

# WAVE OF PACIFIKA

## Special Feature “Coconuts College” Open Seminar in Yaeyama Islands

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SPINF was established within The Sasakawa Peace Foundation (SPF) with a 3 billion yen endowment in 1988. As a private, non-profit Japanese foundation, the SPF will, while recognizing the need for development in the Pacific Island Region, base its programs on a respect for native cultures and traditional social systems of the island nations.

Special Feature  
"Coconuts College" Open Seminar in Yaeyama Islands

## *The 2nd Coconuts College Open Seminar in Yaeyama Islands*

Story and photos by Richard Walker

Junior Communications Officer,  
The Sasakawa Peace Foundation

Ishigaki Island. Small and remote, its oceans are crystal clear, –hues of green and blue radiating from the depths. Flowers and palm trees line the roads, which remain virtually traffic-free. The sun is warm, if not hot, but a gentle breeze makes the heat almost bearable.

A veritable tropical paradise, Ishigaki Island is part of the Yaeyama Island group which is located southwest of Okinawa, Japan. Just north of the Tropic of Cancer, the Yaeyama Islands lie at nearly the same latitude as Honolulu and Miami and are close to Taiwan.

The feeling of the people on Ishigaki is laid back and slow-paced. The air is clean, tinged with a hint of salt and perhaps something a bit floral. One might even think one's on a remote tropical island in the middle of the Pacific.

This was the setting for the 2nd Coconuts College in Yaeyama Islands, a conference sponsored by the Sasakawa Peace Foundation and The Sasakawa Pacific Island Nations Fund. Held October 9-10, 1998, the meeting brought together a wide range of speakers and participants, with the main objective being to help raise the awareness of the Japanese people of the cultures of the islands which dot the Pacific. The theme of the meeting was "Island Culture and its Inheritance –In Search of Island Identity."

Held at Ishigaki Citizen Center, Coconuts College featured five speakers in the morning, followed by a

speech by an area high school student and a panel discussion. Local entertainment by local high school students closed the program.

Dr. Jose T. Nededog, president of University of Guam, was originally scheduled to appear as the keynote speaker, however, due to sudden illness, he was not able to come to Ishigaki. In his place was Annette Santos, who delivered his address.

Dr. Nededog's speech detailed parts of Chamorro culture, which can be seen on Guam. It was noted that the culture is an old one, and can be seen to influence modern society. The speech included a story that detailed the creation of Guam. It was just one of the many stories passed down from generation to generation as part of a wider scope of stories that in addition to providing a history of a people also served as entertainment.

According to Dr. Nededog, this can still be seen today, although the invasion of television and other modern media have taken the place of the family storytelling. Despite this, and other outer cultural influences, language remains important, as do other traditional aspects of the Chamorro culture.

But through the practice of its native culture, the people of Guam continue to enjoy a rich existence.

Within the Pacific region, there are also cultures that bear a startling resemblance to one another. In his speech, Dr. Seiichi Muratake, professor emeritus of Tokyo Metropolitan University, noted similarities in cultures of some South Pacific islands and that of Yaeyama.

Having spent a great deal of time studying the cultures of both the South Pacific as well as that of Yaeyama, Dr. Muratake discovered that the two cultures had areas that were surprisingly similar. One aspect of similarity between Yaeyama and the Pacific Islands is in religion. This was seen in the concept of animism, which can be noted in both areas.



And within the Yaeyama island group, each island also has certain cultural aspects which are individual. And the Yaeyama area also differs from that of Okinawa.

Heading back to Guam, we see that Guam is currently undergoing a sort of Chamorro renaissance. This was one of the messages in the speech by Dr. Hiro Kurashina, director of the Micronesia Area Research Centre at the University of Guam.

The culture of the Chamorro people is currently enjoying a rediscovery thanks in part to the tourist industry. As more and more people come to visit the island, in turn, the buildings on the island must be renovated or new ones built. Fees are tacked on to the construction of buildings and these fees are sent to the Guam Preservation Trust.

With this increased interest in the both the native and foreign-influenced cultures on Guam, the cultures themselves will be perpetuated.

The next speaker was Yoshihiro Okada, Director of the Planning Office of Atsumi Town in Aichi Prefecture, Japan, where the coconut has served as a medium for cultural exchange.

In the late 1980s, residents of Atsumi conducted a sort of experiment by launching coconuts into the ocean to see where the current would take them. Well over 1000 coconuts have been put to sea with 55 retrievals. Exchange programs have been set up between the senders and the recipients.

The final speaker of the morning session was Hirotaka Ishigaki of the History of South Islands Academy in Ishigaki City. He offered insights into the difficult process of analyzing the origins of island cultural rituals and ceremonies.

According to Ishigaki, despite the notion that most aspects of island cultures are resultant of outside influence, looking at the rituals of the southern islands of Japan, many of the origins are hard to trace. Also, there can be seen relationships between ceremonies and traditional entertainment, although the origins are



mostly unknown.

The afternoon session began with the announcement of the winners of a writing contest by students of Yaeyama High School. The theme of the contest was “Thoughts for Pacific Islands,” and was won by Ayumi Hamamoto.

A panel discussion followed. The discussion featured questions by the high school student essay winners, and a discussion of the morning’s speeches by the members of the Coconuts College.

The day came to a close with a special program of local dances performed by area high school students.

The symposium was an overall success. By providing a forum for the open discussion of cultural identity among islands in the South Pacific, it encourages the further study of island cultures.

One of the panel discussion participants, Robert Matau, assistant news editor of the Fiji Daily Post, commented after the program that the Coconuts College provides a needed service.

“I felt that the Coconuts College symposium today was important because cultural identity is a must. You have to know what your identity is otherwise you really have no value to life,” he said.

## *Chamorro Culture in the Pacific*

**Dr. Jose Nededog**  
President,  
University of Guam

Perhaps you have heard legends of how islands or continents were created, some through the hands of their God and others through supernatural powers.

What I want to do is share a legend about the creation of Guam, the island I come from . . . as it was told to me by my ancestors and transition into the culture as

we know it today.

