

The book is in five sections. In the first, on 'spaces and identities', Stephen Royle explores island typologies, including their utility as laboratories for many disciplines. Christian Depraetere and Arthur Dahl classify in intricate detail (with 39 maps, diagrams and illustrations) the uneven distribution and characteristics of islands. Island origins and the effects of tectonic and climatic change on the evolution of their environments are superbly described by Patrick Nunn.

Section 2, on 'island life' includes chapters on unique biological features of islands by Andrew Berry; epidemiology by Andrew Cliff *et al.*; flora and fauna by Diana Percy *et al.* and Sam Berry; and the archaeological record by Athol Anderson. The third section, on 'development' includes 'Island war and security' by Barry Bartmann, 'Island political economy' by Geoff Bertram and Bernard Poirine, 'Island governance' by Edward Warrington and David Milne, 'Island tourism' by Stefan Gossling and Geoffrey Wall, 'Island migration' by John Connell, and 'Island gentrification and space wars' (on competition for real estate). All show how islands differ significantly from continental areas.

Chapter 15, 'Island futures and sustainability', contains brief contributions by 18 authors on the key challenges facing islands today and how to mobilise knowledge into action to deal with them. The final chapter, by Graeme Robertson, is an annotated list of institutions and resources for islands studies.

The book covers all aspects of the island world from the tropics to the polar regions in chapters of uniformly high quality. That is its greatest value. There are thousands of books about this or that island or group, or about aspects of islands in general. I have been involved in island studies for over 50 years, but this is the only one I know that assembles some of the world's best authorities to give readers a rich and detailed overview that will be of value to all scholars with an interest in islands.

RON CROCOMBE, *University of the South Pacific, Rarotonga*

We believe it is good to have a range of opinion in order to promote scholarly debate and, therefore, are pleased to have received two reviews of the following book.

**Asia in the Pacific Islands Replacing the West.** By RON CROCOMBE

Suva: IPS Publications, University of the South Pacific, 2007, 623 pp. notes, refs and index US\$49 paperback; US\$59 hardback ISBN 978 982 02 0388 4

This highly comprehensive, intriguing and insightful account of the Asians' activities in the Pacific Islands

must be read by all who are interested in the Pacific Islands and their relations with Asia. The book has been researched for over 50 years by the author, who has visited all the countries and worked in all the relevant governments, organisations and institutions to have a truly insider understanding of the facts, background and future of the relations between Asia and the Pacific Islands.

The book is a revealing and consuming journey of discovery that traverses ancient history, colonisation, the wars, social and political developments, decolonisation, trade and investment, crime and contemporary domestic and international relations within the Pacific century. It is the product of a lifelong undertaking by a genuine authority of Pacific studies.

The book is skilfully crafted and Professor Ron Crocombe, like a traditional Pacific Island story teller, presents the facts as if he had made the story himself. The book begins with an overview that whets the appetite and introduces the features examined in the book. Each of the subsections of the overview is then developed into the different chapters, which fits the author's aim to show why and how Pacific Islanders need to better understand the Asians. The facts are well argued and supported by the references. The notes add 'classified' information that better clarifies the issues.

Apart from Section I, 'Overview: turning full circle', the main part of the book is divided into five additional sections each of which consists of at least one chapter. Section II is on 'People: mostly out of Asia' with five chapters; Section III is on 'Hardware: out raw, in processed' with three chapters; Section IV is on 'Politics: why "look north"?' with five chapters; Section V is on 'Software: a slower transition' with three chapters; and Section VI is on 'Prospects: how far will possible potential be developed?' with one chapter. There are four appendices.

The book is likely to upset some people around the region but that is expected from such a serious and highly charged work. I remember about eight or so years ago in a seminar in a graduate school in Australia, when some of the female members of the audience walked out in protest in the middle of Professor Crocombe's talk. I felt for the females and for their sentiment but was thankful to Crocombe for accurately interpreting the data, having the courage to deduce the trends they show and, in the process, educate me on this topic.

The author has presented the 'spectacular transition' that has been underway in the Pacific Islands for the last 200 years. He has also explained why Pacific Island states need to realise that in this Pacific century, the cultural, economic, political and all other external influences will all be predominantly from Asian sources in place of the Western ones.

The book has important lessons for all the people responsible for leadership and development in the

Pacific Islands. Pacific Islanders can take advantage of the advice freely provided in the book's 622 pages to improve their development research. The advice is based on information that has been gathered over the last 50 years of development experience and is from a scholar who has demonstrated his commitment to the region. To repeat the mistakes mentioned in the book is to be wasteful of this one chance to make a difference.

I recommend the book to all the government workers in the Pacific Islands and those from outside assisting them, researchers working in the Pacific Islands and all those who want to be informed about the Pacific century and the people involved.

