

**ASIAN APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY INTERNATIONAL-REGIONAL
CONFERENCE, BANGKOK, THAILAND**

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*Working Paper 12/06
May 2006*

**DEPARTMENT OF MANAGEMENT
WORKING PAPER SERIES
ISSN 1327-5216**



ASIAN APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY INTERNATIONAL-REGIONAL CONFERENCE

The Asian Applied Psychology International-Regional Conference (AAPI-RC) held in Bangkok from 14-16th November 2005 was the sixth regional conference of psychology, all of which have been jointly sponsored ventures of the International Association of Applied Psychology (IAAP), the International Union of Psychological Science (IUPsyS) and the International Association of Cross-Cultural Psychology (IACCP). The general idea of these cooperative undertakings is to foster the development of psychology in selected regions of the world and previous conferences along these lines have been every second year starting with Guangzhou in 1995, and followed by Mexico City, Durban, Mumbai, Dubai, and now Bangkok [Knowles (1995), Knowles (1998), Barnes & Knowles (2004), Sabourin & Knowles (2005)].

The current Conference was organized by Thammasat University and the Thai Psychological Association and was coordinated under the conference Presidency of Ubolwanna Pavakanun (Department of Psychology, Thammasat University). Wide personal and institutional support was achieved through a collective conference Vice-Presidency consisting of Wiladlak Chuawanlee (Behavioural Science Research Institute, Srinakharinwirot University), Siriwat Srikreudong (Buddhist Psychology Department, Mahachulalongkornradchawitdhayalai University), Mookda Sriyong (Psychology Department, Ramkhamhang University) and Surin Rannakiert (Thai Psychological Association). In addition to these officers the Organizing Committee consisted of dual Secretaries in Sarun Gorsana (Hua Chiew Chalermprakiet University) and Paneenuch Pussadeesopon (Chaophaya Hospital) and dual Treasurers in Tipawadee Emavardhana (Thammasat University) and Sarintorn Chiewsothorn (Royal Thai Army Nursing College), and was supported by an Active Staff Team and a Translation Team.

PARTICIPANTS

The Conference attracted over 400 participants of whom approximately half came from Thailand, a quarter were Thai students, and the remaining quarter came from a range of near and far neighbouring countries including South Africa, Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Laos, South Korea, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, The Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Australia and New Zealand. Other countries also represented at the Conference from further a field included the United Arab Emirates and Israel from the Middle East, Greece, Germany, The Netherlands and Belgium from Europe, as well as Canada and the United States from North America.

OPENING CEREMONY

The Opening Ceremony was chaired by Ubolwanna Pavakanun who introduced in turn Michael Frese, Bruce Overmier and Shalom Schwartz, the Presidents of IAAP, IUPsyS and IACCP, each of whom welcomed all delegates and briefly described the roles and principal activities of their respective international organizations. The Conference was then formally opened by the founder of psychology in Thailand, Prasop Ratanakorn, who set the tone of the meeting by citing the quotations that “all we know is that we must be good, be just, and be happy” and always, as far as practicable, “aim to do the best we can”. These statements, he emphasised, embody values which form the basis of a healthy society in which psychology contributes in its special way as a neuroscience, a behavioural science and a health science, taking into account both cultural and religious values. Among other things, he said, an indicator of a healthy society is the way it treats its elderly where the intent should be “to add life to years rather than years to life”. The declaration that the Conference was open was followed by artistic performances by students from Srinakharinwirot University including a colourful and elegant display of traditional Thai dancing, an accomplished performance of classical Thai music, and a lively routine of regional dancing originating from north-eastern Thailand.

