states in Palau (listed below in Figure 1). In the past, the capitol was Koror, but it is now Melekeok. Palau has a population of 20,879 and a total land mass of about 177 square miles (Central Intelligence Agency: The World Factbook, 2010). In 2005, there were 44 people living on Hatohobei, on one square mile of land area, which made it the least populated island in Palau. Koror was the most populated island with 12,676 people on seven square miles (Bureau of Budget and Planning Office of Planning and Statistics, 2005).

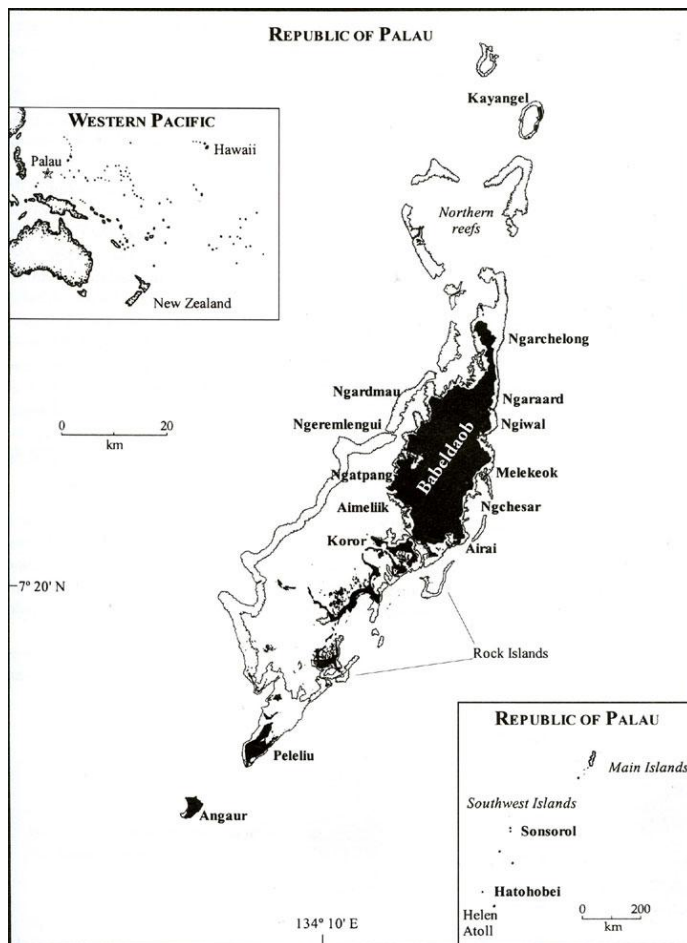


Table 1: 16 States of Palau

Aimeliik	Airai	Angaur	Hatohobei
Kayangel	Koror	Melekeok	Ngaraard
Ngarchelong	Ngardmau	Ngatpang	Ngchesar
Ngeremlengui	Ngiwal	Peliliu	Sonsorol

Figure 1: Map of the Republic of Palau

Source: “Government of Palau: A Nation That Honors Its Traditions”, by Davis and Hart, pg.7

Traditional Education System of Palau

According to the research of the Palau Society of Historians and the Bureau of Arts and Culture (2006), there are eight fundamental principles and components that were taught to Palauan children in their homes and clubs (p.3-4). They are as follows:

- Respect
- Responsibility
- Occupation
- Obedience, Kindness, and Perseverance
- Visits to Kin and Others
- Humility and Verbal Conduct
- Care and Compassion
- Concern for the Needs and Problems of Family

“Respect: The act of showing honor or esteem to others” (p.5).

Children showed respect to their parents and elders, as well as brothers and sisters, in different ways, including doing what they are told without the need to be reminded, not using obscene language, bowing their heads “when moving in a crowd,” and not standing “at the doorstep with their arms raised up and lean against the door frame” (p.6). As a child, I remember being told to lower my posture when passing other people. I still do that to this day without thinking about it. I was raised to think actively about how to conduct myself at all times, and to remember that my actions affect my entire family. Self-sacrifice for the good of the family was considered better than individual advancement.

“Responsibility: Duties assigned to a child...” (p.7).

Boys and girls were given different everyday responsibilities in their home, clan, and society. Children learned what was expected of them by example from their family members. This was considered to be “one of the most important values...in traditional times” (p.7). The responsibility of girls in a family included: gathering of certain food items, peeling taro, and serving meals using acceptable manners. Boys were taught how to fish from their fathers. Boys also gathered firewood and created spears out of bamboo (p.7).

“Occupation: Work assigned to children in order for them to acquire skills and techniques needed in life” (p.8).

When children reached a certain age they joined clubs. In these clubs, members learned from each other while performing different assignments and occupations that they were given depending on their personal background knowledge and skills. Here are a few examples of occupations that were available for adolescent boys to learn: “gathering coconut sap, wood carving and the building of boats, canoes, or houses, and hunting” (p.8). After choosing an occupation, a boy’s parents would find a person to mentor their son. Girls learned how to take care of a garden, and about different familial issues such as marriage. They also learned about childbirth and rearing. These lessons were normally learned through a girl’s maternal grandmother. Daughters were taught to “perform *klomengelungel* (bai visits)”, which provided her family with a source of income (p.9). A woman who was married also “provided another source of income” for her clan (p.9). Occupations woman could have included handicrafts such as grass skirt-making and weaving.

