WORKING SESSION 2

Transformation of the Political System in Late 19th Century Kiribati

When the first Europeans arrived in the second half of the 19th Century, they found a variety of different political systems in use on the 16 atolls of the archipelago nowadays known as Kiribati. The spectrum of political systems reached from hegemonic dynastic ‘kingdoms’, with one family holding all the power, to more or less democratic egalitarian ‘councils of old men and women’, who discussed and decided matters of common interest. Foreign Traders and Missionaries had a strong impact on the local society and its laws. But it were the British protectorate officials who, from 1892 on, established a new, uniform system on all the Islands. It is one of the interesting questions how the People of Kiribati dealt with this external pressure and to which extent they allowed their social structure and traditional values to be transformed.

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