SCIENTIFIC PROGRAM

The Scientific Program was organized mainly into three but sometimes four or more groups of parallel sessions, each including Invited Addresses, Invited Symposia, Paper Presentations and Poster Presentations. One of the leading Invited Addresses was helpful in setting the context of the Conference by painting the 'big picture' of the basic science of applied psychology, starting with Kurt Lewin's famous dictum that "there is nothing as practical as a good theory". Numerous examples were cited of the contributions that psychology has made to making people's lives safer, saner and more psychologically healthy across a range of areas such as education, health, work and advancing age, as well as helping to combat pervasive societal problems such as violence and drug abuse. A model was presented describing how psychology is also contributing by conducting basic research grouped under themes such as mind/brain behaviour, growing up and development, social groups, and education, training and performance. While a major challenge facing psychology is that politicians are oriented towards immediate applications and cures, the fact remains that if policy makers are interested in changing behaviour they need the social sciences. This is because behavioural change is seldom likely to be achieved the first time around, and if it is to occur then it is best approached through the application of a psychosocial technology.

From this basis the rest of the Scientific Program unfolded, and given that Thailand hosted the Conference and thus the majority of the presentations were by Thai psychologists, what emerged was a very positive picture about the vigour of Thai psychology as well as the similarities and differences between it and psychology in the rest of the world. To illustrate this the Scientific Program will now be reviewed under the following headings: educational psychology and psychological assessment, clinical psychology and behavioural health psychology, organizational psychology, morality and spirituality, psychological rebuilding in the tsunami aftermath, cross-cultural psychology, and the profession of psychology.

Educational psychology and psychological assessment

Because psychology in Thailand developed partly out of educational psychology and vocational guidance, this has remained an active sub-discipline leading to a considerable amount of work being done on the assessment and evaluation of personality, attitudes, values and intelligence. Specific areas research included such topics as the social referencing of infants, numerical ability in three to four year old children, enhancing preschool children's life skills, and the effect of watching beneficial television programs on the development of psychosocial factors. Since language-based intelligence tests have often been criticised for their dependence on school learning and command of the dominant language in which the test is administered, one study reported on the development of a non-verbal test in The Netherlands to assess the cognitive development of children, a test which currently is widely used in European countries.

Given the collectivist nature of Asian cultures it was interesting to discover that emotional intelligence was a popular area of research including, among other things, the Emotional Intelligence Screening Test developed by the Department of Mental Health within the Thai Ministry of Public Health. Programs to enhance the growth of emotional intelligence in Thai youths were also described, as was an especially constructed Oriental-based program in which emphasis was placed upon the development of both body and mind through physical exercise, crisis management and meditation. Other allied lines of research in Thailand have produced the Emotional Dissonance Scale, the Adult Meta-Emotion Inventory, and the Behaviour-Temperament Inventory, while in Taiwan the Chinese Emotional Intelligence Inventory has also been constructed.

Clinical psychology and behavioural health psychology

The other cornerstone in the early development of psychology in Thailand was clinical psychology although, as time has progressed, this has led to burgeoning growth in the area of behavioural health psychology. One keynote address relating to the latter outlined the issue in Western

societies as follows. While it is generally recognised that no one should smoke tobacco, males and females should not consume more than four and two standard alcoholic drinks per day respectively, every one should limit their saturated fat as a percentage of total energy intake to 10% and consume at least 300g of vegetables and 300g of fruit per day, as well as engage in at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity on most days, it is also well established that between 10 and 50% of the population do not meet any of these guidelines and practically no one meets all of them. Thus the challenge for psychologists working in this field is to develop ways of facilitating behavioural change and in this address a model integrating a number of these approaches was outlined.

In Thailand the three issues most actively researched, especially among adolescents, are smoking, sexual behaviour and drug use. With respect to smoking the most vulnerable groups are those who are from families with high incomes but have low future orientations, and have favourable attitudes towards smoking which are influenced by their peer groups. This research is helping to identify those factors upon which remedial programs should concentrate such as future orientation, locus of control, and attitude towards smoking. In the area of sexual behaviour the major problems are inappropriate sexual relationships, unwanted pregnancy and unsafe abortion, and research in this field is focusing upon the role that teachers can play in counselling their students. This is being broadened by increasing the teachers' awareness and understanding of sexual health as well as improving their counselling skills. In connection with drug use the risk factors include the individual's personal condition, the situation with respect to their families and friends, exposure to liquor and cigarettes, and community attitudes to drug use. Programs to combat drug use involved parents, teachers and community members.