“Obedience, Kindness and Perseverance: The act of showing respect, the habit of doing good things to others, and the determination to pursue one’s goal even in the face of difficulties” (Palau Society of Historians & Bureau of Arts and Culture, 2006, p.10).

While these values were first learned at home, clubs were responsible for a large part of promoting them. For example, club members learned how to be kind to each other by eating and drinking from the same plate and cup. They demonstrated kindness towards their village by providing financial support and practiced perseverance by working together, which was “considered the only way for a club to remain strong and endure” (p.10).

“Visits to Kin and Others: To pay a visit to members of the extended family and relatives” (p.13).

Children were expected to learn who their relatives and familial responsibilities were, including caring for family members (especially elders and the sick). They were taught how to conduct themselves during these visits. Various members of a child’s family were in charge of teaching proper behaviors such as a child’s maternal uncles, as well as female titleholders. Young men were expected to make visits to their female relatives (ex: sisters, other kinswomen) and present different gifts such as fish, and to help out during times of need. Young women had the duties of assisting during times of funerals, as well as collecting money and paying debts (p.13).

“Teaching Humility and Verbal Conduct: To teach a child humbleness in mind and spirit and proper ways of speaking” (p.14).

Children were taught to be humble and to speak properly to others. Each child was taught to understand the traditional social system of hierarchy of the different families and clans from the village. No matter if you were from a high-ranking family, had personal wealth, or were considered an educated individual, you were expected to treat everyone with the same level of respect and humility. “Disapproving of pride and self-assertiveness, each home taught the children to display respect and humility toward other strata of society” (p.14).

Traditional personal homes and community houses were even designed in a way that encouraged and reminded everyone to be humble and respectful. Crossbeams in a home are positioned in a way that were an individual to stand up totally straight they would hit their head on it. Such an action would cause them to feel a sense of shame. Walking in a home with a bowed posture is considered proper and respectful (p.15).

“Care and Compassion: To love, to comfort and to be able to help others” (Palau Society of Historians & Bureau of Arts and Culture, 2006, p.15).

From an early age, children were taught to care and exhibit compassion for not only their own family, but others in the village. They were taught to help others with heavy work, especially the sick and elderly. They also learned to care for traveling strangers by offering them nourishment and a safe place to rest or sleep. It was also customary to bid travelers farewell when they continued onto their journey (p.15).

“Needs of the Family and Village: The needs and shortcomings of the family or village to be resolved was a first step in fostering discipline in the hearts and minds of the children and young people of traditional Palau” (p.17).

There is an old saying in Palau: “When leaving home go and stand at the edge of the yard and take a good look at your house. When leaving town, go to the landing and departure dock and take a good look at your village. Anywhere you go, hide your shore.” This saying cautions one not to forget one’s village and family bonds, and conceal from the outside world any shortcomings that relate to one’s place of origin (p.17).

Chanting and Story Telling

As with other cultures, chanting and story-telling was also a way of passing on morals, values, and knowledge. One such example is the story of Dilmellomes. Here is a very abridged version of her story:

Dilmellomes was raised to be a hard worker, respectful, and obedient. She was taught to properly care for a taro patch and other womanly duties. When she became of age, she was chosen to accompany other women from her village to be concubines (mengol) for men in another village. While the other women found lovers, Dilmellomes stayed behind and cleaned the bai (meeting or community house) they lived in during their visit. Every day, she found an elderly local village woman and offered her assistance in her taro patch. She worked very hard and treated the local village woman with the type of respect she learned at home. Since Dilmellomes worked hard in the taro patches of the local women, she was given fresh food, betelnut, tobacco, and other treats which she would bring back to the bai and

share with the other women from her own village. The other women from her village spent the entire day with their lovers, and they always came back to the bai hungry. The local village women gave spoiled food to the other visiting concubines because they did not like them flirting with their local men. The good deeds performed by Dilmellomes spread throughout the village. When it was time for Dilmellomes and the other concubines to return to their own village, the local women asked Dilmellomes to stay behind, and so she did. All the other concubines left without her. Every day, the local village women visited Dilmellomes at the bai and brought her food and other things she needed. When it was finally time for Dilmellomes to return to her own village, the local village women decided to reward her with Palauan money of the highest amount, food, and other necessities for her trip home (Palau Society of Historians & Bureau of Arts and Culture, 2006, pp.20-25).

Clubs

Each village had at least three types of clubs: *klou el cheldebechel* (the large club), *ongerung el klou el cheldebechel* (the second large club), and *kekerei el cheldebechel* (small club). These different clubs were responsible for performing various assignments. There were clubs for men and corresponding clubs for woman. Children would join small clubs and work their way up to the larger clubs.

Clubs deliberately sought to accomplish difficult tasks in order to train their members and improve their skills. Through the clubs striving for excellence, community service and competition in sports and games were promoted within the village (Palau Society of Historians & Bureau of Arts and Culture, 2006, p.11).

Klou el cheldebechel (the large club):

These first-ranking clubs had members who were the titleholders. Duties such as establishing, and protecting programs for the village, and supervising the other clubs, as well as acting as “guardians of law and peace” were given to these club members (Palau Society of Historians & Bureau of Arts and Culture, 2006, p.11).

Ongerung el klou el cheldebechel (the second large club):

The members of the second-ranking clubs were typically married homeowners who took care of obligations for their family or clan. Such as the first large club, the men of the second large club protected and promoted village programs. They also supervised the small clubs. The women were assigned with promoting “economic well-being by performing *klomenguelungel* (bai visits) at other village’s men’s meeting houses (bai) in exchange for payment which was used to support their club and village activities” (p.12).