At one time in history, the planet Earth was covered with water, and man had no place to live. There were, however, during this particular time in history, many giants who roamed the planet. These giants had great powers and could use them to help change the planet's surface. Two giants instrumental in making many of these changes were Puntan and his sister, Fu'una. Puntan, getting very old and wanting to do something great before his death, called his sister, Fu'una and explained to her what he wanted done with his body. She would have little trouble in carrying out his wishes because she would receive his magical powers. With the aid of his sister, Puntan's body would change the planet. His eyes would be used to create a sun and a moon. His eyebrows would be turned into rainbows of beautiful colors. His breast was to be a colorful sky. His back would form the island of Guam. After his death, Fu'una did as her brother had commanded. Using these magical powers, she mixed the red earth of Guam with the sea water and created a great rock. She divided the great rock into small stones and tiny pebbles. It was from this that the people of Guam came into being. (cited from Legends of Guam, DOE 1981)

This story of how the island of Guam was created was passed down from generation to generation. Before the introduction of electricity and technology, the Chamorro people spent a great deal of time together and much of this time was spent telling stories. This is still evident in some families today, but television and modern technology have replaced the ritual of storytelling and family dialogue.

Historical records do not reveal the origin of the Chamorros. As a result, cultural and physical changes are difficult to characterize. Having endured the incursion of peoples from other lands and modification through time, the language represents the only authentic culture of the Chamorro people in existence today.



Every culture is defined by its social behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought. These patterns, traits, and products are considered an expression of ancestral practice of a people passed on from generation to generation.

In keeping with the topic of "Chamorro Culture in the Pacific," it is best for me to recollect from my own experiences and share some of my interesting stories with you.

The Chamorro culture, as we know it today, is very different from the way it was when I was a young boy. In those times, much of our day was spent working in the farms and managing to get as much done before the sun goes down. I worked tirelessly in the hot, humid weather, sweat dripping down my face, looking forward to the end of the day. My whole family would gather together for dinner. There is something special about being with family and sharing stories about the day. Almost all the stories would result in laughter and teasing. This is typical of most Chamorro families. Their warmheartedness and playfulness are evident in their storytelling skills and their contagious chuckling. And always during the course of a story, it would remind one of the elders of a legend and my favorite would be that of the taotaomo'nas. The Chamorro people believed that when a person died their spirit remained alive. These spirits are believed to be those of our ancestors and can be easily offended when people neglect to ask permission to use the land or when they disrespect nature. Such disregard is often punished by marks on the skin, sickness and even death. Taotaomo'nas are present in the air, jungles, caves and trees. The taotaomo'nas are most notably found in the area of the banyan (nunu) tree. Some people also believe that some taotaomo'nas can be friendly and helpful spirits.

The core of the Chamorro culture is deeply rooted upon respect. Kostumbren Chamoru, as Chamorro culture is understood in the vernacular, is still reverently practiced by many. When an elder is present, the act of mangi'nge', kissing the hands of the elder is performed. The Chamorros respected nature and were taught to live in harmony with nature and each other. Today, we continue to pass on the core of the Chamorro culture to our children and their children.

So today, I inspire upon my children and grandchildren the music, songs and proverbial dances of the Chamorros. We read stories describing sea navigation practices. We indulge in the flavor of our island's unique cuisine and play games that our ancestors played such as batu, chongka, and bayogu.

Fashion and dress have been influenced by the arrival



of peoples from other lands and have been adopted as cultural representation for a specific period of time but no historical reference defines the original fashion of the Chamorro culture. Today, my wife and I continue to sport our matching island print outfits which reflects our island spirit of hospitality and warmth.

Many people continue to practice the culture we have come to learn from our introduction to the many visitors to our island. Courtship rituals, canoe-making, making of the Belebautuyan, fashioning of slings and stones, burial rituals, and preparation of herbal medicines by suruhanos continue to be practiced today.

So, if you ever find yourself boonie-stomping on Guam or entering sacred ground you must remember to request forgiveness from our spiritual ancestors. Lest you forget, you will be reminded by a bruise mark or a swollen body part.

The Chamorro culture is full of many different practices and its richness is found among the people who still practice and respect the culture. In closing, “I erensia, lina’la’, espiritu-ta”. This translated means, “Our heritage gives life to our spirit.”

## *The 2nd Coconuts College Composition Contest*

### **First Prize**

Islands in South Pacific and Us

**Ayumi Hamamoto**, Second-Year Student at Yaeyama High School

Today, when it is said the Age of the Pacific has arrived, how many people know about the South Pacific countries? When I hear the words “South Pacific islands,” the first thing I think of is the incident that occurred on March 1, 1954, when the U.S. military exploded the hydrogen bomb, “Bravo,” at the Bikini Atoll. The bomb is said to have been 1,000 times more powerful than the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima.

I learned that a tuna fishing boat, Fukuryumaru No. 5, from the Yaezu Harbor in Japan, was casting its nets at a point 160 km from Bikini, and that some of the fishermen died of illness caused by radiation from the atomic bomb. Of the people who heard about this incident then, how many thought of the Marshall Islands near the Bikini Atoll? Why didn’t people think that the surrounding area was also exposed to radiation when the Fukuryumaru No.5 was exposed to radiation outside the supposed “dangerous water zone?” As we can see from this, we had little recognition of the Pacific islands, I suppose.

Next, I thought of such words as “uncivilized” and “aborigine.” I suppose not a few adults use such words without even thinking about it, but in reality words like “uncivilized” and “aborigine” are discriminatory. When people use such words, what they really are doing is looking down on the people they are talking about, differentiating them from “ordinary” civilized people – they have the wrong idea.

I thought we know too little about South Pacific coun-

tries, though we coexist in the overall Pacific region, so I became interested in those islands. It is said that about 50,000 years ago, people from Southeast Asia first migrated to the South Pacific islands. There, the island peoples lived carefree lives until exchanges with European people began in the 16th century. And in the 19th century, the islands became colonized by European countries. In this century, however, many of the islands became independent or shifted to self-governing dominions, and in this process, their old cultures were reevaluated and their unique identities came to be strongly asserted.

