

# **DISTANCE EDUCATION IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC**

## **Nets & Voyages**

*Editors: Richard Guy  
Toshio Kosuge  
Rieko Hayakawa*

Distance Education  
in the South Pacific:  
Nets and Voyages

Richard Guy, Toshio Kosuge and Rieko Hayakawa  
editors

Institute of Pacific Studies  
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and

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## Preface

In January 1995 a group of experts and practitioners involved in the field of distance education in the South Pacific gathered in the PEACESAT conference room of the University of Hawai'i to discuss the provision of distance education to fostering the region's human resources and to craft collaboration to accomplish that end.

Historically, the Pacific Islands region has been subdivided into Polynesia, Melanesia and Micronesia, each comprising countries and territories with diverse peoples, cultures and languages. Vast expanses of sea separate these countries and the islands comprising them. The island nations vary as much historically as they do geographically. As a result of colonial rule by western countries and Japan, they possess differing political, economic and educational systems. The majority of the region's countries gained independence after World War II, though some have yet to gain full independence and some choose to retain special relationships with metropolitan powers. With the exception of Papua New Guinea, which has a population of over four million, most of the island nations and territories have populations ranging from 50 to 700,000 inhabitants. Generally speaking, they lack abundant natural resources, fertile soil, and fresh water. In most cases, they depend on their ex-suzerains and other advanced nations for aid. Amidst this arduous environment, there is an urgent need to foster, within the region, human resources of a calibre that can help to bring about economic development and autonomy for the island states.

Education and training are essential to the promotion of technological innovation and social reform in developed and developing countries alike. The island nations are each facing the formidable task of overcoming their high levels of dependency while strengthening their currently frail politico-economic bases. Pacific Islands states share relatively high recognition of the role that education can play in expanding their future horizons. Education has a particularly strong importance in this region of scarce natural resources, where development can only be accomplished by fostering professionals and practitioners with the skills and know-how to produce high-quality, value-added goods and services. Enhanced education will also make it possible for island nations to send a higher calibre of people overseas as well. The fact that most Islanders currently

going abroad to predominately ex-suzerain countries are manual labourers bespeaks the heightening need for education and training in the region.

Through this project, which seeks on one level to foster strengthened awareness of the importance of human resource development in the Pacific, we looked at the history of distance education and explored the state of its deployment within the region. We then sought to share the information, knowledge and technology generated through the region's various distance education systems and their respective processes of development. We considered that bringing these experiences together into a critical mass to be our most immediate task, and we decided to compile our findings on distance education in the region and publish them in this volume.

It was the long desire and ardent determination of many educators, and others, in the Pacific region that made possible the implementation of this project. It could not have been realized without the efforts of various collaborators from the Pacific Islands nations, Australia, France, Japan, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The achievements of this project, and its attendant value, were elevated by other vanguard projects in the area of telecommunications previously funded by the Sasakawa Pacific Island Nations Fund from the time of its establishment within the Sasakawa Peace Foundation. These forerunners were the two Sasakawa Peace Foundation support projects: the PEACESAT Policy Conference held in Sendai in 1991 and the Pacific Island Nations Region Distance Education Study conducted in 1993 and 1994. Each of these projects provided opportunities for a cadre of experts on distance education to meet and to converse.

Its groundwork having thus been laid, the convening of the aforementioned conference in Hawai'i in January 1995 launched this project. It shifted into high gear at a second conference in November of the same year held at the Commonwealth of Learning in Vancouver, Canada, in which the work's content and distribution was determined and writing and editing assignments made. This volume was to cover the scope of distance education in the region and to describe the various systems as accurately and comprehensively as possible. With an eye to capturing the geographical and historical settings of distance education, we decided to take up the topics as listed on the contents page.

Experts with distinguished research careers in the field of distance education in the South Pacific were engaged to conduct the studies and to write chapters. Professor John Chick and I were given editorial responsibility. The writers gathered information from the latest surveys

and research conducted on their respective topics and carried out site studies in the process of preparing their chapters. Though the results of this work fall short of portraying a complete picture of distance education in the Pacific, they do piece together a significant portion of that picture. In future, we hope to finish this work and to publish a sequel volume that will complete the body of knowledge on this subject of considerable interest not only to the region and Japan but to other countries around the world as well.