One section of the Scientific Program dealt with particular therapeutic methods that are being used to treat specific psychological conditions and these include Group Reality Therapy to improve academic achievement, Group Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy to increase students' self-acceptance and deepen their understanding of emotions, Vision Therapy to enhance self-esteem among overt male adolescent gays, Reality Therapy to treat sexually abusive delinquent juveniles, and Satir psychotherapy to treat mass hysteria in teenage girls. All these methods reflect a change in thinking about psychotherapeutic interventions away from the more negative, deficit, pathological approach to a more optimistic, solution-oriented and problem-solving approach which is being adopted not only in Thailand but also in Europe, Australia and North America.

Organizational psychology

Building upon the early establishment in Thailand of educational psychology, vocational guidance and clinical psychology, a more recent growth area has been organizational psychology where leadership is an important topic of research. One study examined the importance of entrepreneurial orientation, planning strategy and the development of human capital in the success of small business entrepreneurs while another major study involving over 1,000 middle managers found that the most important factors affecting effective leadership were power distance, future orientation and organizational culture. Since a good number of Thai publicly-listed companies are controlled by majority shareholders and their families, another study into corporate governance also found that the performance of these companies was highly correlated with authoritative capability and control power which, in turn, were moderated by cultural consensus consisting of trust, cultural values, social norms, social beliefs and ethics.

Two invited addresses dealt with training and development in the workplace. One of these was in the area of action learning and action research, and summarised a broad line of research concerned with strengthening the relationship between knowledge and practice. One of its important findings is the emerging realisation of just how useful making errors is in learning. The second invited address also summarised a major research project into decision making where participants manage virtual employees in a furniture factory. Contrary to the conventional wisdom espoused in a number of textbooks in organizational behaviour which argue for the efficacy of specifically directed feedback, in this continuing line of inquiry it has been repeatedly found that

while this benefits performance and satisfaction in the short term, on a longer time scale less structured and less supportive feedback fosters the development of unsystematic exploration and initiative which, in turn, lead to high performance and satisfaction.

Other papers reported on studies into the leader competence model and factors affecting safe working practices, both in Thailand; learning about emotions in the workplace in Malaysia; and team emotional intelligence and team effectiveness in Taiwan.

Morality and spirituality

Given the centrality of Buddhist traditions in Thai society, and as may have been judged from the remarks of Prasop Ratanakorn in the Opening Ceremony, morality and spirituality are central values to many people in Thailand, and this was reflected also in the Scientific Program. One paper described how the methods of participant observation, interview and documentation were used over a five-month period in a preschool for young children to study how the Buddhist concept was taught emphasising concentration, firmness, humility, sensitivity, gratitude and the ability to handle difficulties. What was also noted was that the teachers themselves developed techniques for calming and controlling their deepest emotions in order to cope with the stresses of teaching. Another study into the applicability of the Buddhist concept in psychological research described a healthy organization as one in which employees did not experience irritation to the six Ayatana perceptions of sight, sound, smell, taste, touch and thought, and developed a six-item physical environment scale to measure employee perceptions of lighting, noises, dust or fume, temperature, and physical and mental stress in the workplace.

In the public sector arena one case study described how a sub-committee was established to improve the values of Civil Servants and the culture of the Civil Service. The set of new creative values to be promoted among officials included moral courage, integrity, transparency and accountability, non-discrimination, and results orientation. Out of a sample of over 2,000 officials altogether, 15 were identified as possessing the highest ratings and these officers were further interviewed about their work and their lives.

The role of religion was also examined in Indonesia in a study of spirituality as a critical success factor among Muslim women entrepreneurs.

Psychological rebuilding in the tsunami aftermath

Following the devastation caused by the tsunami in South Eastern Asia in 2004, a workshop was organized by IUPsyS in May 2005 in which participants were sponsored from Sri Lanka, Indonesia, India and Thailand with financial support coming from IUPsyS, the American Psychological Association, the Australian Psychological Society, ISSBD, and CAST. Since this was the worst natural disaster in the modern history of these countries, participants from these four most affected areas described the physical and psychological impact of the tsunami in their respective countries and these presentations were followed by an interactive discussion on how best to proceed with psychological rebuilding in the traumatised communities.