When I was an elementary school student, I learned that a British seaman, Captain Cook, discovered the South Pacific, but people in the South Pacific islands prefer the viewpoint that they discovered Captain Cook. I would have to agree on that point. They, in fact, say that Captain Cook should instead be called Pirate Cook. I think it is natural for them to think this way, as he came without permission, and like an overlord, simply claimed possession of their lands. While researching about the South Pacific islands, I made a big discovery, which is that the Japanese islands and the South Pacific islands may be connected in some way. What surprised me most is that Japanese straw-rope pattern pottery was also discovered in the Republic of Vanuatu. Specifically, about 30 years ago a French archaeologist, Dr. Jose Garanger, discovered earthenware from Mele Village on Efate Island, and his research revealed that it has a pattern exactly like that of the cylindrical subsoil earthenware excavated from around Aomori and the southern part of Hokkaido. This is Japanese straw-rope pattern pottery of the early Jomon period. Why was it discovered in the Republic of Vanuatu, which is 6,000 kilometers from Japan? I greatly look forward to the day when the answer to this important question is found. Another thing that surprised me very much was that

Sugar Tempura, which my grandmother used to make often for me, is also made in Fiji. I was quite amazed to hear that there also is Sugar Tempura –which I thought was a uniquely Okinawan confectionery –across the ocean in Fiji. The story I heard is that long ago, when Fiji was a British colony, many Indian people were forced to move to Fiji as sugar laborers, and this confectionery was brought by Indians at that time. I felt there is some connection that can never be cut between Pacific islands and Japanese islands. By learning how the islanders live, and about their land, climate, and natural features, I could feel very close to them. In order for Okinawa to develop in every sense, I thought it important to look at the islands that share the same Pacific Ocean with us, instead of just paying attention to powerful countries like America, England, and France.

I have great pride in Okinawa, and in Yaeyama, where I live. I love Yaeyama, where the people are warm. The Yaeyama of songs and dancing, and the Yaeyama that is a treasure-trove of nature. I hope people in the South Pacific will learn how wonderful my Yaeyama is, and that we people of Yaeyama will also learn a lot about the South Pacific.

## Excellence Prize

Aiming at Deeper Exchange

**Makiko Miyara**, First-Year Student at Yaeyama High School

What should we do to deepen exchange with Pacific countries?

That is the theme of this composition, and I think it is necessary to gain deep knowledge about each other in order to increase understanding about countries with which we want to conduct exchanges. In beginning to write this, I was at a loss about the words “Pacific countries,” because I knew almost nothing about them. Therefore, I went to a library and researched the islands in the Pacific ocean, and I was surprised to learn that there are so many, including those I know and those I have even never heard of, which made me quite interested. If I did not have a chance to write this, I would never have come to know about them.

However, I am not alone. For reference, I asked people around me about the Pacific islands, but I could never get a clear answer. The majority of people in Ishigaki are probably like this. In such a situation, there will be no possibility of exchange or anything like it. I don’t believe that knowledge we can get from a textbook alone is good enough, either. I think the best way is to send students there, and of course, Ishigaki should also receive students from there. The students in this case should include more than just

ordinary students. It may be difficult to accept any age of people, but how wonderful it would be if a system that enables a wider generation of people to study there could be established, with some age limit.

My father went to Bali Island this year. According to him, Bali Island has a unique culture different from Japan, and I became very interested in it, listening to him. I think it is very significant for us to learn about the people who have 180-degree different cultures and living customs, and it will be meaningful for them too. What I think is necessary for studying abroad is taking action and curiosity. I suppose many of the Pacific islands are warm and quite similar to Okinawa. I will be happy if the realization of studying abroad results in reducing the other party’s narrow image or prejudice, even if only just a little.

This summer I went to Australia, but I was surprised by the image that people there have of Japanese people. Because I participated in a tour, I did not have many opportunities to encounter native people, but nonetheless I sensed that they have some wrong ideas, such as that if a person is carrying a camera, he or she must be a Japanese, or if a person is not friendly, he or she must be a Japanese, which I learned from a book. It is not only us who have prejudice toward foreign people. People may know about other countries’ land area and population, but they do not seem to know about their culture or the existence of different personalities and ideas among the same race. On the other hand, when I saw the characters of “Karaoke” and “Print Club” in Australia, I felt happy, seeing some connection to Japan. To actually go to a place you don’t know and experience the culture, people, and things that you cannot experience elsewhere, is real exchange, I think.

I read in a book that in ancient times, people traveled among the Pacific islands by boat. The people discovered new lands from one island to another, and they immigrated, and thus, people on islands expanded. Perhaps such island people came to Ishigaki too. Considering such things, studying abroad is like going to see friends in a distant place.

We should get living information that cannot be learned only from a textbook, in order to realize deeper exchange not only with the Pacific side but also the Atlantic side, and not only information on the countries’ main cities and crops but also in a wide range, including their cultures and living customers. Studying abroad is the first step, and in order to put it into practice, it is important for each of us to be interested in other countries and small islands.

# Excellence Prize

The Fiji I Long For

**Hoshimi Onaga**, a Second-Year Student at Yaeyama High School

On August 20, 1998, Papua New Guinea was hit by a strong tsunami. That day, when summer vacation was nearing its end, I learned about the disaster on a news program. The scenes of damage by the tsunami, which were shown on TV, included trees knocked down by waves, destroyed houses, as well as scenes of such wreckage that you could not even tell what had been there before.

Perhaps because, recently, such natural disasters have occurred frequently in various places in the world, I have come to not be easily surprised by them, but on that occasion I felt very close feelings, which amazed even myself, toward the people in Papua New Guinea, including sympathy and other feelings.

At the same time, the “Coconuts College,” which I learned about in the first semester, came to mind, and my interest in Papua New Guinea and other island nations in the South Pacific expanded.

I researched not only the frequently heard islands, such as Hawaii and Guam, but as many islands as possible, and as a result I learned that many islands have climates and natural features similar to those of Yaeyama, and I could sense that their rhythms of living are somewhat similar, which made me feel even more close to them. Even among them, one nation attracted me more than any: Fiji.

