

2012 Final Report for “Young Researcher Overseas Visits Program for Vitalizing Brain Circulation (ZUNO project)”

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## 1. Study Subject

This is a study for Palauan Oral Tradition, trying to understand and analysis the system of Palauan knowledge and its friction with contemporary society of Palau. Thus far, at first, I was especially focus on the culture of chant in contemporary Palau to validating the relation between modern Palauan social/political spaces and actual situation for practicing/succession of Palauan chant. The aim of this dispatch is thus for, (1) verification for a recognition system of Palauan traditional knowledge, (2) structural analysis for local gift money system, (3) re-interpretation for a history of Micronesia, to deepen understand more about this study subjects as above, and to understand the Oral tradition culture in contemporary Palau.

## 2. Contents of Dispatch

[Republic of Palau, Micronesia: 4/1, 2012~11/30, 2012]

I was belonging to Belau National Museum where placed in Koror state in republic of Palau, as a volunteer researcher during my 8 months dispatch here. I did fieldwork in Babeldaob island, Koror island, Peleliu island and Angaur island. I have been mainly pursued interviewing, participation observation and collecting materials in all over the Palau states except only Kayangel island, depending on the study purpose on (1), (2) as above.

[University of Hawai'i at Mānoa: 11/30, 2012~ 2/15, 2013]

Main subject here was (3) re-interpretation for a history of Micronesia. I was mainly focus on either collecting primary materials/references/working papers discuss about oral tradition in Oceania and history of Micronesia in Hamilton library and East West Center

library, or attending seminar for history of Micronesia (Department of History), East West Center and Center for Pacific Island Studies. In addition I could have chance to pursued few interview to Palauan who lives in Hawai'i.



Photo1: Ngaraard State, Site for traditional rituals



Photo2: A monument for legend of Ngiwal state

### 3. Impressed experience during dispatch

I have had a lot of opportunity to meet and discuss with researchers who were from either Japan or overseas at the National Museum in Palau, where they function as a research base. I had experienced great knowledge exchange with them and it became a really great valuable time. Meantime, in 2012 at the exact same time as the US president election, the Republic of Palau also had one. That was another great opportunity for me to see the whole dispute around Palauan politics during the election time nearby. I believe that it would be an important aspect to understand modern Palauan politics. I would like to express my appreciation here to Prof. Kazuharu Mizuno who kindly visited Palau during my dispatch to give me an important advice.

During my stay in Hawai'i, I have had a great opportunity to visit Prof. Barbara B. Smith from the University of Hawai'i who is a pioneer not only as an ethnomusicologist but also as a first researcher studying about Palauan chant in the early 50s. I could possibly inquire many questions to her especially about the situation of how people practicing Palauan chant in the 1950s. It was a really great meet for me then, I could have a memorable conversation with Prof. Smith. On the other side, living in a dorm was my first time for me,

then for the very beginning I have had little confusions, however soon after I could get use to a circumstances, and could be able to enjoyed everyday conversation with young researcher who is working for various study topics in Asia and Pacific regions. At the seminar, there was Palauan graduated student working for analysis the traditional political system in her villages, I could have good discussion with her mainly focus on the difference and common view and understanding for Palauan society between us, and I strongly felt these discussion could complement each other.



Photo3: Landscape of University of Hawai'i taken from Hale Mānoa(University dormitory) building

#### 4. Achievement and Reflection

##### [Palau/ Field Work]

There are main two topics as below, (1) verification for a recognition system of Palauan traditional knowledge, (2) structural analysis for local gift money system, here. For (1), I did listening interview with using questioner to 30 households at Imul village and Ngerakeai village in Aimeliik states located in the middle-west of the Babeldaob island. A questioner is combined with 3 sections for Palauan knowledge as livelihood activity, History and Art. In the process of this research project, I could access to some cases which how using and succession for their sacred knowledge (for example herbal medicine). These cases are really helpful to consider the differences between sacred knowledge and else, and it make me more clearly understand the system of knowledge in Palau. However it took long time for interview to each person more than I expected, thus I couldn't finished all interviewing as I planed. Also, it could made cleared the situation which remarked increasing number of household in Aimeliik state recently, such as a house living in the overseas, a house living in other state, and a house not from Aimeliik

state neither wife and husband. This situation imply that to analysis whole recognition for Palauan knowledge belonging to Aimeliik state, it should also pursuing the research at several places as I mentioned in above. For (2), I picked up 2 cases to analysis the system of gift money exchange during the traditional rituals. Case 1 is a funeral held in Koror state located in center of Koror island, Case 2 is a first child birth ceremony held in Melekeok state located in middle-east of Babeldaob island. The traditional ritual itself, tend to expand a scale. As one example for funeral held in Koror state in 2012, participant were over 500 persons and the amount of total gift money marked over \$10,000 (Palauan gift money is not only an American dollars but also Palauan local money like turtle shell or beads). Each house has own traditional custom for distribute the gift money, besides money distribute is sensitive and private issue, thus sometimes its difficult to access into details.



Photo4: (Left) Gift money announce during funeral in Ngesear state



Photo5: (Light) Collecting gift money at first child birth ceremony in Melekeok state

Even with above 2 topics in addition, I did research about Palauan narrative art to consider how Palauan artist represent oral tradition into visual image and its transformation from gable into modern visual art. Result for this research analysis was written in article for “*Transforming of Narrative Art in Palau*” which published in 2013.



Photo6: Palauan modern visual art representing Palauan legend called “*Milad*”

[University of Hawai'i]

I was focus on work for this (3) re-interpretation for a history of Micronesia, topics during dispatch in UH. It was a great opportunity to have a personal guidance from Prof. David Hanlon (Department of History), especially to consider the impact of works which Micronesian researcher have done to making history of Micronesia, and how we could understand the meaning for “writing” oral tradition through academically works. Such discuss make me more deepen consider about interpretation of Micronesia history and could have fresh view how to placed oral tradition culture in Micronesia into world. A seminar for History of Micronesia that I attended to was also one of a place that exchanged ideas for understanding Micronesian history. On the other hand, collecting materials, mainly pursued at Pacific collection located in 5<sup>th</sup> floor of Hamilton Library. I could access to primary materials recorded about Palau in German time, Japan time and American time, and study report or dissertation for Oceania oral tradition and Traditional knowledge.

## 5. Future Theme

All date which I collected during this 2012-2013 dispatch, I am planning to output mainly through articles either internal or international and doctoral dissertation. In future, I would like to expand an academic network in Hawai'i, New Zealand and Australia where has base for Oceania Anthropology/Sociology research, to output my study.