Now, six months after the May workshop, a follow-up symposium funded by IAAP and jointly organized by IAAP and IUPsyS, was convened to establish what had been achieved by the psychological rebuilding programs undertaken in various countries in the half year between the workshop and the present symposium. Against a background of massive immediate problems including loss of life, loss of homes, and loss of occupations, as well as a range of subsequent problems including child abuse, substance abuse, trafficking, and privacy issues for women, and all accompanied by persistent heat and rain, the symposium described the serious psychological problems resulting from all this including grief and loss, frustration and anger, developing a sense of helplessness and dependency, fear of the sea and another tsunami, and post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). As if the situation were bad enough, it was further compounded by the development of anger and distrust due to the fact that very little of the considerable funds collected

world-wide in the name of humanitarian aid has actually been received by those at the front line of the tsunami disaster zone.

What was recognised from the presentations was that there were many different ways of providing psychological support and therapy which should build upon and utilise two factors noted from the presentations. One was the remarkable degree of resilience shown by many, and the other involved the cultural and community methods of coping that were used in the different areas affected by the tsunami. What was also apparent was that so called help provided by merely enthusiastic people who were untrained in psychology and lacked cultural sensitivity was counter-productive and could actually cause more harm than good by increasing PTSD as well as delaying the process of psychological recovery. Another important outcome was recognition of the need for psychologists to work in cooperation with other non-government organizations (NGOs) as well as local and national government organizations (GOs). For example, this could be in the form of a Mobile Mental Health Team consisting of 2-3 psychologists, 1 social worker, 1 psychiatrist, 2 nurses, 1 pharmacist and 1 driver. Such a team would provide physical first aid, psychological and psychiatric assessment, counselling, mental health care for children and psycho-education.

Cross-cultural psychology

While the presentations in the Scientific Program covered a wide range of topics, a good number of themes cutting across them had several things in common which could best be understood in terms of their underlying values. Two invited addresses provided a useful way of understanding these. One dealt with basic values which characterise people as individuals. 10 such values have been identified, namely, benevolence or kindness, tradition, conformity, security, power, achievement, hedonism, stimulation, self-direction or autonomy, and universalism or concern for all others. As may be seen from the above discussion of the Scientific Program, a number of these values such as kindness, tradition and conformity surfaced time and time again. The other way of examining culture as described in the second address is from a national perspective in which cultures across the world can be mapped with respect to three dimensions. These are - autonomy vs. embeddedness, egalitarianism vs. hierarchy, and harmony vs. mastery. One of the notable findings of this map is the clustering of countries from the Asian region. For example, the cultures of Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore are very high on embeddedness and also relatively high on hierarchy, and located close to them are the cultures of Thailand, India and China which are very high on hierarchy and relatively high on embeddedness. As such this map provided a useful and fruitful way of understanding the basis of a lot of the research interests of the presenters in the Scientific Program.

Other topics researched in this section of the program included acculturation and cultural adaptation, childlessness among highly educated women in Germany and the Philippines, a cross-cultural study of self-presentation in Korea and the USA, an international study demonstrating little or no difference in various types of intelligence among children from different cultures, the assessment of credibility in a multi-ethnic environment, and an examination of how to sample individuals and societies in ways that permit reliable comparative research.

The profession of psychology

Another invited address which presented a global view of events dealt with the development of professional psychology around the world. As was pointed out, the great philosophers of Europe and Asia were concerned with human behaviour and ways of changing it, mostly through instruction, reward and punishment, and this laid the foundation for the development of psychology's scientific basis. It was the second half of the 20th Century, however, that witnessed the expansion and rapid growth of psychology, especially as a profession, so that today it is firmly established in Europe, North America, Australia and Latin America. In fact Brazil has the largest psychological society or association of any country with a membership of some 140,000. Looking to the future, psychology is growing and indeed booming in South East Asia which some day should become the largest region of psychology in the world.

