PREFACE

It has been several years since the National Institute of Multimedia Education decided to organize a team to study major distance higher education institutions in Asia and the Pacific Region. The project team had three major goals. First, in view of the fact that distance education has been booming in this region since the 1980's, it was thought very important to identify the pertinent facts concerning these institutions "on the spot" rather than by reviewing existing data. We also hoped for opportunities to work with colleagues in each country so that a better mutual understanding would evolve. Consequently, the project was conceived not as "field work" by outsiders entering a foreign country (as so often occurs in many anthropological and sociological studies), but as research designed and conducted in collaboration with individuals and institutions from each respective nation. The last major objective betrayed a more personal interest: as chief executive officer of the Institute, I personally wanted our younger faculty members to become more exposed to the Asian context so that we could share an increased Asian awareness.

It was fortunate that the Japanese Ministry of Education provided us with the necessary budget for this research which started in 1989 and lasted five years. UNESCO and other international organizations also encouraged this project. Above all, however, not only did our colleagues at the several institutions support this international venture, but so too did the government agencies of each country. As a result, we were able to study representative universities engaged in distance learning in Thailand, Indonesia, India, Pakistan, Korea, China, and the University of the South Pacific. This volume is a condensed report of research in Thailand which was carried out in 1990. I sincerely hope that major findings included in this volume will serve as reference materials for those who are concerned with distance learning throughout the world. On this occasion, on behalf of our Institute, I would like to acknowledge the generous understanding and cooperation extended to us by Dr Iam Chaya-Ngam, President of Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University and his staff, without which this publication would have been impossible.

Hidetoshi Kato
Director-General