REVIEW

Pacific theses


The book under review is the nearest thing we have to a comprehensive and up-to-date list of dissertations on the Pacific islands. It is mainly on the strength that it is the only one of its kind that the World catalogue will prove to be an indispensable reference tool. Complete comprehensiveness however was neither possible nor intended as particulars from Russian and Japanese universities were not available whilst the sections on Hawaii and New Zealand are "necessarily selective". The Catalogue does however record theses from universities in Germany, Holland, France, Switzerland and Austria as well as the English-speaking countries. In addition to doctoral and masterate dissertations of all types, the compilers have also included the more important Honours and the various diploma course theses of significance along with some university prize essays and a selective list of long essays which form part of the M.A course at the University of Otago. An attempt has also been made to include published works that grew out of these.

It is therefore unfortunate that the value of the World catalogue will be somewhat diminished by its shortcomings. There is every indication that work on the Catalogue was fitted into spare half-hours and odd afternoons; that it was just one of the many duties that the compilers had to perform as research assistants in the Department of Pacific History at the Australian National University. The fact that Dickson, before coming to New Zealand, compiled the first draft of the Catalogue which Dossor then revised and extended must have created problems. But the Catalogue has other defects which could have been avoided and is infested with instances of carelessness, mostly of a somewhat trivial nature but which in sum add up to a very unfavourable impression. H. E. Maude, the General Editor of the Pacific Monograph Series, in his elegant Preface makes an appeal "for the clemency normally accorded to a first offender". But that clemency ended abruptly when I noticed that the compilers had not even bothered to ascertain the full names of former Ph.D students in their own Department.

Perhaps the most serious shortcoming is the distance in time between the closing date of entries (30 June 1968) and the actual date of publication (21 August 1970). In the intervening period a number of important theses...
had been completed and consequently not listed in the Catalogue. Perhaps the publisher, who is notoriously slow in turning a manuscript into a book, is partly to blame, but whatever the case the two years or so that it took the Catalogue to see the light of day after the entries closed only serves to reduce its value. Neither are some of the editorial policies very helpful. It is ludicrous that the first volume in what was originally intended as a paper backed series is an expensively produced hardback, resulting in a skimping on essentials to keep the price of the book below the $4 mark. Thus, cross-referencing has been done very sparingly indeed and there is no subject index. Anyone wanting to find all the theses listed on, say, education would have a long and tedious task in front of him, all because someone got the priorities out of order.

Within the limits imposed upon it, the geographical division of the Catalogue is well enough done. I would however question the inclusion of Angus Ross’ thesis, New Zealand aspirations in the Pacific in the nineteenth century (p. 10) in the section “Oceania—Great Power Relations” when the author tells us that “the title . . . emphasises the New Zealand end of the story which, in this book, has been treated as an aspect of New Zealand rather than Pacific island history”. Many of the long essays on the Pacific from the University of Otago which are also treated as an aspect of New Zealand history should likewise be transferred to the section on New Zealand to be in the same company with Joan Airey’s study on New Zealand imperialism in the Pacific . . . 1843–1906.

That section would be the most inept part of the book. It is marred by an appalling number of omissions and a few sins of commission. Maude explains that “in the case of New Zealand, only theses concerned with the Maori and other immigrant groups from the Pacific islands have been included”. The compilers seem to have listed all the theses in the latter category but the former is very thin in places. To mention but a few cases, Te Awarau’s History of Tuwhakairioro . . . Bell’s study of Maori myths and rites and Adam’s life of Sir James Carroll have all been overlooked. These three theses date back to the 1920s and the 1930s but even fairly recent dissertations have been missed. For some reason, the compilers have included the PhD theses of J. E. Ritchie and Joan Metge but overlooked their MA ones. Christie’s comparative study of Maori and pakeha female borstal trainees, Sheffield’s analysis of Maori theft and William’s study of Maori achievement motivation, all recent theses in psychology at the Victoria University of Wellington were also overlooked. Some theses on Europeans who had frequent dealings with the Maori are omitted too. For instance, neither of the two theses on Dickie Barrett appear in the Catalogue, nor does Scotney’s The land sales of Walter Mantell. Theses on missionaries have had their ranks severely thinned for the Catalogue does not list various studies on Octavius Hadfield, Archdeacon Brown, George Clarke, John Coleridge Patteson, Bishop G. A. Selwyn, and Richard Taylor. Also excluded is Chambers’ psychological analysis of certain cultural relationships between Wesleyan Methodist missionaries and the Maori between 1822 and 1834. But the most glaring omission of all would be Judith Binney’s MA thesis which had since been published as The legacy of guilt: a life of Thomas Kendall.