In the meantime, however, a number of challenges face psychology in the developing and albeit it major world. Perhaps the situation in Bangladesh is a useful starting point because of the overwhelming problem of scarcity and inadequacy in the training of psychologists as well as lack of awareness of the relevance of psychology in both the general public and the national leadership. Thailand is a good example of the situation some way down the track where the academic training and professional practice of psychology is firmly established, and to the level that the licensure of psychologists in clinical practice was recently mandated by the government. What lies ahead is the development and maintenance of curriculum standards and, as reported in another paper, the balance in the curriculum that is achieved between laying the scientific basis of psychology and catering for the vocational interests of students. Other issues include the setting of licensure standards, the establishment and dissemination of ethical guidelines, and provision for continuing professional education.

While the above is a positive picture overall for international psychology in general and regional psychology in particular, in some cases such as South Africa it has gone backwards due to lack of sustained contact with the country's principal decision makers, especially in governmental circles. In this context it should never be forgotten that psychology does not have the same financial resources as some other professions which means that psychology has to 'punch above its weight' as it were to maintain and develop its role.

FAREWELL OCCASION

A Farewell Dinner involving the Conference Organizing Committee and representatives from the three international bodies (IAAP, IUPsyS and IACCP) was held to celebrate the conclusion of the Conference and congratulate the Organizing Committee on its widely acclaimed success. The restaurant was pleasantly located on the banks of the Chao Phraya River, the main river upon which Bangkok is located, which meant that as dinner progressed convivially and those gathered tasted a delicious range of traditional Thai dishes, in the background brightly coloured ferries plied up and down the river in between the busy barges that were still working into the night. The dinner coincided with the Festival of Light (Loy Krathong), a local tradition in which thanks were given to the river for the bounteous gifts it bestowed upon those who depended upon it for their livelihood, and on leaving the restaurant by ferry each person entered into this custom by lowering onto the water a basket of flowers with a lighted candle which floated away on the swiftly flowing river.

IMPACT OF THE CONFERENCE

An important meeting which was held towards the end of the Conference was arranged to discuss what action could be taken to foster the future development of psychology in Thailand, and this preliminary meeting brought together representatives from the Thai Association of Psychology and the three international bodies of IUPsyS, IAAP and IACCP. At the present moment the International Union of Psychological Science (IUPsyS) has a membership of approximately 70 national societies or associations of psychology but no representation from Thailand. Among other things this is due to the fact that currently there are two different psychological associations, the Thai Association of Psychology and the Thai Clinical Psychology Association, with a large number of psychologically trained professionals also being members of the Association of Vocational Guidance. As was explained by Officers from IUPsyS, if psychology in Thailand was to be represented in the International Union, then it would be desirable for the three Thai associations to form a single committee which would speak with one voice for Thai psychologists and represent them at the Union's General Assembly. In this way Thailand could become a member of the Union and join the vast network of international psychologists that it embodies as well as having access to its considerable experience and the wide range of services that it offers.

Another outcome of the Conference resulted from the networking done by members of the newly formed Asian Association of Psychology in planning its first Convention in Bali, Indonesia, from August 18-20, 2006. The Convention President is Salito Sarwono and the event will be supported by the Indonesian Association of Psychologists, the Faculty of Psychology of the University of Indonesia, and the Faculty of Psychology of the University of Tarumanugara. Information about the Convention can be obtained from its website at: www.apsya.org

In addition to these institutional outcomes, the other consequence of the Conference, and perhaps an unintended one, was the effect that it had upon its participants, especially those who were international visitors to Thailand. What affected everyone was the kindness and hospitality shown towards everybody by every Thai person from the Organising Committee to the willing band of Thai students whose interest and enthusiasm was invaluable in enabling the Conference to run smoothly. Thoughtfulness and attention to detail was shown in many ways on many occasions, right down to the gift presented to every Invited Speaker of a ceramic vase artistically hand-painted in traditional Thai patterns and colours. For those fortunate enough to attend the Conference, it was a richly rewarding experience.

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