Kekerei el cheldebechel (small club):

The members of the third-ranking clubs were generally unmarried men and women who were not tasked with house responsibilities. They were assigned to help out members of the second-ranking clubs and teach skills to other young villagers. During times of wars between villages, the male members served as protectors. Women members did not fight in wars, nor perform *bai* visits (p.12).

Clubs still exist today. While I was in Palau for my research study, I was fortunate to be invited to attend a conference sponsored by Ngara Lukes, an Angaur women’s club. The entire conference was delivered in Palauan, so I had a hard time understanding everything that was discussed. The focus of the conference was to teach and share Palauan customs as well as gain more understanding regarding the different clans and villages in Angaur.

Education in Palau

Spanish Control:

In Micronesia, the first school called the College de San Juan de Letran was built by Jesuit missionaries in the Mariannas in February 1669 for Chamorro boys “between the age of seven and ten years old” (Hezel, 1985, n.p.). In 1891, Capuchin missionaries started a Catholic school in Palau. The main education goal was to promote the Christian way of living. At first, Palauans tried to prevent their

children from attending catechism sessions because they did not agree with their teaching, but the village children were very curious and found ways to visit the missionaries (Hezel, 2003, n.p.).

Lebuu, the First Palauan Scholar to Study in England:

On August 10, 1783, the *Antelope*, a packet ship under the command of Captain Henry Wilson, crashed between nine and twelve miles from Palau. November 12, 1783, Lebuu (sometimes referred to as Lee Boo), the first recorded scholar to leave Palau and attend school in England, sailed with Captain Wilson on a voyage to England. Lebuu was the second son of Ibedul Abba Thule. Ibedul is the highest-ranking title of chief in Koror. At the time, the Ibedul was considered the King of Palau by Captain Wilson and his crew (Rechebei & McPhetres, 2006, p.69-79). According to Dale, Lebuu made several stops on his way to England, and finally arrived at Portsmouth on July 14, 1784. He resided with Captain Wilson and his family in Rotherhithe, near London. "Lebuu was so courteous and pleasant during the whole voyage that everyone was ready to render him all service in their power" (2004, p.138). Lebuu attended "an English school and he was welcomed and admired by his fellow students" (Rechebei & McPhetres, 1997, p.78). Unfortunately, five months after arriving in England, Lebuu succumbed to smallpox on December 27, 1784 (Dale, 2004, p.148). Lebuu was 20 years old. He was laid to rest in Rotherhithe at St. Mary's Church in Captain Wilson's family plot. His grave is still there (Rechebei & McPhetres, 1997, p.79). Today, there is a statue in front of Palau Community College in Koror memorializing Lebuu and naming him the first scholar from Palau to study overseas.

German Control:

On September 20, 1898, Spain gave Germany a lien on several Micronesian islands. By then, young Palauans "had a thirst to learn about the Western world" (Hezel, 2003, n.p.). High-ranking families learned the importance of understanding foreign culture in order to "retain social prestige and economic power" (Shuster, 1982, p.150). In 1902, the first school for policemen was opened by the Germans, which was considered the first vocational school in Palau. The Germans brought in their own Capuchin missionaries who taught children from high-ranking families in Koror. In 1906, the Ibedul had a school built right next to the German Capuchin mission for the children of high-ranking families from Koror to attend (Shuster, 1984, p.150). Later, the German Capuchin missionaries expanded their work from Koror to locations such as Melekeok, Airai, Ngatmel, and Aimeliik. The German Capuchin missionaries taught "German language, reading, writing, and arithmetic" (Rechebei & McPhetres, 1997, p.123).

An actual public school system was still not available; the Germans were only interested in having a labor force and using the resources of the islands of Palau (Soalablai, 1996, p.16). In 1909, Franciscan sisters arrived in Koror to run a convent and school for girls. Boys and girls from the ages of six to early twenties went to classes in the "morning with their slates and exercise books" (Hezel, 2003, n.p.). German missionaries focused on educating children, since they had a harder time changing the ways of Palauan adults. "They saw the schools as the perfect means of winning the hearts and minds of a new generation to Christ and molding their lifestyles accordingly" (Hezel, 2003, n.p.). As more and more parents wanted their children to attend classes, children who were not from "chiefly families were permitted to attend" (Hezel, 2003, n.p.).

Japanese Control:

After World War I, the Germans lost control of Palau in 1914 to the Japanese government. In 1915, the Japanese accused the remaining five German Capuchins and five Franciscan sisters of trying to persuade the Palauans to rebel against the new Japanese rule. The Japanese forced the missionaries to leave the island along with 400 Palauan converts. The Japanese introduced the first formal public school system, "unlike Spain or Germany, they set up a well organized school system throughout the islands of Micronesia" (Pedro, 1999, p.98). All children were mandated to attend school, and classes did not include religious teaching. Once again, the Palauans were being educated in order to make them more civilized in the eyes of their occupiers, show their loyalty, and promote the economic development of a foreign country (Soalablai, 1996, p.16).

According to research conducted by Pedro (1999), the Japanese set up two school systems, one for Japanese students called *shogakko* and one for islander students called *tomin gakko*. The name *tomin gakko* was later changed to *kogakko*. At the time, islanders understood the word *tomin* to mean “primitive or uncivilized people who did not know a better life” (p.103). At first, Japanese naval officers had the task of teaching the students, followed by Japanese civilians and then later qualified teachers who were sent from Japan.