In 1996, while editing this volume, Professor Chick passed away suddenly. We take this opportunity to express our deepest sorrow and to promise that we will fulfil his desire to complete this important work. Dr Richard Guy of Papua New Guinea was asked to assume Professor Chick's editorial responsibilities.

Finally, we would like to express our appreciation to the Sasakawa Peace Foundation and the Sasakawa Pacific Island Nations Fund for not only the financial assistance but also the moral support rendered to this project. We would, furthermore, like to extend special words of thanks to Ms Rieko Hayakawa, Assistant Program Officer, for her masterful work in carrying out the difficult task of coordinating this international joint effort.

Toshio Kosuge  
1999

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# Colonial Experiences and Education Legacies in the South Pacific Region

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*Richard Guy*

## INTRODUCTION

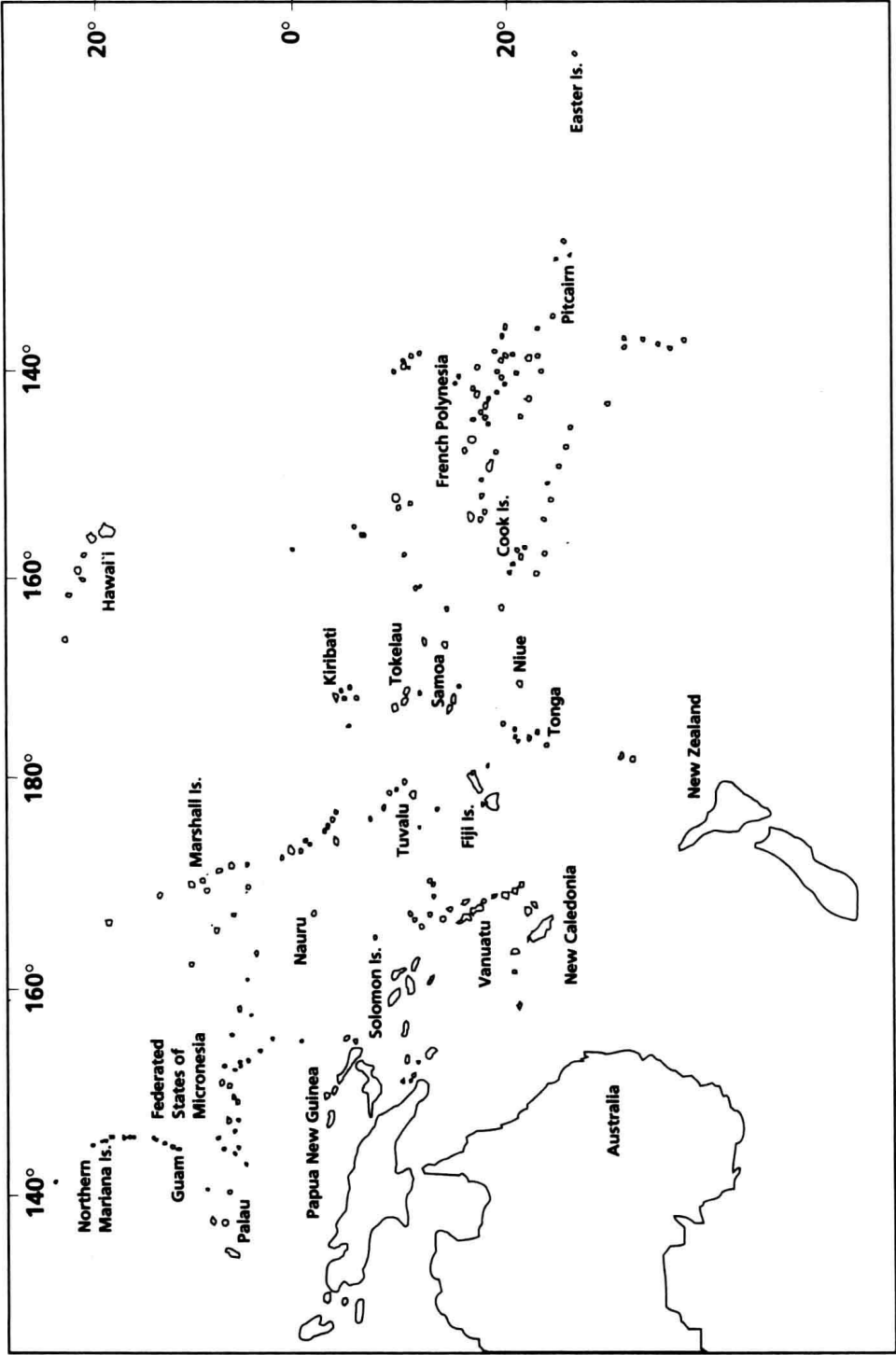
The South Pacific better describes the ocean, rather than the landmass or a homogeneous group of people. Indeed, it is not a well-defined notion for many people who live in the region. Significant social, economic, cultural and political diversity within the region underlies the apparent uniformity encapsulated in the term: the South Pacific (see Figure 1). How have spatial and temporal factors affected social organization and development? What are the antecedents that account for the diverse political, economic and social organization within the South Pacific region? What are the conditions that have fostered the growth and development of distance education in the region?

