

Chapter 12

‘You Did What, Mr President!?!?’ Trying to Write a Biography of Tosiwo Nakayama

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At the time of this writing in March, 2006, Tosiwo Nakayama lies gravely ill in Waipahu, a former plantation town on the island of O’ahu flattened, paved over and built upon with shopping malls and track houses. Japanese and later Filipino immigrants once worked the sugar cane fields of Waipahu. More recently, the town has become home to an increasing number of people from Micronesia; most notably those from Chuuk and the Marshall Islands. Their presence is the result of provisions within the Compact of Free Association between the United States and the governments of the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) and the Republic of the Marshall Islands that allow for the free movement of Micronesians into the United States and its territories. Tosiwo Nakayama, the first president of the FSM, helped negotiate that compact.

There is considerable unease surrounding his present situation in Hawai’i; those who tend to him in that two-story townhouse in Waipahu are his most immediate family members: his daughter Sydiniha, his youngest son Masami, and other female members of his extended family resident on the island. The United States government has extended no recognition to this former head of state lying ill within its borders, and members of the FSM consulate in Honolulu struggle with the lack of established protocol for his presence. Nakayama’s current circumstances seem a less than dignified or respectful culmination to a distinguished life. Perhaps the uneasiness surrounding his situation suggests something of the ways in which the nation-state he helped build is regarded by those who reside within its borders and by those who are bound by diplomatic treaty to respect its sovereignty. Or do the restrained responses to his weakened condition remind us of how belittling the prefix ‘micro’ is? Micro as in ‘Micronesian’, meaning tiny or small, and not terribly important to those for whom size matters. That is the way Micronesia has been viewed historically and historiographically; that is the way Micronesian immigrants tend to be viewed now in Hawai’i. Tosiwo Nakayama, then, dies as a ‘micro’ man whose contributions to the founding of the Federated States of Micronesia do not allow him to escape the belittling, still colonising gaze cast upon people from small,

distant islands to the west of Hawai'i. I am interested in the meanings of Tosiwo Nakayama's life that precede, include and transcend his current condition.

Born to a Japanese father and a local woman in 1931 on Piserach, a part of the atoll complex of Onon in the Namonuito group of islands that lies some 200 miles to the northwest of the main Chuuk Lagoon group, Nakayama grew up during Japan's colonial administration of greater Micronesia. Perhaps, the skills he developed negotiating the different worlds from which his father and mother came help explain his success in later forging a national government from a collection of disparate island groups. Before he reached the age of 15, Nakayama had lived through a world war and a subsequent change in colonial administrations. Nakayama proved adept at adjusting to life in post-war Chuuk, then known as Truk, and under the United States Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. He learned English and graduated from the Pacific Islands Central School (PICS) on Weno Island, also called Moen and the administrative center for Chuuk during the Trust Territory period. Nakayama later went on to spend time studying at the University of Hawai'i's Mānoa campus.

Returning to Chuuk in 1958, Nakayama advanced quickly through a series of administrative positions to become assistant district director for Public Affairs. Most notable in this time period are his efforts on behalf of autonomy and self-government at both the local and trust territory-wide levels. He served first as a representative from Namonuito and then as president in the Truk District Congress. In 1965, Nakayama won election to the House of Delegates of the Congress of Micronesia. In 1968, he succeeded Amata Kabua of the Marshalls as president of that legislative body. More than any other individual, Tosiwo Nakayama is credited with managing the complex, sensitive political negotiations on Saipan in 1975 that resulted in a draft national constitution for the different Micronesian states or districts seeking political autonomy from the United States.

A proponent of independence for Micronesia since his student days at the University of Hawai'i, Nakayama served as an early member of the Congress of Micronesia's Future Political Status Commission, and was a key player in the long difficult negotiations with the United States government that culminated in the Compact of Free Association. Nakayama worked aggressively on behalf of the compact, arguing for its passage throughout the islands and against strong opposition in the Northern Marianas, the Marshalls, and Palau where sentiment for separate political negotiations with the United States ultimately prevailed. Despite this separation, the Federated States of Micronesia came into being as a result of the constitution's ratification in 1978 by the remaining island states of Chuuk, Kosrae, Pohnpei, and Yap. These same four states later approved the draft Compact of Free Association with the United States in a 1983 plebiscite.