In a magazine with colorful pictures, many things were written about Fiji. A sport that is popular in Fiji, seven-player rugby, is not known much in Japan, but Fiji has such great ability in this sport that it repeatedly won the international tournament, the “Hong Kong Sevens.” It is said that seven-player rugby can even be called Fiji’s national sport. The educational system there is different from Japan’s: primary education consists of six years of schooling, and secondary school six or seven years. And something I felt envious about was that female students can choose the color of their uniform freely. At a public secondary school called Suva Grammar School in Fiji, female students can choose their favorite color for their uniform from among pink, yellow, blue, and green, while male students’ uniform is only in gray.

Also, I learned that in Fiji there is a drink called “Kava,” which is made by extracting the nutrient of a pepper family tree root into water. As it has a sedating effect, the more you drink, the more you feel relaxed, and finally you can get drunk. But it doesn’t make you drunk like alcohol does, so it is also called the “peace-

ful drink,” and I felt like trying such a wonderful drink myself.

However, what fascinated me more than anything else was what was written about Fijians’ personal relations. The reason is that, since I became a high school student, I have often been confused by my personal relations with others, and I felt that in what I learned about Fiji I could find an answer to my trouble. Recent people cannot communicate with others very well, and I am such a person. Except for my very close friends, I spent a whole year without even speaking once with some classmates, or even if I spoke once, I often felt awkward when I spoke the next time. What should I do to overcome this situation and live a good high school student life? I should cherish this opportunity to share the same island and the same time with my friends, considering that there may be no such opportunity in the future, as people of Fiji do.

Fijian people have such a warmhearted feeling, and they say their neighbors are just like their own family. Even when an argument starts, someone stops it before it becomes serious, without fail, and smoothes things over. In addition, for example, hotel employees treat guests with a sincere smile both when they receive them and when they send them off, and they even show an expression of missing their guests. Furthermore, if you become friendly with them, they might even invite you to their own homes. Just thinking about it makes me imagine pleasant conversations.

These things might seem easy for anyone, but in practice they are not so easy. I think Fijian people can do it because of the ideals of personal relations. And I am fascinated by such relations that they have.

I have a dream –to visit Fiji, a nation I long for; to experience its living and its warmheartedness myself, and to feel and learn it. And I would like to convey what I learn there to my family and friends, and I want to further expand and strengthen relations among people, which will also lead my life in a better direction. I look forward to fulfilling my dream.



# Culture is the Key to the Well-being of a Society

By Richard Walker

Junior Communications officer,  
The Sasakawa Peace Foundation

Are island cultures on the wane? This might be the case for Fiji, where such factors as a decrease in the study of the native culture is thought to be one contributing factor in what appears to be a slow death of the culture.

These are the thoughts of Robert Matau, assistant news editor for the Fiji Daily Post. Matau was among the participants in the recent Coconuts College symposium held October 9-10, 1998, in the Yaeyama Islands in southern Japan.

Matau spoke of the importance of the coconut tree to the way of life in the South Pacific. "The coconut tree is a very significant plant in the South Pacific islands, especially in my land in Fiji," he said.

The tree has a variety of purposes including housing and furniture. In fact, there is a multi-million dollar industry in Fiji selling coconut timber.

The coconut itself also has importance as a source of fuel, and the flesh provides food. "We grate it and squeeze it and eat fish with the milk. I can say that it's probably one of the tastiest dishes in the South Pacific," said Matau.

As a critical form of sustenance in the South Pacific, the coconut tree is an important part of life for the people. Matau drew parallels between the coconut tree and human beings and their need to respect their culture.

"You can compare a coconut tree to a human being. The most important part of that coconut tree really is the root. And for a human being, if he does not know his roots, you'll kill off the branches—the other vital parts of that tree," he said.

For Matau, the Coconuts College also plays a role in the perpetuation of culture. "I felt that the Coconuts College symposium today was important because cultural identity is a must. You have to know what your identity is otherwise you really have no value to life," he said.

But how is cultural identity being affected in Fiji, where modern life is beginning to encroach on a traditional culture?

Matau brought up examples of traditional culture, which are threatened by outside influences. One of these is the whale's tooth.

"The whale's tooth is very important and expensive in the traditional sense. It is a token that we use to communicate with other tribes," said Matau.

Another example is the kava root, which is used to make a drink used in traditional ceremonies. But it too is being threatened by skyrocketing prices brought on by outside demand.

"The kava plant is in high demand right now in Europe. It is now becoming a debatable issue whether we need to continue traditional ceremonies on a large scale where we use a lot of kava and whales tooth because the prices are too high. The monetary side has taken away the true value," said Matau.

But where are the young people who are needed to perpetuate the traditional Fijian culture? Matau feels that the schools and government aren't doing their part to teach the young people about their culture.

"It's sad, really. I don't think government and schools are doing enough about it. There are some schools in Suva that don't teach cultural issues and subjects.

"The effect of that is that you get a stereotype Fijian who is more of a copycat American. They value the western culture more than the Fijian culture," he said.

Also included in this loss of culture is the ability for





young people to speak the native language.

“There are a lot of instances in Suva where Fijian students cannot speak Fijian simply because their schools do not encourage it. All schools, especially Fijian-dominated schools, emphasize that we must speak in English during class,” said Matau.

Matau did note, however, that there are Fijian boarding schools that do have cultural periods, and whenever a dignitary or guest comes to the school, students perform traditional welcome ceremonies.

But that doesn’t seem to be enough to stop the decay of Fiji’s traditional way of life.

“We’re already feeling the side effects of the dying culture. Those students who went through those schools without any values probably didn’t get any jobs and now they are contributing to the crime rate in the country,” said Matau.

“You’ve killed off his branches—killed off his morality—his social values. He goes out into the streets and does anything he wants—he has no respect for the Fijian values.

“In the Fijian values you respect your elders, you respect the other person—you must be kind generous and forgiving. There’s a lot of humility and acceptance involved in Fijian culture, which is slowly fading away,” said Matau.



But the youth of Fiji will need to see the importance of their traditional culture and have a desire to learn about it, said Matau.

“I believe learning about a culture is a matter of wanting to learn it. If you don’t want to learn it, you’ll never grasp what it’s all about. You’ll always be left behind and left out of society,” he said.