Throughout the Japanese rule, there were changes to the curriculum and philosophy of education. When the Japanese government first opened the schools, the main goal was to teach students to be loyal Japanese subjects and to teach Japanese culture and way of life. Students were lined up in the morning before class, faced Japan, and pledged their loyalty to the Emperor. Students were only allowed to speak Japanese while in school, and there were severe punishments for those who spoke anything else. Islander students were allowed to attend school for three years, and if they proved to be capable, they had a chance to go to school for another two years. Japanese children were allowed to attend school for six years with the chance to attend for an extra two years. The teachers, schools, curriculum, and instruction materials were different between the Japanese and islander students.

The Japanese in Angaur also introduced the concept of “Field Day”, which was a yearly event held for students and their families (Pedro, 1999, p.105). A number of different competitive sports and games were performed and prizes were awarded. On June 30, 2010, I interviewed Dominica Rivard. She described one of the games she fondly remembered playing on Field Day. Each participant was given a set amount of time to toss homemade rice sacks (made by filling a square fabric and sewing it shut) into a woven basket placed high on a pole. When their allotted time was up, the basket was brought down, and the winner was the participant with the most sacks in their basket.

As the years progressed, additional classes were added for islander children. The school curriculum improved and included vocational skills. The islander students studied “Japanese language, arithmetic, singing, physical education, carpentry, agriculture, and domestic chores” (Pedro, 1999, pp.98-105). In 1926, the Japanese government opened a carpentry school in Palau where male islander students learned how to build Japanese-style houses. There was quite a competition to be accepted into the school, which was called the Palau Woodwork Apprentice School in Koror. In 1944, schooling from the Japanese was “interrupted by World War II” (Pedro, 1999, pp.103-104).

According to Soalablai (1996, p.18), Japan made several contributions to the education of Palauans. One major contribution was starting a school where all island children attended, no matter what family they were from, or what religion they practiced. In the past, only children from high-ranking families were invited to attend the missionary schools. There was also a time during the German rule when more village children were being accepted into the missionary schools, despite their family ties, but they were required to be baptized.

What was the price of a free education for every child in Palau? Palauan children were forced to attend classes, and if they did not, the children and their parents would be penalized (Rechebei & McPhetres, 1997, p.154). They were forced to speak Japanese and bow down to an Emperor they never met. In Angaur, the villagers were forced to move away from their homes in order to appease the needs of the mining companies. Taro patches were destroyed, and needed to be replanted in areas that were not as fertile. Davis & Hart (2002) wrote about some of the negative effects of Japanese rule. Many traditional customs were lost and they were forced to follow Japanese ways (Davis & Hart, p.47). Traditional Palauan money no longer had as much value as it once did. Due to the influx of foreign workers, Palauans were treated as an “inferior people”, were given the lowest paying jobs and became a minority in their own country (Davis & Hart, p.47).

American Control:

During World War II, the United States of America attacked the Japanese military who occupied Palau. After gaining control of Palauan soil, and until the end of the war, U.S. Navy officials took over and taught in whatever classrooms were still open with the assistance of local Palauans (Pedro, 1999, p.207). At the time, the schools offered first through sixth grade classes but would later expand to offer

classes until the eighth grade in 1965 due to the Accelerated Elementary School Program launched by the Kennedy Administration (Pedro, 1999, p.213). During the war, the Navy introduced a curriculum that included Palauan language, art, English (reading and writing). Extra-curricular activities such as sports and games, singing, dancing, and handicrafts were also part of the curriculum. After the end of World War II, the U.S. gained official control over the islands of Palau. In 1947, the U.S. Navy established a school system and an Education Department in Koror. In the 1950s, classes such as social studies, science, and gardening were added to the curriculum (Pedro, 1999, p.207).

In 1947, the U.S. Navy sent potential teachers from Palau to Guam to be trained. Also, due to staff shortages, teachers who were already in the classroom received in-service training sessions to improve their teaching skills (Pedro, 1999, p.211). Later in 1948, the Navy moved their teaching program from Guam to Chuuk (Pedro, 1999, p.12). During the 1950s, Palau opened its first middle school, and later in the 1960s, students in Palau could finally attend high school classes (Pedro, 1999, p.210).

In 1962, the Kennedy Administration introduced the Accelerated Elementary School Program (AESP), which resulted in various changes to school in Palau such as:

- Added 7th and 8th grade to the elementary schools
- Made English the official language of instruction
- Hired and sent qualified American teachers
- Due to the hiring of American teachers, the English speaking skills of the natives improved
- English as a Second Language (ESL) classes became available
- More schools were built, and new books and other supplies were provided (Pedro, 1999, pp.213-216)

The funds for this program came from the education budget increase granted by the Kennedy Administration. In 1962, the education budget for Micronesia was \$600,000, which was about \$50 per student. By 1970, the education budget increased to \$10 million, about \$240 per student (Hezel, 1989, n.p.).

A few years after the arrival of American teachers contracted by the United States, the Peace Corps sent volunteers to teach in Palau. The Peace Corps volunteers were different from the American contracted teachers. While the American contract teachers stayed in homes built by the United States and focused on teaching English to natives, the Peace Corps volunteers lived in the homes of local Palauans. The Peace Corps volunteers were there to teach the islanders, as well as learn the local language and customs before they were assigned to a school. On the island of Angaur, it is said that the Peace Corps volunteers were so embraced into the homes of local Palauans that they treated their sponsors like their own families, referring to members as mother, father, sisters and brothers, and so on. Due to the personal relationship the volunteer teachers had with the local Palauans, the students had an easier time communicating with them (Pedro, 1999, pp.216-217).