By vote of his congressional colleagues, Tosiwo Nakayama was chosen as the first president of the FSM. His inauguration took place on 15 May 1979. More than seven years would pass before the United States Congress completed its review and approval of the compact. In the interim, Nakayama concerned himself with matters of government. During his first four-year term in office, Nakayama focused on transition issues, nation building, economic development, and the distribution of power and responsibilities between the national and four state governments. He worked in his second term to establish the FSM's regional and international credibility.

A study of the life of Tosiwo Nakayama, however, involves much more than a narrative of political events. From a small atoll complex whose survival depended upon voyaging and navigation, Nakayama's career parallels the current regional reemergence of these nautical abilities as powerful testaments to cultural pride and dignity. Similarly, Nakayama's personal and professional travels foreshadowed the current migration of Micronesian peoples; as previously noted, his efforts on behalf of the Compact of Free Association have enabled Micronesian migration to the United States and its territories. Nakayama's rise to prominence in Chuuk constitutes a remarkable story given the physical, political, and cultural distance that separates the Namonuitos from the main Lagoon group. Put another way, he was an outer islander.

Complex engagements with colonialism, decolonisation, and nation-making were central to Nakayama's career; these encounters place him squarely in the middle of some of the most complex, important issues in 20th-century Pacific Islands history. Nakayama's career also affords the opportunity to examine the gap between political theory and practice. While anthropologists, historians, and social science researchers debate modernisation, development and the appropriateness of the term 'Micronesia', Nakayama had to call upon historical linkages, common experiences, and shared aspirations among varied and diverse groups of island people. Tosiwo Nakayama's life, then, offers a critical focal lens through which to examine a host of key themes that link Micronesia to the larger Pacific region and beyond.

I first met Tosiwo Nakayama on Pohnpei in 1973. My wife and I were Peace Corps volunteers preparing to leave the island after three years of teaching English and social studies at a Catholic mission school in the south of the island. We were in Kolonia at the time, the aptly named capitol of the island. The Congress of Micronesia was holding a session on the island, one in a series of visits designed to better connect this still fledgling representative body with its widely dispersed constituency of atoll and island dwellers spread across an area about the size of the continental United States. Negotiations with the United States over a new political status had already begun, and members of the congress's Future Political Status Commission were also seeking the input of

elected and traditional leaders in the different island districts. There was a reception for the congress near the Catholic Mission in Kolonia to which my wife and I were invited. I remember sitting in one of the chairs that lined the walls of the long, rectangular meeting room with tiled floor, thinly panelled walls and a corrugated tin roof. Nakayama, then president of the Congress of Micronesia's Senate, came up to us, extended his hand, and said simply 'Tos Nakayama'. I remember being struck by his modesty and good looks. Twenty-seven years later, I met him again, this time in the restaurant of the Honolulu Airport's Best Western Hotel where I agreed to work with him on the story of his life.

Why? Living for almost eight years on the island of Pohnpei had taught us to look beyond labels such as 'underdeveloped'. I learned something of how rich life could be amidst communities bound together by a strong sense of kin, clan, family, and church relationships. I remember marvelling at how in control people seemed to be of their lives—of how focused they were on their social relationships—despite a succession of colonial regimes in the region. In more academic environments of the early 1980s, the word 'agency' spoke to the realisation of peoples' roles in the making of their own worlds and in their encounters with others. I wrote a general history of the island of Pohnpei that sought above all else to portray a rich and dynamic island world that persevered against an array of external threats, not the least of which was epidemic disease. I authored a later book entitled *Remaking Micronesia* that took a larger regional view of the way people engaged with both the discourses and forces of development. While the balance of power in this engagement was decidedly asymmetrical, I saw agency too in different peoples' efforts to make a better world that was still their world. I saw agency in the person of Tosiwo Nakayama in 1973.

I used to teach a course in World Civilisations at the University of Hawai'i; it was an impossible course that sought to acquaint students with the variety of human experiences over time. I subverted the conventions of that course by including a section on the peopling of the Pacific and by advertising that settlement as being one of humankind's greatest historical accomplishments. I would describe the creation of the Federated States of Micronesia in less effusive terms, perhaps, but nonetheless as a remarkable achievement.