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**Richard Walker** was born and raised in Hawaii. After graduating from the University of Hawaii with a B.A. in Japanese, he interned at The Honolulu Advertiser newspaper as a photographer. He then moved to Idaho where he worked at the Idaho State Journal newspaper for a year-and-a-half before moving to Japan to work as a copywriter/designer. He has been at the Sasakawa Peace Foundation for a year and works in the P.R. section designing their newsletters and web site as well as photographing.

## *Address for Symposium on Global Warming and Pacific Islands*

Sponsored by The Pacific Society  
October 3, 1998, Tokyo, Japan

by **Robert Matau**,  
Assistant News Editor, Fiji Daily Post

Before I deliver my speech I would like to thank the Pacific Society for inviting me to speak on this important topic.

Most of the time we journalists are usually on the other side of the room reporting while someone else does the talking. And big vinaka vakalevu (which means thank you in Fiji) to Rieko Hayakawa and the Sasakawa Pacific Island Nations Fund for making my trip here possible. A big bula vinaka to all of you.

My name is Robert Matau and I am the Assistant News Editor of the Daily Post, which is one of the two daily newspapers in the Fiji Islands.

Today I’ve been asked to speak about global warming and climate change. It is something all Pacific Islanders worry about. Let me tell you a story about how the rising sea levels caused by global warming have affected me.

I had a great grandfather who I actually never met. But he was well-known by his fellow kinsmen as a champion farmer and a respected figure on the island of Kadavu which lies South of Fiji’s main island Viti Levu. Over the years his grandchildren became well established in the village, which lies on the coast beside the sea. They soon became the first people to receive an education, including my father. And I am



thankful to him that I stand before you today.

But in 1992 when I wanted return to village to pay my respects to a great man my hopes of cleaning his grave were destroyed by the rising sea level. It was washed away in the sea... which was when he was buried was far away.

I stand before you today not only as a journalist who has covered the issue of global warming and the rising sea levels...but as a Pacific Islander who talks from experience of the consequence of tampering with the balance of a natural ecosystem. The scenario I have painted for you today is a mild occurrence compared to the atoll states of Tuvalu and Kiribati. There, some islands have been devastated by freak tidal waves and rising sea levels.

A New York Times report on January 3rd of last year told of how a young Kiribati islander watched as the tide continued to rise abnormally above the sea level, swallowing his thatched roof house and other homes beside it. The reality in the Pacific is—if we do not act now we may watch as mother nature wipes out small island nations like Kiribati and Tuvalu, which have already recorded large losses in land and sea.

But studies have proven that this problem affects the whole world world, particularly in low lying areas. Countries most likely to be affected by the rising sea levels include Kiribati, Tuvalu, and the Federated States of Micronesia. Already Fiji has just scraped through one of it's worst droughts. It was threatening to drag on for the whole year. There was singing and dancing in farming communities in Fiji last week as the first real drops of rain made a difference in water levels.

Now weather forecasters in Fiji are predicting that even the rain may develop into a dangerous situation.

We face going from one extreme to the other—from drought to floods. But I believe that the whole of the Pacific is sincerely grateful to the Government of Japan for its stance on the issue of global warming. The Pacific Islands watched with hope as the world gathered in Kyoto last year. We hoped there would be serious steps taken.

But as you know there were many compromises. The focus that Kyoto brought to the whole issue was important because unless emissions are controlled in the next few years, the consequences are too frightening to explain or speculate. We in the Pacific Islands are people of the sea. It is a fact of our daily life.

While those loopholes of rights to trade emissions have yet to be straightened out, we need the continued support and commitment similar to what Japan has displayed. For global warming will affect the ability of our countries to seek marine resources for sustenance and for export. Coastal erosion, land loss, flooding, salinisation, and intrusion of saltwater in groundwater are other issues that will affect our islands.

The quantity and quality of available water supplies can affect agricultural activities, production and human health. Any changes in ocean circulation and upwelling could affect the fish population and catch. Tourism, a very important economic activity in the Pacific Island Countries, could be affected through beach erosion, loss of land degraded reef ecosystems, as well as the changes in the seasonal patterns of rainfall.

A warmer Earth could also lead to the spread of diseases such as malaria and dengue, which already have a hold in our islands. While consultants make their thousands and academics get credited for carrying out studies and thesis on the issues, my great grandfather's grave, and many others around in our islands, have disappeared beneath the sea. More importantly an I-Kiribati and Tuvaluan may be without a roof over his or her head. It will be replaced by the ocean surface—sooner rather than later—unless there is some real action taken on the recommendations and conventions ratified over this issue.

For me this issue is not a study—it is an experience which is haunting the minds of people who have never had the resources, skill or know how to appropriately tackle this problem. The decision we make tomorrow will decide what kind of a world or environment you want for your children and their children to live the future. Unless we act it won't be just my great grandfather's grave which has disappeared beneath the rising sea. It will be the village of my ancestors.

# Value of Stone Money

by **Katsuhiko Kawaura,**

Journalist, Miyako News, Miyako Island of Okinawa

## *The Island that Time forgot*

The Yap Islands, with a population of about 11,000, are located within the Federated States of Micronesia in the West Pacific. It is a place where still-vibrant tradition and culture converge. After long years of foreign control, culminated by Japan and then the U.S., Yap finally won its independence in 1986. As an isolated state, Yap is, however, yet experiencing difficulty in securing its economic autonomy. Through a series of five articles, starting with this one, I would like to introduce Yap, an island state bounding in natural beauty and endowed with rich traditional values and culture.

What may best symbolize Yap's traditional culture is its stone money, which can be found lying about carelessly within villages and around houses. This form of money is still used when holding weddings and other ceremonies, building houses, and settling problems. There is even a special bank where it can be deposited. It comes in all sizes from giant pieces of over two meters in diameter to tinier pieces of less than a few tens of centimeters, and is crafted of various kinds of rock.

The stones used in making the money are not from Yap, but transported from as far away as Palau, some 400 kilometers across the sea. Even today, shell axes are used to chisel and carve the stones before they are loaded into the belly of outrigger sailing canoes for the perilous voyage back to Yap. The value of a piece of stone money is determined by the length of its journey and other aspects of its history. The people of Yap, who do not have a written language, have for several hundred years passed the stories associated with individual pieces of stone money down through a long oral tradition. They are, however, hesitant to reveal these stories for fear that doing so may diminish the money's value.