The New Zealand section also contains a number of factual errors. M. E. Boyd (p. 85) should read M. B. Boyd; a second edition of Sinclair’s Origins of the Maori Wars came out in 1961 (p. 93); Leach’s thesis on Wiremu Tamehana is sub-titled A study in Maori statemanship (p. 90); Dawe’s study (p. 87) is a long essay, I believe; in Missen’s thesis (p. 91)

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the name "White" should read "Whiti"; Barker's study (p. 84) is an MA thesis—there is no such thing as a BA (Hons) thesis in history at Victoria University. Also, as in other sections, dates for the theses listed cannot always be relied upon because the compilers frequently date them one year late. The compilers also fall down in that they are unaware that some of the theses in this section have been published. Babbage's work on Hauhauism (p. 84) appeared in book form nearly 35 years ago; the Polynesian Society had published those by Bigg (p. 85), Henderson (p. 88) and Vayda (p. 95); whilst Hohepa's study of a Maori community in Northland came out under the Reed imprint some time ago. In sum, the section on New Zealand is thoroughly unsatisfactory and people would be well advised instead to consult Margaret D. Rodger's Theses on the history of New Zealand which interprets the word "history" in its widest possible sense.

A few other errors will be found in the remaining sections of the Catalogue. In Walsh's thesis (p. 104) the last word should read "in-migration" and not "immigration", and in Field's study (p. 101) "Gaugin" should be "Gauguin". It might also be pointed out that Smith (p. 100) is the married name of Sylvia Masterman (p. 98) and although the compilers list the same thesis for each entry, only the one under Masterman is correct in its details.

The compilers are to be commended for their efforts to note instances when a thesis has been converted into a book. However, they have missed a few in addition to those already noted. The theses by Gordon (p. 3), Parnaby (p. 4) and Strauss (p. 55) have been published by different university presses in the United States. All three books are well known so it is rather surprising to see they were overlooked and especially so when the compilers have brought to their readers' attention many books that are rather obscure. In the case of Owen Parnaby's study of the labour trade, the compilers by-passed the obvious as the book was reviewed in the first number of the Journal of Pacific history (whose Editorial Board consists of members in the same Department as Dickson and Dossor) by a Research Fellow within the Department. It might also have been worthwhile to list more fully the instances when a thesis had been converted into a scholarly article. For instance, M. P. K. Sorrenson's analysis of the purchase of Maori lands (p. 94) and Ben R. Finney's study of socioeconomic change in the Society Islands (p. 101) have both appeared in reduced form in the Journal of the Polynesian Society, and David Routledge's Mr Lundo in Samoa (p. 100) appeared likewise in Historical Studies, Australia and New Zealand.

The final complaint would be the cavalier attitude that is adopted throughout towards the niceties of bibliographical procedures. Names haven't appeared in full when they could have, sub-titles have been omitted too often and when two theses are listed under the one author, there is no consistency in the order in which they appear. One wonders how a book that rejoices in so many irregularities ever ran the gauntlet of readers—if there were any readers, that is.

But despite all its faults, the World catalogue is nevertheless an extremely valuable reference source which the research worker on the Pacific will only ignore at his peril. It would have been even more than this had greater care been exercised in its making.

DOUG MUNRO

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