A study of Tosiwo Nakayama's life also offers the opportunity to glimpse local engagements with the American colonial presence, and the creation of a nation state against a formidable array of local and external forces, not the least of which were the divisions among Micronesians themselves. The approval of the constitution of the FSM was but the beginning of a difficult foundational period. There were the complex negotiations with the Trust Territory government over separation and transition; the physical and political difficulties of establishing a capitol for the new government on a reserved, not always

appreciative Pohnpei; and the intense debates over states rights, powers, and revenue entitlements. Within the FSM, there was concern over the possible domination of Chuuk at the expense of the smaller states, most notably Kosrae and Yap. Nakayama was at the center of all this, and his mediation skills were sometimes required in the settlement of more immediate, personal and ethnic crises such as the stabbing of a Pohnpeian by Chuukese youth in 1983 on Pohnpei.

Nakayama committed himself early on to independence. He said, in the course of a week-long series of interviews at his home on Weno in early January of 2001, that his early work for the Trust Territory government in Truk had convinced him that Americans could not administer the islands effectively or prepare them for self-government. He thought Micronesians needed to govern their own islands. There is more than a little irony in Nakayama's call for unity and independence. To be sure, it was the Chuukese or Trukese delegation in the Congress of Micronesia that was most critical of the American administration in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Members of the Chuukese delegation in this period were also quite adamant in their insistence on independence for the future Micronesian state. Nonetheless, Chuuk is considered the most divided and contentious of the Micronesian island groups. It's a description with a historical pedigree that goes back almost to first contact between the islands and the larger world. 'Dreaded Hogelau' is the term used by some historians to describe the factionalism and rivalry that seemed to characterise the lagoon group then. It's a characterisation that in the minds of many still fits in the first years of the 21st century.

Chuuk's alleged backwardness was a concern of the Trust Territory government. More recent assessments, such as the United States Government Accounting Office's report on the use of compact monies in the FSM, have stressed the corruption that has impeded Chuuk's development, making it a major drain on the struggling government. The prejudice is not necessarily a colonial construction or artifact. Distrust of Chuukese is acute among other Micronesian peoples and is pointed too as a potential cause for the dissolution of the FSM.

Nakayama, however, dismissed criticisms of the region as too diverse and divided. He believed differences among Micronesians were exaggerated by outsiders whose own interests, prejudices and world views were served by the presumption of divisiveness. He did not share understandings of Micronesia as a colonial construct. He saw links, connections and commonalities that the name 'Micronesia' spoke well enough too. He articulated his belief on numerous occasions during the ratification campaign for the FSM constitution that the resources of the surrounding seas could easily provide the revenues to sustain a unified government. During his trip to various islands during the ratification

campaign, he often told the story of a previously dismembered ocean deity made whole again by those who believed in him.

If there are reasons enough to justify a life history of Tosiwo Nakayama, what then are the themes, patterns, or interpretive lens through which Nakayama's life might be understood? Voyaging is an often used (perhaps too often) metaphor in Pacific studies. Voyaging, however, is a metaphor that might serve us well in understanding something of Nakayama's lineage. I'm thinking here of Nakayama not so much as the navigator for the FSM ship of state or of the extensive travel that was a feature of his public life. Rather, I have in mind something more immediate and personal. Nakayama hails from Onon in the Namonuito group of islands. One of Nakayama's uncles was a respected navigator who sailed the seas around the Namonuito group. Nakayama himself once thought about leaving his public career to return to Onon to learn the navigator's craft. He was certainly competent and comfortable on the ocean. Fishing was a passion of his, especially during his days as FSM president on Pohnpei. There are stories of him putting his ear to the boat floor to listen for fish. Another account speaks of an earlier incident when he successfully took over as navigator for a field trip ship whose radar system had broken down on the way to the islands of Yap. We might think of him, then, as a would-have-been navigator had his life been less affected by colonialism and war.

Tosiwo Nakayama is quite literally a child of the Japanese colonial presence in Micronesia. His father was an employee of the Nan'yō Kabushikigaisha (Nambō) trading company that was so commercially prominent in the islands during Japan's tenure. Nakayama and his family accompanied their father on different assignments that included extended stays on Lukunor in the nearby Mortlocks, and on Tol and Tolawas in the Faichuk area of the Chuuk lagoon. Nakayama describes his father as being quite adept in English and with a sense of the importance of that language for the islands' future. Nakayama never mentioned learning any English from his father; he may, however, have had his father's ear for language as he developed over his career a good ability in English despite his limited formal schooling.