Employment prospects for high school and college graduates during the 1970s, who were provided with an American liberal education, were low. "Education had far outraced the economy" (Hezel, 1989, n.p.). What educational philosophy and curriculum is more appropriate for islanders born post-World War II? A more traditional system of education with a focus on vocations that taught students how to survive on their island? Or perhaps an education that allows a student to be creative, to think for themselves, and see the world from different perspectives? Depending on your personal views of the roles of education, this question could be endlessly debated (Hezel, 1989, n.p.).

Independent Control:

On October 1, 1994, the Republic of Palau officially became a self-governing nation. From that day until September 30, 2009, the U.S. and Palau had an agreement called the Compact of Free Association (also referred to as "the Compact"). According to the agreement, the U.S. would provide Palau with a total of \$591 million dollars, and military defense during the 15 year period. In return, Palau would allow the U.S. military access. The Palauan government used the funds to develop infrastructure, investments for the future, and other governmental needs (Davis & Hart, 2002, pp.3-4).

According to the Education Master Plan 2006-2016, created and published in October 2006 by the Republic of Palau's Ministry of Education (MOE), there were a total of 2,274 public school elementary students and 797 public high school students. Private elementary schools had 557 students, and private high schools had 486 students (p.21). The graduation rate was 95.2 percent, the highest recorded in the last ten years. In the 2004-2005 school year, the graduation rate was 79.2 percent. The year before that it was 91.4 percent (p.22).

As of 2006, the MOE had a total of 269 teachers at eighteen public elementary schools and one public high school. In 2004-2005, 116 teachers had no college degree (but had graduated from high school), 88 had an Associate degree, 59 had a Bachelor degree, and 6 had a Master degree (p.24). The MOE is working on making several improvements in areas including teaching staff, as well as curriculum, instruction, and assessment programs. They have also adopted "The PRIDE Project" which set up benchmarks created by the Pacific Vision for Education. A few of the benchmarks are (p.4):

- Pride in cultural and national identity
- Skills for life and work locally, regionally, and globally
- Access to equity for students with special needs
- Partnership with communities and stakeholders
- A holistic approach to basic education

Impacts of Foreigners in Palau

The Spanish Capuchin missionaries brought Christian influence to Palau. They challenged Palauan natives to abandon traditional practices they viewed as un-Christian, such as the use of concubines in men's meeting houses (bai), traditional Palauan marriages, divorce, inter-village warfare and witchcraft. When influenza killed many Palauans in 1892, the Palauans noticed the missionaries were not affected by it. The missionaries gained the trust of the natives when they shared "a special kind of broth that apparently healed the sick fairly quickly" (Rechebei & McPhetres, 1997, p.121). Now that the local Palauans trusted the Spanish Capuchin missionaries, more and more of them had their children baptized.

German Capuchin missionaries continued in the same policies of the Spanish Capuchin missionaries. The list of prohibited actions grew. Traditional feasts and practices were seen as "a waste of time and energy...the effects of these policies in a culture that depended on these customs for the purpose of circulating wealth was significant" (Rechebei & McPhetres, 1997, p.124).

In 1909, the Germans discovered rich phosphate on the southern island of Angaur (also known as Ngeaur), but did not attain permission to mine the phosphate properly. The chief they approached, Ucherkemul Keteluang, did not understand the German language and did not completely understand the entire situation. Ucherkemul is the highest male chief title of Rois village of Angaur. Ucherkemul Keteluang agreed to have the Germans mine for phosphate in his village of Rios only. However, the Germans interpreted this as permission to mine the entire island. The Germans believed the Ucherkemul was the highest ranking chief of Angaur, but he was not. The Germans either did not understand, or did not care about the social hierarchy of the Palauan culture. At the time, an Englishman named Sims (known more commonly as Isims) held the title of the highest male chief in Angaur. The title is called Ucherbelau. Ucherbelau Isims was deported by the Germans. It was believed he was deported because the Germans were afraid he would demand fair payment to the natives for the mining Angaur phosphate (Pedro, 1999, pp.55-58).

The English Ucherbelau Isims was married to a local Angaur woman named Sekang, who was a member of the ruling clan of Angaur. Sekang's mother was both the Dirbelau (highest female chief title in Angaur) and Ucherbelau (highest male chief title in Angaur) at the same time. Sekang's mother held both titles because there were no men of age to accept the title, which was quite unusual. Isims had guns, which he had used to free Angaur from the control of Koror. Sekang's mother decided to grant her son-in-law the title of Ucherbelau (Pedro, 1999, p.57).

A foreigner receiving a title is an anomaly. Due to the circumstances, the Dirbelau must have felt she needed to offer Isims the title after his assistance freed Angaur from the control of Koror. Palau is a

matrilineal society, where membership in a clan is passed down generation to generation from a mother's line. There is a line of men and women who may rightfully be offered a title in a clan passed through the female side of a family. When a chief died, his title returned to the woman in his lineage. My mother has taught me that the highest-ranking title in our clan of Orakibai from Angaur, Dirbelau, has the right to appoint the Ucherbelau to serve under her. The Dirbelau may consult with others, but the final decision is hers alone. Due to the modern system of laws and courts, family members may try to debate who is the rightful title holder. Normally, the oldest living men and women of a clan are appointed to receive a title.