Another custom representative of Yap tradition is its "men's houses." Thatched with nippa palms, these traditionally constructed wooden structures have a distinctive character about them. They are places where the men of the village pass along traditional customs and rites, conduct collaborative tasks, and communicate with one another. Because it is also from them that the men watch and wait for good fishing conditions, they are always constructed beside the seashore. It is in them where the men learn and continue to observe the village rules, taboos, and functions.



At the center of the village order is its chief. At the time of Yap's independence, a system was installed for the villagers to elect their own chief; however, with the sole exception of Rull, the elections maintained all of the incumbents in office. Two chief's councils have been organized as extralegal bodies with the power to overturn decisions of even the state government and assembly in matters of tradition. On the other hand, an old caste system still continues especially with regard to people of the outer islands, who have difficulty finding acceptance and leading successful lives in Yap Proper.

Though unrelated to tradition per se, men and women alike have a taste for betelnuts, which they chew with a sprinkling of lime. The chewer's mouth becomes bright red from the juices of the nuts and numbed by their bitterness. There are those folks who abstain from betelnut chewing, being unable to do it without getting nauseated. Betelnuts are chewed in Southeast Asia and India as well, but in Yap the world would stand still without them—they are loved that much.

In the islands, men can be observed toting guardedly frond-woven shoulder bags, from which they will, when so moved, extract some betelnuts and a bit of lime. It's safe to say that they will chew them whenever there is a break in their activities. For the people of Yap, upon whom the intense rays of the equatorial sun constantly beat, the stimulant derived from betelnut chewing is an indispensable part of their daily lives.



When making leis, the Yapese determine the beauty of the flowers used by the quality of their fragrance. They're fond of hanging gingery-scented leaves and sour-sweet smelling fruit around their necks. The fragrances of plants are generally known to have various effects—they can relax, stimulate, etc. As such, they have of late become used in aromatherapies to affect mood and promote health. It would seem to me, however, that the Yapese have long before appreciated the essence of plant fragrances.

The capital of Colonia is a small town situated on an inlet. It has virtually no buildings over two stories tall. Only a scattering of people can be seen on its streets, where here and there middle-aged women in waistcloths chat and laugh while walking along. The people of Yap enjoy a leisurely life style and don't find any special virtue in work. Though material civilization and a money economy are finding footholds in the island state, the Yapese appear to still have only a weak attachment to cash. In Yap, where life is still rooted in a traditional culture characterized by stone money, a sharp silhouette still remains of a gradually fading past.

### *Youth editing School Text Books*

Tommy Tamangmed, 23, described with pride his first piece of art work, a Christmas card he had sketched of three Yapese kings paying homage to the infant Jesus cradled in his mother, Mary's, arms. In the picture, the kings had brought gifts of stone money, sea shells and coconuts to celebrate the birth of the Son of God. At the Yap Art Studio, where Tommy is employed, local crafts produced around the island state are sold. In addition, work commissioned by the state's education ministry is carried out to create elementary school textbooks. An American artist, named Ruth Glenn Little, is also employed at the Studio to instruct talented, young Yapese artists selected to work at the Studio from around state. Tommy was Ruth's first student. "At first," he said, "I really didn't know how to draw. I really like this job because it gives me a chance to learn while working."

"Because of Tommy's success," Ruth explained, "we were encouraged to hire more staff from other places in the islands." It has been five years since she came to Yap to work at the Studio, at which eight young staff are now employed to create pasted rag pictures and other traditional art pieces.

At the Studio, textbooks are written in four languages including those of Yap Proper and such outer islands as Satawal. The state government is exerting considerable effort to preserve traditional culture through education. Textbooks for lower grade levels are designed to introduce folk tales and other traditional children's

stories and to teach aspects of native life such as canoe-handling techniques, traditional recipes, and edible fruit/nut selection and preparation. Ruth explained, "Technology is good, but at the same time it's important to preserve traditional culture." One public high school has been established in Yap Proper and on each of the main outlying islands. Some 500 students, ranging from 12 to 30 years in age, attend the high school in Yap Proper, at which technical courses are offered in commerce, industrial arts, agriculture, mechanics, and computer sciences, and at which courses have been introduced in Micronesian civics (e.g., politics and government) based on an American model. A course in Japanese is also offered, taught by an elderly Japanese gentleman named Akira Ohashi.

It is difficult to teach traditional culture at the high-school level because the students come from different elementary schools and from communities with varying customs. So attempts are made to cover it through extracurricular activities such as using homeroom time to discuss traditional values and designating certain days for the students to wear their community's tradition dress to school.

Only about 30 percent of the high school students go on to college, while the others seek scarce work opportunities in the local community or go abroad to work after graduation. Over half of Yap's population is under 30 years of age, creating an extremely severe employment situation for the state's younger people. Concurrently, there is also a lack of teaching staff at the high schools, which send their graduates off to college abroad on the condition that they will come back and teach at the school. A strong need exists to foster the next generation of island leaders.

Going back to the picture in the Christmas card Tommy drew, I found it to be somehow symbolic of Yap's current circumstances. During my conversation

with him, I was struck by a bright ray of promise when he spoke about his work in transmitting traditional culture to the next generation of Yapese youth: "I enjoy learning about our traditions; and though my knowledge is still fragmented, I want to learn much more and to teach it to the children."





## FY1999 SPINF Projects SPINF Projects for FY1999 Get Approval!

The Board of Trustees of the Sasakawa Peace Foundation and the Board of Committees of the Pacific Island Nations Fund have approved the following six projects for FY1999 (April 1999–March 2000).

### 1. “Inviting Media Personnel from the Pacific Island Region to Japan”

The Sasakawa Peace Foundation

(yen)8,000,000 –self initiated program

This project enables media personnel from Pacific Island nations to visit their Japanese counterparts and deepen their knowledge of Japan.

### 2. “Coconuts College”

The Sasakawa Peace Foundation

(yen)5,000,000 –self initiated program

To promote understanding of the Pacific island nations within Japan, Coconuts College offers a program of virtual classes transmitted online via the Internet to the interested Japanese public, while providing a platform for opinion and information exchange in both directions. It will also conduct open lectures in Japan. Through these activities, the College will pursue its primary mission of sharing the limited information available on the Pacific island nations with people in Japan.