The American repatriation of all Japanese nationals from Micronesia following the end of hostilities separated father from family. One of the more intriguing anecdotes from Nakayama's personal history involves the search for his father during a trip to Japan in the late 1960s. The Chuukese son eventually brought his Japanese father back to Weno to live with him in the family home by the shore. Nakayama's father now lies buried just outside of that home in a marked grave surrounded by a modest wooden fence and covered by a small tin roof. Towards the end of his life, Nakayama's father, somewhat senile it seems, tended the family's small retail store. He was a popular sales clerk as he often returned people's money with their purchases.

One of the more remarkable aspects of Tosiwo Nakayama's life is the network of relationships throughout the Chuuk group and further west that would later translate into political support. Prejudice within the Chuuk lagoon group against people from the outer islands remains pronounced. Nakayama's birth on Onon gave him no advantage on Weno or in the surrounding lagoon area, and by itself could have been a very limiting factor for anyone with ambition. The personal relationships established on those islands where his father resided for extended periods of time as a commercial agent of Nambō came strongly into play in his election to the Congress of Micronesia and later to the Congress of the Federated States of Micronesia where popular electoral success was a condition of eligibility for the presidency.

Nakayama claims to have had no ambition, certainly no plan for a political career. But his travels, multiple residences, and close personal ties with the people among whom he lived as a boy and young man go a long way toward explaining his electoral success. His ability to garner support from the many island areas that made up Truk district, later Chuuk state, allowed him to overcome the disadvantages of a candidate not from Weno or the lagoon proper.

There is also Nakayama's paternal ancestry. It linked him to a group of people who became quite prominent in Chuuk during the Trust Territory period. These island men, born of Japanese fathers and Chuukese women, were known for their energy, drive, and entrepreneurial ability. They were often called upon to serve as representatives or go-betweens in matters involving governance or economy with the Trust Territory government. Nakayama's association with this prominent, commercially successful network of individuals proved a decided asset. Perhaps, the most politically strategic of relationships was his marriage to Mihter, a member of the Sopwunipi clan that was dominant on Weno and prominent in the larger lagoon area. The geographical distribution of Nakayama's own clan stretched from Nomonuito west into Yap. This link to Yap would provide him with strong support at critical times during his career in the Congress of Micronesia and as president of the FSM.

Nakayama was a facilitator, a consensus seeker not given to confrontations or public posturing. He showed little emotion and was a quiet man who preferred private conversations and small social gatherings. As president of the Congress of Micronesia's Senate from 1968 to 1979, he rarely spoke for the congressional record on key matters affecting policy or legislation; he confined himself instead to procedural matters, and left the more public speeches for others. Nakayama was also a self-effacing leader; he voted for his opponent, Amata Kabua of the Marshalls, in the 1968 election that brought him the presidency of the Congress of Micronesia's Senate. He was a pragmatic man as well. When I asked him why he settled for free association with the United States rather than the independence

he had initially and vigorously championed, he replied simply that free association was the best deal that could be gotten.

Those closest to him note that he grew quieter when angry. Emotions and the threat of violence swirled about him nonetheless. He responded to threats of violence against his person in one election by travelling to Tolowas in the Faichuk area to meet with then congressman Kalisto Refalopei, the source of those threats. At the end of the 1975 Micronesian constitutional convention, he brokered a last minute deal that made possible the approval of a draft constitution despite deep dissatisfaction within the Palau, Marshalls, and Mariana delegations. At that closed door session, Nakayama sat between John Ngiraked of Palau and Leo Falcam of Pohnpei. Tensions ran high between the two men on either side of Nakayama. Words, gestures, glances, and body posture, reported those present, conveyed the two men's deep unease with one another. Falcam, himself a future president of the FSM, spoke for unity and the draft constitution; Ngiraked was committed to a separate government for Palau. Nakayama, personally closer to the Pohnpeian than the Palauan, would sometimes step on Falcam's foot when exchanges became particularly heated. Ultimately, the convention delegates approved the draft constitution but with the tacit understanding that not all of the districts would join the Federated States of Micronesia.