JOELI VEITAYAKI, *School of Marine Studies,  
University of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji*

It is not just nature that abhors a vacuum. The physics of flows is very much the key thematic of this most impressive and comprehensive volume on the changing balance of power in the world's geographically largest, most populous and yet still least-researched region. Professor Ron Crocombe has crafted a comprehensive account of the various dynamics by and from Asian countries in the Pacific (mainly the People's Republic of China, Japan, Korea and Taiwan/Republic of China) and the reverse dynamic of and by Pacific Islanders to East Asia. The author's encyclopaedic and pluri-disciplinary review of the subject matter is balanced by a very focused and sustained rationale. Asia is solidly moving into the Pacific even as European and North American influence wanes. The trend is 'irreversible'. The region fails to recognise this trend at its peril. As Asia replaces the West in the Pacific theatre, it exacts sweet revenge on how the West had 'replaced' Asia in a previous era. Archaeological evidence clearly suggests waves of *Homo sapiens* migrating east and south starting from around 50 000 BP and reaching Aotearoa/New Zealand by around 800 BP. The descendants of these 'Asians' were the Pacific Islanders that were encountered by Western seafarers in the so-called European age of discovery. More Asians have since ventured into the region because of aid, trade, investment, employment or military ambition. Though not explicitly, Crocombe proposes that the Pacific may yet become (again) an Asian *mare nostrum*.

Crocombe carefully structures his text in terms of competing currents of four sets of resources: (1) the human resource or migratory flows, with special emphasis on the rise and fall of the Japanese empire in the mid-twentieth century; (2) hardware, meaning economic transactions such as trade, investment, tourism and financial services, as well as less legitimate but just as real ones such as crime and corruption; (3) the new political economy of the region, inclusive

of slow but steady attempts at 'south-south' regional cooperation, and the cheque book diplomacy between Beijing and Taipei; and (4) the software of ideas, religion, information, education and research. All this, and more, the author documents with assiduous detail and a boundless energy. The text is a veritable *tour de force*, interjected with candid personal observations that accompany a myriad of endnotes and citations drawn from scholarly and various other sources (including regional and national news releases). As a result, the language is direct, uncompromising and unflattering. (I find this especially so in the section on services.) The black and white photos located throughout the text – often showing real people – also provide a very helpful human face to the powerful currents that the book explains so well.

I have just one concern with the book: perhaps it is too quick to ditch the role and influence of the *ancien regime* ('the West') in the Pacific. While six pages are dedicated to the US and its military concerns that affect its interest in Guam and the Northern Marianas, hardly any other reference is made to its influence in the region, except in the context of arguing its decline. There is also one Western European country with still significant (neo-imperial?) interests, and territories, in the Pacific: France. It scores just two entries in the index. Britain has one entry, and the Commonwealth – a lingering anchor for cultural cooperation in a region like the Pacific, from where a clutch of former British colonies graduated to independence – is ignored. Australia and New Zealand, the location of which assures them considerable scope for Pacific diplomacy, and that remain associated with such territories as Norfolk, Cooks and Tokelau, are accorded 13 and 3 entries in the index, respectively. As the West is 'replaced', it would be pertinent to examine more closely the details of this realignment, and how specific episodes and situations speak to this reshuffling of the pack. Perhaps the author deliberately avoided such considerations, in order to make his point about the Asian ascendancy even stronger. Moreover, Crocombe's tone suggests that the West is simply disinterested in a region that Gerard Ward had somewhat cynically called 'Earth's empty quarter'. Perhaps some of these 'Western' actors will only exit the Pacific stage kicking and screaming. Or they may not exit the stage at all.

In any case, these comments are not intended to sidetrack from the commendable contribution to scholarship that this book affords us. (In fact, much of the alleged missing material is addressed elsewhere in Crocombe's even more massive 980-page *South Pacific*, of which the seventh edition has just been published, also by IPS.) Our understanding of this large and complex region that is Asia-Pacific is facilitated admirably by the book's breadth and depth of knowledge and insight. I also find it noteworthy

that the book is authored by a Cook Island resident, published by a Fiji-based publishing house (IPS), and is, for its bulk (it weights 1.2 kg), attractively priced. *Asia in the Pacific Islands* will be an authoritative reference work on the features of the Asia–Pacific interface for many years to come. And, in the spirit of the book’s message, perhaps its price should also be quoted in yuan, yen, won and Taiwanese dollars? One also wonders whether a translation is to be made available, at least in Cantonese.

GODFREY BALDACCHINO, *University of Prince Edward Island, Canada*

**Correction:**

The book review forum contribution ‘Disaster capitalism in historical perspective’ in *The Geographical Journal* 174:3 was by Gerry Kearns and David Nally, University of Cambridge.