Chapter XII

“Life in the Round” and the History of Libraries in Micronesia

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Abstract

This chapter uses the importation of an American institution of information—“the library”—into the Pacific region of Micronesia as an example of a contextual-less, cross-cultural information transference that suggests the autonomous impact of distance education technology and protocols on indigenous and other interpretative communities. Such an impact negates the innate values of these communities as they pertain to concepts of “knowledge” and “information” derived from tenacious cultural and social values. Conflicts between indigenous values and the transferences of “the library” and subsequent information technologies are considered along with individualizing values exhibited by early Christian missionaries in Micronesia. Based upon these issues and cross-cultural tensions, the chapter appeals for the inclusion of indigenous contexts into discussions of online educational development and access to better understand and serve these communities and to provide an exemplary situation from which to recognize the importance of cultural contexts in the provision of distance educational opportunities.

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Introduction

This chapter will focus on a case perspective of the transference of American libraries and librarianship into oral based societies of Micronesia. Libraries provide just one example of American cultural agencies whose introductions into Micronesia were historically guided by political and economic perceptions of what was right for Micronesia. The relevance of this cross-cultural transference for open and lifelong learning through expanding electronic horizons should not be seen simply through the stereotypical idea of the library as a depository of information. To do so is to accept the history and the presence of the institution of the American library in Micronesia without a context and specifically an indigenous context that is itself an historical and contemporaneous realm of information and protocols for sharing it. Its relevance is made clearer by acknowledging its historical and indigenous contexts as part of a contemporary discussion of the use of technology for learning in the Pacific today. Without this historical context, the idea of “online education for lifelong learning” in Guam and Micronesia and within other indigenous communities exists without critical thought given to the transference of foreign institutions of information—a transference pursued without critical thought as its resources develop and are used in future educational needs.

Stretching across a Pacific Ocean area broader than the continental United States, the islands and atolls of Micronesia were settled by Austronesian speaking peoples moving out from Southeast Asia over 3,000 years ago. Voyaging thousands of miles with only cognitive navigational aids in wooden outrigger canoes, the Austronesians likely reached the Mariana archipelago first, followed by the three other large archipelagoes that make up Micronesia: Carolines, Kiribati, Nauru, and Marshall Islands. British colonial possession and influence in Kiribati has, however, essentially divorced Kiribati and Nauru from events and discussions of Micronesia from an American context of influence.

Centuries after the discovery of most of the islands in Micronesia by canoe, French geographer Gregoire Louis Domeny de Rienzi received permission in 1831 from La Société de Géographie in Paris to label the islands as Micronesia, meaning “tiny islands” from the Greek. Domeny de Rienzi thereby completed the European labeling of Oceania, with all of Melanesia and Polynesia having already been labeled in European cartography. By this time, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) had already been printing missionary material in Hawaii for nine years, establishing an important precedent for eventual movements to the Micronesian islands of Pohnpei and Kosrae 30 years later.

Although it claimed the Mariana Islands for itself in 1565, Spain actually began its efforts in 1668 to establish its authority in the Mariana Islands in the northwest region of Micronesia among the indigenous Chamorro people, essentially ignoring the Caroline Islands that form much of Micronesia to the south of the Marianas until
Information Retrieval in Virtual Universities
www.igi-global.com/article/information-retrieval-virtual-universities/1661?camid=4v1a