Violence would become associated with the careers of both Falcam and Ngiraked. Falcam in 1986 promised that blood would run through the streets of Pohnpei should the Faichuk area of Chuuk be recognised as a separate and second Chuukese state within the FSM, a development that threatened the very tenuous and fragile balance of power among the four existing states of Chuuk, Kosrae, Pohnpei, and Yap. Ngiraked would be arrested, tried, convicted, and jailed for masterminding the assassination of the Republic of Palau's second president, Haruo Remelik.

The pressures on Nakayama were many and constant throughout his public life. There were threats against his life, and intense surveillance on his movements and activities especially during negotiations with the United States over the Compact of Free Association. His absence from home placed considerable pressure and hardship on his family, most especially his wife and two eldest sons. Nakayama, however, did not use his position for private gain. His own public career is remarkably free of controversy or scandal. The same cannot be said for family members. His brother-in-law was impeached as governor of Chuuk State in the early 1980s for misuse of public funds. More recently, Nakayama's daughter and son-in law were indicted, again for the misuse of public funds and as part of a wider investigation into fraud and corruption in Chuuk state carried out by the attorney general's office of the FSM government.

It would be a mistake to see Nakayama as more than he actually was. He brought people together and through dialogue, reassurance, and persuasion. His most important political asset may well have been his patience. Nakayama did not act alone, but rather in consort with others who shared his belief that Micronesians were best able to govern themselves. A life history of Tosiwo Nakayama will need careful attention to his friend and colleague Andohn Amaraich, now chief justice of the Federated States of Micronesia. Amaraich, like Nakayama, was a largely self-educated man who served in the Congress of Micronesia and later headed the Congress of Micronesia's Future Political Status Commission in its negotiations with representatives of the United States. Amaraich shared Nakayama's vision for independence. There are those who view Amaraich, more than Nakayama, as the visionary and architect for what became the Federated States of Micronesia.

Betwel Henry from the outlying island of Mokil or Mwoakilloa in Pohnpei state served as the speaker of the Congress of Micronesia's House of Representatives for many years. Henry is credited with being the tactician who actually brokered many of the compromises that made possible the emergence of the FSM. The three—Amaraich, Henry, and Nakayama—are often spoken of as a triumvirate. Other prominent names from this period of state formation include Petrus Tun and John Mangafel of Yap, Lazarus Sali and Roman Tmetuchl of Palau, and Ambilos Iieshi and Bailey Olter of Pohnpei. One of the reasons behind Nakayama's cooperation in this biography project is the belief that the story of these early formative years of the FSM is being forgotten and that current leaders have lost a sense of vision and commitment to the nation in favour of more immediate parochial and personal interests.

The issues surrounding and even confounding a biography of Tosiwo Nakayama are many and considerable. This is a project that I was asked to do by those close to Nakayama personally and professionally. They perhaps seek a life history that celebrates a man and his many accomplishments. It would be easy enough to make this biography a hagiography. Among the more than 35 formal interviews I have recorded with Nakayama's colleagues and associates, only one individual ventured comments that were substantively critical of Nakayama and on grounds that he was far more a politician than a leader. The vast majority of individuals I have interviewed across Micronesia over the last few years have spoken glowingly of Nakayama, including those in the Marshalls and Palau who opposed him in his efforts to promote Micronesian unity. It would be naive, perhaps, to expect that I as a stranger to most of these men could elicit within a single meeting comments that were other than positive.

The artificiality of formal interviews is but a part of the larger problem of doing a life history of a Micronesian. Biography can certainly be an alien, intrusive venture into lives whose parameters are defined, even subsumed, by

a complex, interlocking network of kin, clan and family. There is the fact too that we are dealing with multiple identities and inter-subjectivities. Nakayma was a man whose life involved numerous relationships and accompanying responsibilities; he was a son, brother, nephew, husband, father, uncle, friend, clan mate, student, church member, government worker, elected official, national leader, and president of his country. Depending upon circumstances, he would identify himself by home island, clan membership, family affiliation, and as Trukese, Chuukese, or Micronesian. At different times in his life, he dealt with people who called themselves Chamorros, Guamanians, Kosraeans, Marshallese, Palauans, Pohnpeians, Yapese, Americans, Australians, Fijians, Israelis, Japanese, and Samoans to list a few. And there is the very fundamental question as to what kind of man Tosiwo Nakayama was. The anthropological literature suggests that modernisation has had a highly disruptive effect on Chuukese masculinity. This does not seem to be a prominent issue in Nakayama's life. If so, then the question is why. What is it that allowed Nakayama to be secure, assured and confident in his identity?

