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World Geography 2

Chapter 34: Australia, Oceania, Antarctica

Oceania(for today, this will include Antarctica and Australia for simplicity) has one notable characteristic that outshines all others: it is *huge*. More than this, within that huge-ness, it is incredibly sparse. Australia, the most populous of the three, has a population of only 25 million people, less than Texas. New Zealand has only about 5 million, and there are but a few million more spread across the whole of Oceania - Antarctica has no permanent residents at all. This is a region of the world that is defined by its emptiness, and the challenges that come with that.

Even in the era of the internet, the vast distances between cities and towns in Oceania make communication difficult. The region is home to some of the most remote places on Earth, and the people who live there are often cut off from the rest of the world. This isolation has historically led to a great deal of diversity in the region, with many different cultures and languages coexisting in "island worlds" that are separated by vast stretches of ocean. In the modern day, it means that trying to get things, people, or information from one place to another can be a real challenge. In addition, it hampers their economic development, as building any kind of industry on such tenuous supply lines is difficult.

The vastness also makes infrastructure difficult to build. Roads, railways, ports, and airports are all expensive to construct and maintain, and the distances between population centers(on land), and the sheer distance and number of islands at sea, make it difficult to justify the expense. With thousands of islands, many of which are inhabited by only a few thousand people, it is an expensive proposition to build the infrastructure necessary to connect them all to the degree that could ensure total connection. Australia is connected east-west(Perth to Adelaide) by a single road and railway unless you want to go all the way to the middle of the outback. What better could be done? It is a massive country, and the population is very spread out - rail expansion and road building more than they already have is a difficult proposition compared to expansion of your existing air network.

New Zealand suffers from this problem in a slightly different manner: it is far smaller, and can certainly connect its population with roads and rail, but the gap between North and South Island(I personally feel they should build a bridge or tunnel) required constant ferry service, and that dramatically cuts down on what would be "easy" travel between the two islands. This would be the largest bridge in the world, and I personally feel that it would be a great boon economically, geostrategically(soft power - "yeah, we built the biggest bridge in the world"), and for the people of New Zealand. It would be a massive project, but I think it would be worth it.

In conclusion, the trait defining Oceania is its vastness and emptiness. This has led to a great deal of diversity in the region, but also to challenges in communication, infrastructure, and economic development. The region is home to some of the most remote places on Earth, and the people who live there are often cut off from the rest of the world for many months of the year. The internet has helped to bridge some of these gaps, but the physical distances between places in Oceania remain a major obstacle to development.