Before the Germans and Japanese discovered that Angaur was rich with phosphate deposits, Palauans living on Angaur were able to easily live off the land. When the Japanese took control of the mining project, they forced the Angaur residents to move from their homes in order to access the phosphate they wanted. The islanders were not offered any help or compensation for moving. The natives literally moved their homes piece by piece. A team of men could move one house a day without any equipment or transportation. The men would take the roof, walls, and floor off and carry it to a new village about two miles away. When they arrived at the new site, they would have to put the house back together. Even the taro patches that are such an important source of nourishment for Palauans had to be moved, but the natives were not given enough time to do so. Anything left behind in a designated mining area, for example, coconut trees, citrus and other fruit trees, taro, and tapioca were destroyed by the Japanese miners (Pedro, 1999, pp.77-81).

The environment also suffered from the mining. Important trees, plants, and animals that were used for food and medicine started disappearing and some totally vanished. The phosphate was being used to make fertilizer to support agriculture for other countries, but in the process, they destroyed the environment in Angaur. Another impact, which was isolated in Angaur, was the introduction of Macaque monkeys (Rechebei & McPhetres, 1997, p.15). Germans brought their three pet monkeys to Angaur but neglected to take them away when they left the island (Pedro, 1990, p.8). I have been told there are more monkeys than people in Angaur, but I could not find any supporting documentation. My mother said these monkeys are very smart but destructive. They are known to pull up newly planted taro from the ground and replant them upside down.

Before the Germans set up their mining operation in Angaur, the natives worked together for the betterment of their homes, clan, village, and island. The Germans were first to establish a "cash economy, where goods were exchanged for money rather than for other goods" (Davis & Hart, 2002, p.45). For the first time, natives worked for a wage, which forced the men and women to change their lifestyles.

In a way, the money economy changed the natives' attitude toward family, clan, and community. Islanders learned individualism. The wage earners began to accumulate for themselves and this lessened caring and sharing with the extended family, clan, and community (Pedro, 1999, p.61).

Once again, the natives witnessed a different standard of living from foreigners. Now that Palauans could work for currency, they earned money to buy clothing, kitchen utensils, canned food, sugar, Japanese pickled vegetables, soy sauce, sewing machines, radios, mirrors, rice and rice cookers, and other items they saw that were possessed by the Japanese and other foreign workers (Pedro, 1999, p.82). In Angaur, it became normal to see everyone (from babies to adults) wearing Japanese inspired clothing and carrying on conversations in Japanese (Pedro, 1999, p.82).

Foreign workers from places such as Guam, Saipan, Yap, Chuuk, Pohnpei, Japan, and China introduced new plants, animals, food, dancing, singing, and lifestyles. In Angaur, they learned how to bake bread, sew, western dance and how to play some musical instruments such as the "guitar, harmonica, and accordion" from the Saipanese (Pedro, 1999, pp.84-85). The Yapese brought over a giant yellow taro called *prak* which also became a staple starch.

Belau Modekngei School

A chief named Temedad from Northern Babeldaob started a new religion on Palau which he called *Modekngei*, which means “united.” Temedad and his followers believed “Palau will always be for the Palauans. The Palau people should never take on the foreigner’s religion and life” (Davis & Hart, 2002, pp.45-46). They practiced traditional customs, healing, predicting the future, and went against the Japanese way. Temedad was later jailed for resisting Japanese rule. He died in prison in 1924, but *Modekngei* is still around today. In fact, there is a private school dedicated to surrounding their students in Palauan traditional culture, Belau Modekngei School.

I was very fortunate to meet and interview Bedbii Chokai, the current principle for Belau Modekngei School (BMS) on June 16, 2010. The following information was shared with me during our interview:

Belau Modekngei School (BMS) is a high school that is known to have unique character. It is different from other private high schools because it is not connected to any outside school or mission, and they do not teach any religion. There is one public high school (Palau High School); all other high schools are private and religion based. BMS is a dual curriculum school, where one curriculum teaches academics, as required by the Ministry of Education, and the other curriculum teaches students vocations, as well as Palauan traditional studies. Students are required to take academic classes and to pick an area of vocation each year.

The vocations they offer are agriculture, piggery, fishing, weaving, sewing, carpentry, and small engine mechanical maintenance. Aside from these vocations, one of the characters of BMS is that students are involved in and experience practical Palauan cultural skills and customs. Classes focused on Palauan studies are core subjects offered each year until graduation. BMS is a boarding school where students live and they learn to be self-sufficient.

BMS is designed to help keep Palauan roots of custom, culture, and traditional ways. Three years ago a summer program was designed to immerse students in Palauan traditional ways and activities. During these events, Chokai saw how much Palauan youth are missing in knowledge as Palauans. According to Chokai, the leaders of the Palauan Congress are recognizing it more and pushing to expand and develop Palauan studies.

The *Olbil Era Kelulau* (OEK), the Palau National Congress, is the legislative branch of the Palauan government. “The OEK is made up of two houses, the Senate and the House of Delegates” (Davis & Hart, 2002, p.167). The OEK has started asking schools to include Palauan studies, including the Palauan language. A special class that is offered by BMS teaches the origins, evolution, proverbs and legends of Belau. Legends are shared to teach morals, lessons, and history. The teacher for the class takes the students to places around the island where the legends actually took place. Chokai believed it was not offered in other high schools in Palau.