It would be a mistake to speak or write of Tosiwo Nakayama only in his more political and leadership roles. He was much more than the public descriptions and accounts provided by Trust Territory officials, diplomats, compact negotiators, American negotiators, and academic observers that constitute the written archive on his life. It would be wrong as well to frame his life solely against the discourses of governance and development with which he engaged. But how to do it? How to tell his life story in a way that captures his complexity, his humanity, his significance, and in a way that he and his people would recognise?

I have already indicated in this essay something of the issues around sources. Let me expand. Soon after agreeing to take on this project, I asked Tosiwo Nakayama if I could have access to his personal papers. He replied that had he any, he would most certainly make them available to me. Unfortunately, he continued, he had thrown them all away shortly after leaving the presidency in 1986. I was dismayed. My inner voice cried out: 'You did what, Mr. President!?!?' The public records of the Federated States of Micronesia for the Nakayama presidency pose another kind of problem. I have been told they exist, but have yet to locate them or identify anyone who knows where exactly they are stored. Given the climatic conditions in Micronesia, the often erratic power supply there, and the generally low priority accorded the preservation of government records, my fear of what I might find sometimes approaches my fear of finding nothing.

Nakayama's life is certainly not without documentation. There are the microfilmed records of the Trust Territory administration housed at the University of Hawai'i, Mānoa, and other selective sites throughout the region.

This rather extensive collection includes over 2,500 reels of microfilmed reports, correspondence, minutes of meetings, and government publications, much of it concerned with matters of governance and future political status. This will help. The secondary and periodical literature is also considerable; Nakayama's name figures prominently in studies of politics, governance, constitutionalism, and the Compact of Free Association. Official American records from Nakayama's time are more difficult to access; many are still classified. Those that are available can be accessed only through a time consuming and costly application process as specified in the United States Congress's Freedom of Information Act. There are too the highly sensitive psychological profiles of Chuukese leaders commissioned by Trust Territory government officials and done by the American anthropologist Jack Fischer in the early 1950s. The Pacific Collection on the fifth floor of the University of Hawai'i's Hamilton Library holds the university's international student records on Micronesians from the 1950s and 1960s; these include quite detailed, even intimate reports on the many future political leaders of Micronesia who studied in Hawai'i during this period. Finally, I did spend considerable time with Nakayama himself in late December of 2000 and early January of 2001. I visited his home on Weno where I conducted 13 hours of recorded and since transcribed interviews with him. These, of course, are invaluable but nonetheless are affected by Nakayama's self-admitted memory loss and poor health.

To be honest, I think Nakayama was also careful, selective and even evasive at times in these interviews. His stated reason for cooperating in this biography project is the belief that the story of the FSM's formative years has been forgotten by those local leaders desperately in need of remembering it. It is, then, a political biography he would have me write and for contemporary political purposes. While I understand Nakayama's life as being about much more than politics, this biography project may well end up concentrating on his public life. If so, I still have many questions to ask. I want to know more about his Japanese ancestry, about his father's forced repatriation to Japan, and about how growing up during Japanese colonial times may have influenced his later political views. I have questions too about what strikes me as Nakayama's denial of the very real divisions within the FSM. Tosiwo Nakayama is unable to answer these questions, however. He is desperately ill in Waipahu, conscious and alert but no longer able to speak.

I return to the circumstances surrounding Nakayama's current presence in Hawai'i. It may be that they reflect his noble but flawed vision of an autonomous government not much believed in by some of its citizens and not much respected by the United States with which it is associated. Still, I contend that a biography of this individual is important for what he tried to do, for the historical and contemporary issues with which his life engages, and for the ways in which he sought to redefine the boundaries of a Micronesia and reconfigure the

self-imaging of Micronesians. This is what makes trying to do a biography of Tosiwo Nakayama a worthy and important project.

Postscript:

Tosiwo Nakayama passed away on March 29, 2007 in Hawai'i.