

PREFACE

I am very delighted and privileged to write this preface for *Traditional Knowledge and Wisdom: Themes from the Pacific Islands*. This book is the result of our two-year journey for a joint publication project that ICHCAP and the coordinators of six Pacific countries—namely, the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Fiji, Palau, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Tonga, and Vanuatu—planned and implemented with the spirit of solidarity and mutual respect.

The idea originated at the fourth sub-regional network meeting of six Pacific countries in Port Vila, Vanuatu, in April 2013 to promote the visibility and viability of Pacific intangible cultural heritage. At the beginning, however, selecting proper themes and authors was quite a challenge due to the long distances and the lack of communication tools. Through continuous e-mail and telephone calls, we finally managed to find authors and collect articles for this publication. For the book, two editorial meetings were held this year, one in Pohnpei, FSM, in May, and the other in Jeonju, Korea, in August.

While traditional knowledge is now receiving more attention due to its potential value, for some time, ‘traditional’ was generally synonymous to ‘old’ and ‘outdated.’ But, by the end of the twentieth century, the so-called modern approach to the world has revealed its limits as expressed in the many problems facing modern society, including environmental degradation and dehumanization. In post-modernist discourse, a central task has been to overcome the negative side of modernity in the fields of not only the arts and humanities but also social, natural, and applied sciences. And many people are looking for alternatives in traditional knowledge or intangible cultural heritage. Re-examining, reinterpreting, and applying traditional knowledge in a contemporary context often leads to viable solutions.

An example of a return to traditional knowledge creating viable solutions can be found in the field of medicine. It has long been the practice of many societies to try to cure diseases and stay healthy by using locally grown herbs to boost the immune system. This approach to human health was supplanted with modern medical science, which is based on the idea that diseases can be eradicated by identifying pathogens and killing or removing them with modern medical materials and devices.

This approach flourished in the twentieth century until it was suggested that locally grown herbs can be better for overall health and result in fewer side effects than antibiotics and other universally applicable and diagnosed materials.

Applying traditional knowledge in the modern world is not confined to the field of herbal medicine. Traditional customs and know-how can be applied to overcome various social, environmental, and ecological challenges today.

The editors of this book have compiled informative articles on traditional knowledge from the Pacific that may provide solutions and ideas for problems facing modern society. To help create a clearer platform for conveying ideas about traditional wisdom, we have categorized the articles under five themes: Worldviews, Relationships and Social Cohesion, Harvest and Landscapes, Voyaging and Seascapes, and Art and Technology.

In Worldviews, the articles reflect not only how people in this region conceptualize the world around them but also how such conceptualizations best suit their living conditions as well as their social organization and their interactions with the world. Their ideas of the world manifest themselves in events, myths and legends, important food, communication, and traditional laws and systems.

And, as is well acknowledged, the traditional knowledge demonstrated here can motivate those in industrialized society to reflect on our own ways of living. In many of these articles, you can see that people in the Pacific pay special attention to the ways they communicate to and with others, especially through the power of song, where they have chosen not to speak directly, instead alluding to the main point in beautiful and poetical words, and often the messages in the songs are more significant.

In Relationships and Social Cohesion, we find interesting descriptions revealing the way people in this region think and interact individually with each other as well as through the larger society. This can include intergenerational family systems, family relationships that drive post-natal practices, rites of passage, and systems to solve and manage social conflict. Though these ideas and approaches are as diverse as the cultures in which they are found, they do collectively show how people in this region form and respect social relationships and how they work on problems that develop in those relationships.

The article on Palauan childbirth practices in this section is of special interest to me personally because the Palauan practices are very similar to the traditional childbirth practices in Korea and it illustrates how modern approaches may benefit from traditional ideas. For example Palau's postnatal care of giving the mother a hot herb bath is similar to the Korean practice of

having the mother rest on a well-heated clay floor with branches and leaves of pine trees piled on one side. Both practices may have the effect, through perspiration and with the help of plant anti-oxidants, of eliminating toxins, such as adrenalin hormones that are secreted during the delivery process, and of restoring the health of cells and organs of the maternal body. Such similarities may not be confined to the birth practice, and they can be the rich source of ideas and practices conducive to improving human health and living conditions in general.

Harvest and Landscapes provides us with information on the way people of this region prepare some of their staple food, mostly taro, cassava, and yams. The familiar western saying of 'You are what you eat' seems to be more applicable here as the people of this region are more engaged in the production and consumption of their food, from taro-field making to the semi-ritual way of eating *laplap soso'ur*.

The descriptions in these papers are telling in that they give clues to solutions for some problems contemporary food culture faces. The preparation process of *nogoytam* and *nelet* is a good example. These two ways of cooking cassava have several effects in terms of helping the people get through hard times: the long storage of cassava roots to be used during food shortage, the multiple ways of using all parts of the cassava for tasty dishes, the know-how of processing the bitter (toxic) part of cassava to make a good and safe food, etc. Longer storage, full usage, and efficient detoxification of food stuffs are pending issues in modern society.

Voyaging and Seascapes reveals one of the most characteristic parts of Pacific ICH. The use of sea routes has not only facilitated networking and cultural exchanges but also contributed to the conservation of traditions, as has been illustrated by the case of Yapese navigation.

Modern navigation methods have mostly relied on magnetic devices to identify the location of the ship. However, in recent decades, earth's geomagnetic system has begun to change with growing speed, and the magnetic signals that modern navigation uses are becoming less reliable. As a result, researchers in various fields of science are trying very hard to find an alternative way to navigate, and some of them are looking to traditional navigation methods.

Art and Technology, which is more directly related to tangible cultural heritage, shows how traditional views can reveal themselves in objects of display and use. In the beautiful hand-printing skill of *kupesi* in Tonga, for example, the patterns created have roots in Tongan history and culture with specific meaning, and the skills needed to create such works are traditionally passed from one generation to the next, but the results show an intricate weave of the tangible with the intangible. This same idea is represented in traditional house building in Palau as well as in the art of archery in Vanuatu, which shows how people can take living necessities and turn them into visual arts, both delicate and grandiose.

I am certain that all the articles under the five themes will help our readers to understand more about Pacific wisdom that is transmitted through generations and is still much a part of Pacific people's lives. Also, to help readers better perceive the rich heritage of the Pacific, we included as many images as possible.

The publication of this book was possible thanks to the efforts of numerous people, and I would like to begin by expressing my sincere appreciation to those authors who contributed. I would also like to express my deep gratitude to editorial board members for their indispensable efforts from the very inception of the project; they provided invaluable insights in the selection of topics and authors, among the myriad ICHs of the Pacific region; they have corresponded with the authors throughout, and were involved in structuring and editing the manuscript. I am also grateful to Ms. Faustina K. Rehuher-Marugg, Professor Unaisi Nabobo-Baba, and Dr. Lea Lani Kinikini-Kauvaka who contributed a great deal to editing and categorizing various articles and jointly wrote the introduction.

I would like to thank the Korea Cultural Heritage Administration for the generous sponsorship and understanding of the significance of this project. Last but not least, I would like to remember the devoted efforts of my staff in ICHCAP, Ms. Boyoung Cha and Ms. Saymin Lee, who coordinated this publication work for last two years.

I hope this book will be recognized as an important resource book of the traditional knowledge and wisdom of the Pacific islanders and used not only by Pacific researchers and educators but also by all those who are interested to learn about the valuable wisdom and vivid life in the Pacific islands.

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Samuel Lee, PhD
Director-General
ICHCAP