This chapter looks briefly at the beginnings of human settlement in the South Pacific and the impact of the European 'discovery' of the region. Discovery was quickly followed by a prolonged period of division and colonization, mostly by the major European powers, that was subsequently followed by political, independence movements throughout the South Pacific. The influence of former colonizers remains strong and that influence is predicated on the substantial financial assistance that supports economic and social development and continues to be provided to most of the countries within the region.

## THE EMERGENCE OF HUMAN SETTLEMENT

The earliest traces of human settlement found to date, in what today is known as the South Pacific, are the stone axes discovered by archaeologists in the Huon area of Papua New Guinea. These sites have been dated at some 42,000 years BC (Groube et al 1986) and people are thought to have reached the Pacific by way of Asia.

Micronesia is thought to have been populated around 2500 BC. There





is evidence, for instance, of human occupation in the Marianas around 1500 BC. The Melanesians spread through the southwest Pacific to Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and Fiji by 1000 BC. Discoveries of Lapita pottery throughout the South Pacific assist anthropologists to trace trade routes (Harding & Wallace 1970), and the expansion of human settlements from western Melanesia to Vanuatu, New Caledonia, Fiji and Tonga. The Polynesians swept across the sea from Asia to Samoa and the Marquesas, then to Tahiti between 100 AD and 300 AD. Around 800 AD they moved further south to Easter Island and to the north to Hawai'i. Travellers from Tahiti had settled in the Cook Islands and reached New Zealand by 1000 AD.

The historical record is sketchy, until the arrival of the Europeans, but accounts suggest that Samoa and the Marquesas can claim to be the places of origin of Polynesian culture. Their arts and traditions can be traced in Tahiti, Easter Island, Hawai'i, the Austral Islands, the Cook Islands and New Zealand. Despite this, the Tongans have been a most influential group and through an elaborate hierarchical social organization were able to resist even the might of the Europeans. Although various Polynesian groups had rivalries and battles during this time, the region remained relatively calm in comparison to the subsequent contact that occurred with Europeans after the 16th century.

## DIVIDING THE SOUTH SEAS

The South Seas were the last place to be explored by the European seafaring countries. Magellan, completing the first circumnavigation of the world, managed to miss Polynesia but made landfall on what is now known as Guam in 1519. The Spaniards, in time, had an early and significant impact on the region and established settlements on the Philippine Islands in 1564 and the Marquesa Islands in 1595.

The Portuguese took the initial European interest in the South Seas. The Dutch, who were more successful, and explored such diverse places as Tonga and New Zealand, quickly followed them. The Dutch had, unknowingly, explored parts of the northern coastline of the great southern continent, *Terra Australis Incognita*, as early as 1605. They were interested in the riches of the South Seas and they established the Dutch East India Company in 1602 to facilitate their activities.

The English entered the South Seas as early as 1572 in search of the fabulous riches of the southern continent as well. They made little impression until the extreme rivalry between the French and the British