BMS was opened in 1974. It is a drug-free school, within the only drug-free community in Palau; Ibobang. A school cook prepares breakfast and lunch Monday through Friday, but the students cook their meals in the evening and in the weekends. They wash their own clothes. They have a timetable of chores, and are very strict. The school believes that in order for students to become efficient and effective time managers, they have to know how to use their time. The campus is shaped like a heart, and it is on sacred land. You must stay on the walking paths around the dorms (Chokai, interview, June 16, 2010).

Ken Suzuki shared his personal experience at BMS, which he attended around 1985. While he was a student at BMS, everyone washed their clothes in the river by hand. They also collected firewood, caught fish, and gardened for taro for their starch. They did not have a gas or electric stove. They cooked over an open fire. About once a month, they received extra food from their parents. He helped to build a basketball court that is still on the school property today and also built houses for Peace Corps teachers.

Palauan Language: Is it in Danger?

The following opinions and information were gathered by interviews I conducted between June 2010 and July 2010. Fifteen Palauans participated by answering several interview questions. One of my questions was "Do you think the Palauan language is in danger of not being spoken one day? Why or why not?" Here are the results from that one inquiry: YES: 8 people NO: 2 people NEITHER YES OR NO: 5 people.

As to the reason why they feel the Palauan language is in danger, here is what they had to say:

While one person mentioned we are losing our language because Palauans want to emulate being American, another commented that English is everywhere and is more popular. Two people said they believed the Palauan language was in danger because of the number of islanders who move off island in search of a higher education or better paying jobs and forget their language. Mixed-marriages were also mentioned. Palauans who marry others who are not from Palau usually cannot communicate with their spouse in Palauan. Instead, they would most likely communicate in English.

One person I interviewed, who requested to remain anonymous, has noticed the younger Palauans do not speak proper Palauan. She commented:

"I think right now if the school institution doesn't include Palauan language or Palau culture in their courses, it will one day disappear. I have noticed today most kids in this generation speak mixture of Palauan and English in their dialogue. I heard people say kids today speak 'Pallish', a combination of English and Palauan. It is weird but one day Palauan kids will lose their own identity if they don't know their own mother tongue."

Two people also felt that the Palauan language was in danger due to the exposure of people who use foreign languages in everyday Palauan society. Today, it seems common for a Palauan household to employ a domestic helper. Most domestic helpers are from the Philippines and speak a mix of English and Tagalog. While a domestic helper stays home to care for the children, both parents are working in order to earn a living. While I stayed in Palau, I noticed my nieces (both under the age of eight) did not seem to speak fluent Palauan. They seemed to understand it, but they responded back in English. Their Filipina nanny spoke a combination of Tagalog, English, and some Palauan to the children.

While some of the people I interviewed were under the impression (and so was I) that Palauan language was not currently a part of the curriculum in Palauan schools, Senator Kathy Kesolei commented:

"That danger (of losing the Palauan language) is very real. There is now a very strong Palauan Language curriculum being taught in the schools, both private and public schools in Palau. Recently, I introduced a legislation which created a Palau Language Commission that will undertake the task of standardizing spelling and correct usage of Palauan grammar and language and to insure its continuity for years to come. There is also in existence a regional organization called the Pacific Islands Bilingual-Bicultural Association which was created to strengthen language learning in the schools and to share among teachers best practices in the teaching of the local languages. The site is: <http://pibbainternational.blogspot.com>"

Changes in Palauan Traditions

Senator Kathy Kesolei gave a thought-provoking response regarding the cultural changes in Palau:

"Palauan traditions do not change. They are simply manifested in different ways but the basic principles remain the same. For instance, the custom or tradition of getting together to help pay for a house of a relative (Ocheraol system) is still practiced but we are now using United States currency as a form of payment, and the houses are being built out of concrete and tin. The concept is still there and the different obligations for the different clan members are still the same. Having said that, there are Palauan traditions that are no longer practiced because they are not conducive to the current living and beliefs today. Culture has a way of adapting to current situations."

The following information was shared with me by the people I interviewed or during casual conversations with Palauans unless a specific source is cited.

Ngasech:

In regards to traditions that have changed, the most popular one commented on was the Palauan traditional celebration of a woman's first childbirth, *ngasech*. Charity Miles, interviewed on July 19, 2010, shared what she learned from her family elders. A traditional ceremony "...did not have men attend and there was no alcohol consumption, and now men attend and alcohol is served." Tokie Mad, interviewed on July 14, 2010, commented, "(traditionally) only married women can have a *ngasech* and there is no music or band being played." Now, an unwed mother may be allowed to have a ceremony, while lively celebratory music is played.



Figure 2: Picture from my sister Maria's *ngasech*.
Source: Adelina Tomomi Rivard.

I attended the *ngasech* of my oldest sister, Maria, when I was a teenager. She emerged out of our family home in Angaur with a black bra on to cover her breast. Later, she shared with me the fact that she refused to exit our home topless, even if it was part of our tradition. She was ashamed to expose herself. She also told me that our mother wanted her to leave her bra on, but our grandmother argued with her to take it off. Here were three women from very different generations fighting over which tradition to follow. Should Maria take the bra off and follow traditional Palauan custom? Or, should she keep her bra on and be the modest Catholic woman she

was baptized and raised to be? Being Catholic won that particular battle. The eldest woman thought it was a shame not to go topless, while the younger two women thought just the opposite. Since then, I know two of my cousins who have gone topless for their ceremony.