### 3. “Teaching the Pacific Forum”

The University of New South Wales

(yen)7,800,000 –grant making program

The purpose of TTPF is to foster co-operative curriculum resource production, teaching and professional development for secondary school teachers (years 9-12) of history/social science in 14 countries (Belau (Palau), Chuuk (FSM), Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Fiji, Kiribati, Kosrae (FSM), Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Papua New Guinea, Pohnpei (FSM), Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and Yap (FSM), with six observer entities (American Samoa, Guam, Northern Marianas, New Caledonia, Tokelauans and Torres Strait Islanders) being invited to all activities.

### 4. “Enhancing the Quality of Nursing Education Through Distance Education in the Western Pacific”

University of Guam

(yen)6,500,000 –grant making program

The goal of this project is to enhance the overall quality of distance education programs throughout the western Pacific and to insure wider and/or more effective utilization of existing nursing education resources.

### 5. “Training Program for Distance Education and Learning Technologies and Applications in the Pacific Islands”

University of Hawaii

(yen)6,500,000 –grant making program

The overall goal of this project is provide educators and other public service professionals with a basic knowledge of the use of telecommunications and information technology in distance education and learning applications in both the

North and South Pacific. The project goal is to ensure that educators and educational administrators become knowledgeable so that they are able to develop appropriate policies, plans, and technology systems in their locale.

### 6. Educational Support for Better Understanding on Japan in the Micronesian Region

New

Association for Japanese Language Teaching

(yen)5,000,000–grant making program

While the need exists in the island nations of the Pacific for Japanese language instruction and introductions to Japanese culture, no adequate system exists for providing assistance in this area.

Some areas do have an ODA assistance system in place, implemented by Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers. However, Guam, Saipan, and others of the Northern Mariana Islands receive no ODA, and these islands lack any appropriate response to the need for Japan-related education.

This project would conduct the research required to develop an assistance program that would make Japanese language instruction and presentations of Japanese culture available in conjunction with educational institutions primarily in the Northern Marianas. One goal of this project would be to establish an effective model for offering similar assistance to other island nations in the Pacific.

### 7. Transcending Borders with Education Online Micronesian Seminar

New

(yen)3,400,000–grant making program

As part of its evolving program of assistance for distance education in the Pacific Islands region, the Sasakawa Pacific Island Nations Fund (SPINF) has launched a new three-year project titled “Transcending Borders with Education On-Line.”

Although Micronesia is undergoing rapid modernization, the region has no facilities offering education in developmental and social issues, and no real mechanism for debate on how to address such problems. While more than 20,000 Micronesians are currently working or studying overseas, many will find it difficult to fit back into Micronesian society upon returning home.

Under this project, Micronesians and other participants both within the region and abroad use the Internet to teach and learn methods of analyzing and solving social problems. In an on-line seminar conducted through a website set up in April this year (<http://www.micsem.org/>), over 40 registered participants engage in ongoing on-line debate while also studying such subjects as research methods, policy formulation and report writing. Studies on ways to develop such Internet-based learning itself are also being made under the project. Planned negotiations with relevant educational institutions in the region are aimed at eventually enabling participants in the on-line seminar to receive credit from local universities and colleges.

The Micronesian Seminar, which is implementing the project, has been actively promoting local education at the grassroots level for more than 20 years. The organization’s founder, Rev. Francis X. Hezel S.J., is a world-renowned expert on Micronesian anthropology, and as principal of Xavier High School, among other positions, has made an enormous contribution to education in the region.

Further details about SPINF’s multifaceted distance education program are available at the website

[http://www.spf.org/spinf/spinf\\_j/enkaku\\_pro/enkaku\\_pro.html](http://www.spf.org/spinf/spinf_j/enkaku_pro/enkaku_pro.html)

# *First Decade of the Sasakawa Pacific Island Nations Fund*

**By Yohei Sasakawa,**  
Chair, SPINF Steering Committee

## *A Highly Significant Top-Level Summit with the Pacific Island Nations*

In October 1997, the Japanese government invited for the first time the heads of state of the Pacific Island Nations to Japan to participate in a summit. Prelude to this epoch event was a conference held in Tokyo 10 years ago by the Sasakawa Peace Foundation. In 1988, SPF sponsored the Pacific Island Nations Conference, subtitled “Friends Across Oceans, Peace Across Borders,” to which it invited ten presidents, prime ministers and other heads of state from the island nations of the Republic of Fiji, Republic of Kiribati, Federated States of Micronesia, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Kingdom of Tonga, Tuvalu, Republic of Vanuatu, Western Samoa, and Cook Islands.

The conference was chaired by former Minister of Foreign Affairs Tadashi Kuranari, who had enunciated Japan’s first postwar policy (the Kuranari Doctrine) toward the Pacific Island Region. The conference achieved highly tangible successes in fostering a closer working relationship between the island states and Japan—successes that would endure through the establishment in the following year of the ¥3-billion-endowed Sasakawa Pacific Island Nations Fund.

As SPF places marked importance within its program philosophy on creating a framework of ties between the nations of the Pacific and those of Asia, we arranged a post-conference trip for the heads of state to China, where they met with Li Peng, then Premier. This was the first, and possibly the last, time for ten leaders of Pacific island states to visit China in one delegation. Seeing the heads of nations with populations measuring in the tens of thousands together in a meeting with the head of a nation whose population numbers over one billion was, to me, a most impressive sight.

## *Support for Info-Communications All the More Needed in the Island Region*

The Sasakawa Pacific Island Nations Fund (SPINF) has now celebrated its tenth anniversary. SPINF’s program priorities at this juncture are two: support for information/communication networks linking the island region, and for exchange activities bridging the islands of the Pacific with the islands of Japan.

Given the fact that the Pacific island nations are spread over a vast ocean space that covers one-third of the globe’s surface, there is no region of the world more in need of information and communication services.