During an informal conversation, an aunt of mine shared a memory with me. She told me about the first woman she knew of that wore a bra during a *ngasech*. The woman she referred to is a cousin of ours. As our cousin was about to emerge from her home to present herself topless, the man who raised her (who at the time held the highest-male title of our clan) told her to put a bra on. He said that there were men from the United States Coast Guard attending the ceremony, and he did not approve of her exposing herself to them.

Marriage:

The fact that traditional marriage does not occur anymore was mentioned by two interviewees. These days, couples get married in court or in a church. In traditional times, there were several steps to follow in order to have both sides of the family accept the marriage. One way a potential marriage may start is when a man tells his father about a woman he is interested in. His father would approach the woman's father with an offer for a marriage. The woman's father would try to get his daughter to agree to the marriage if he approved of the man. Discussion of marriage arrangements and a financial settlement would take place between the two fathers (or uncle, or other male clansmen if a father is not available). An amount of money would be paid to the woman's father from the man's father. After that, the marriage deal would be sealed and official. In order for her to show her husband's family that she is

ready to perform her duties as his wife, her parents would arrange for one of her maternal uncles to prepare food to accompany her to her husband's home. The new wife would be escorted usually with about ten baskets (with each basket holding a complete meal for a family) and a whole cooked pig. She would also have her private belongings, as well as a new set of items for sleeping for her and her husband (Pedro, 1999, pp.19-23).

Tattoos and Other Body Art:

In the past, Palauans were tattooed in order to be able to visually identify a person's status and clan. My great-grandmother was the last person from my clan to be tattooed. Both arms and hands were covered with thick dark bars, and her legs had dime-sized circles going down the outside of her thighs. I could not find anyone who could tell me how old she was when she was tattooed, but the family members I talked to believe it was done when she was still young and before she was married. My mother told me that the Germans stopped the practice of tattooing. My great-grandmother spoke some English, but she was more familiar with the Japanese language, and was fluent in Palauan. As a child, I used to sit next to her and talk to her. This forced me to practice my Palauan language skills in order to have a conversation with her. I remember she told me her tattooing took a long time to do, and that she had passed out a few times. She also told me she had no choice, it was to show who she was in our family. It would have caused her and our family shame if she did not go through with it. When she walked down the street, people knew who she was automatically based on her tattoos. While I was in Palau, I visited the Belau National Museum where I tried to inquire if there was anyone in Palau who still practiced traditional tattooing, or if there were any records of clan tattooing, but no one there knew of any. Luckily, I have pictures of my grandmother, the last Dirbelau (highest-ranking female title from the ruling clan of Angaur) who obediently endured days' worth of tattooing.

According to the written accounts of the adventures of the *Antelope*, which was ship wrecked in Palau in 1783, the men and women of Palau were tattooed. Lebuu, who sailed to England with Captain Wilson, was tattooed (Dale, 2004, p.91). While men had their left ear pierced with a bead fixed in place, the women had both ears pierced, and they wore leaves or jewelry made from turtle shells. It was also noted that both men and women pierced the cartilage "between their nostrils...which they frequently put a little sprig or blossom" (Dale, 2004, p.120). Adult men and women also had blackened teeth. This dye process took five days to complete, where a paste of specific plants and powered limestone was applied to the teeth (Dale, 2004, p.121).

Conclusion

Based on the combination of my literature review and interviews, the impact of foreign education policies, religion, language, and culture has caused Palauans to adapt and modernize traditional customs and practices. In some cases, they were completely abandoned. When I first started my research, I hypothesized the more formal education received, the less a native Palauan participated in traditional cultural practices. I do not think I interviewed enough Palauans to be able to give a definite conclusion. I met people who had attended school until the 9th grade who had more traditional knowledge than some college graduates. However, I also met people who had earned college degrees who care very deeply about preserving Palauan culture and language.

I was able to answer the questions I first posed in my introduction. The traditional education system of Palau was established and honored before the German mission schools opened its door to the children of high-ranking families and before the Japanese mandated that all children attend the free segregated public school. My research finding has shown the educational system in Palau has been through many changes under foreign influences. Each country believed it was doing the best they could for the natives of Palau and perhaps ultimately for themselves. Palauans have been surrounded by different languages, cultures, and ways of life. While some are detrimental to the ecosystem, others have become food staples for island residents.

While I found answers to some inquiries, new questions emerged. What are the most appropriate educational practices that educators can implement for Palauan students to be active, supportive, and

happy members of society, while still preserving their language and customs? If I had asked Palauan high school and college students if they felt the Palauan language was in danger, what would their opinion be? It would be interesting to find out how often and where they spoke Palauan, or if they had a preference between using Palauan or English to communicate. In my opinion, the Palauan language has the potential of becoming lost. Are they interested in carrying on traditions? How many plan on having a *ngasech* after their first child is born?

It was good to be told Palauan schools have added Palauan studies to their curriculum and that there is at least one school, Belau Modeknegei School, which truly focuses on teaching their students to carry on Palauan knowledge, customs, and traditional ways. Palauans value formal education, but they should also hold on to the eight principles and components taught by traditional education. It is not only up to Palauan leaders to preserve language and traditions. It is up to every Palauan to do their part in ensuring their future great-grandchildren will not just read about their culture on the Internet, but to be able to practice it first-hand as well, and understand why they are so important to our identity.

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