In 1992, SPINF provided funding in support of holding a policy meeting in Sendai on a plan to restart the PEACESAT (Pan Pacific Education and Communication Experiments by Satellite) program using a communications satellite decommissioned by NASA. PEACESAT was an experimental satellite network operated by the University of Hawaii to provide welfare and educational services to the Pacific island nations. The Sendai meeting occasioned the establishment of PARTNERS, an international cooperative program employing a satellite of Japan’s Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications.

For a two-year period beginning in 1994, SPINF commissioned a committee, chaired by Prof. Toshio Kosuge of the University of Electro-Communications, to study the information and communication needs of the Pacific island region and to propose a support policy to us. Based on their recommendations, SPINF launched its program in support of distance education in the Pacific islands in 1997. As part of that program, SPINF is currently supporting a project entitled ‘Enhancing the Quality of Nursing Education through Distance Education in the Western Pacific,’ being carried out via satellite by the University of Guam to Micronesian countries.

The SPINF program to support distance education in the Pacific has as another of its antecedents a visit I made in 1987 to Fiji, where in a meeting with former Prime Minister and present President Hon Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, we discussed the upgrading of the USPNET distance education network at the University of the South Pacific.





SPINF has worked in several ways, including the conducting of a feasibility study, to explore the possibility of upgrading the capacity of USPNET; and, in the process, have won the understanding and cooperation of many people concerned, both in Japan's academic and ODA sectors. When former Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto visited New Zealand in 1997, he proposed a USPNET project to be implemented jointly by the two countries. That project is now underway, and has since been joined by Australia.

#### *An Islands-to-Islands Dialogue that Is Bearing Fruit*

Japan is an archipelago, one in which there are in fact some 6,800 outer islands. Among them are the Ryukyus which share the same coral-reef culture with the Pacific island nations. SPINF has, since 1994, been carrying out a project, entitled "Island Forum in Japan," aimed at promoting opinion exchange between those who are involved in island issues. The project brings people, such as interested MoFA officials, JICA staff, scholars, journalists and NGO personnel together with residents of the outer islands of Japan and people from the Pacific for the purpose of planning action programs.

One such program to emerge from the Forum is "Coconuts College." As part of its curriculum, a seminar, entitled "In Search of Island Identity, The Archeology of Island Societies" and featuring a lecture by Dr. Yoshihiko Sinoto, Senior Anthropologist at Bishop Museum in Hawaii, was held in the Yaeyama Islands in 1997.

On another plane, SPINF has, in partnership with the Pacific Island News Association, been inviting over the past eight years about 50 media personnel from the Pacific island region to Japan for observation and news-gathering tours. In cooperation with the Miyakojima and Yaeyama Press Clubs, we have been arranging opportunities for such journalists to research

and report on Japan's island culture and outer island issues. The project also allows journalists from Japan's outer island to visit the Pacific island nations. It is interesting that most come back saying that their observations of the Pacific islands' unspoiled environment and culture has given them pause to reconsider the "main-island-type development" being done right under their noses at home.

#### *Activities Aimed at Making the Next Century the "Pacific Century"*

There is much that the tiny, island nations dotting the Pacific have to teach the international community with its headlong rush toward market globalization. From the perspective of the environmentalist, an island constitutes a closed "cosmos"—one that can predict for us with a high degree of immediacy the planet's future.

In April of this year, two new members were welcomed to SPINF's Steering Committee: Aoyama Gakuin professor Dr. Akio Watanabe and international journalist Yoichi Yokobori. Under Dr. Watanabe's leadership, SPINF has, over the past year, conducted a review of its program guidelines, based on which a new set of guidelines for the program's second period has been drafted. They call for projects that meet following newly established SPINF priorities:

- 1) Respecting the values, culture and identity of each island society
- 2) Securing harmony in the Pacific region through a project axis in Micronesia
- 3) Promoting human resource development through distance education
- 4) Forming various NGO and NPO networks with the Pacific islands, and promoting linkage between the island region and Asian countries.

These priorities underscore SPINF's goal to make the 21st century one of the Pacific. As our resources are finite, all the more we consider to be vitally important your support and cooperation in carrying forward the activities of the Fund.





**Editorial Note:**

I consider myself really quite fortunate to have participated in the Coconuts College program.

When Ms. Hayakawa first invited me along, I had no idea what to expect in the southern islands of Japan. But to my surprise and delight, I found a place that was startlingly similar to Maui, my home. Sure, there were physical similarities, but perhaps more important to me was how the people there reminded me of the people I know at home. I've always considered myself lucky to have been born and raised in Hawaii, and through this program these feelings were strengthened even more.

Coconuts College is providing a valuable service to the people of the Pacific and Japan. Providing a rare opportunity to learn about little-known facts about the areas, it is also serving as a bridge across the sea. The history of the Pacific region is rich and diverse, and we must do all we can to educate the public about this beautiful part of the planet.

I'll be returning to Maui come October, but I'll be returning a much richer person as a result of the Coconuts College.

Mahalo nui loa!

(Richard Walker)



This fifth volume of *Wave of Pacifika* was supposed to have been published last December. Please accept my apologies for the terribly long delay in its release.

I hope you enjoyed the special feature on "Coconuts College". Many of my western friends and various interpreters have advised us that the word "coconuts" has a negative connotation, being associated with emptiness, foolishness and the like in its English context. However, the Japanese and I believe most Pacific islanders have a much more positive image of coconuts. We think of them as being delicious, high in energy and nutrition, and a source of useful fiber. So against well-meant advice, SPINF will hazard to keep the word "coconuts" in our project title.

The SPINF steering committee has issued its new program guidelines for 1999-2008, which were reviewed and sustained by the Pacific Islands' Ambassadors. Please contact the SPINF secretariat for a copy of these guidelines, or visit our Web Site:

<http://www.spf.org/spinf/index.html>

In the preparation of this volume, I received special support from my colleague, Mr. Richard Walker, who hails from Hawai'i. Unfortunately, he will be leaving the Foundation to go back to his home island of Maui in October. Mahalo.

(Rieko Hayakawa July 1999)



This edition of the SPINF Report was edited by Rieko Hayakawa (Ms.), Program Officer of SPINF.

The articles published herein were contributed by people who are either involved in or offer their support to SPINF activities.

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*Designed by R-coco*