

# **AASP Conference 1997: Consolidating for the new millennium**

## **The 2nd meeting of the Asian Association of Social Psychology in Kyoto**

The second meeting of the Asian Association of Social Psychology (AASP) took place at the Kyoto International Conference Hall in Japan from August 4-6. The conference was held as a joint meeting between the AASP and the Japanese Group Dynamics Association (JGDA), and hosted by Kyoto University. It was attended by 104 international scholars from 17 countries as well as 202 Japanese scholars. This represents a considerable increase over the 70 scholars who attended the first AASP meeting two years ago in Hong Kong.

In the account that follows, I would like to offer some personal observations comparing the two conferences as well provide a more conventional description of what took place.

### **Developing Support for Asian Social Psychology**

First, the size of the conference increased from an intimate to a mid-sized gathering after just two years. There were 179 papers and 75 posters at Kyoto compared to 37 and 22 at Hong Kong. Part of this increase was due to the participation of the Japanese Group Dynamics Association, but it is clear that AASP is developing widespread support, both in terms of individual and institutional participation (see Liu & Kashima, 1995 for an account of the first meeting). All papers were presented in English.

Whereas Hong Kong Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans provided the bulk of participants for the first conference, in Kyoto a substantial contingent came from the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia. There was a strong presence from Taiwan and more participants from North America and Australasia as well. If the first conference could be described almost as a love-fest, a gathering of like-minded scholars looking at Asia through a pan-Asian lens for the first time, the second conference was more like an accurate representation of the staggering diversity that IS Asian social psychology.

Perhaps the greatest achievement of the first conference was to provide Koreans, Chinese, and Japanese with a space to examine the shared aspects of their cultures, and understand more precisely the sources of friction between them (see Leung, Kim, Yamaguchi, & Kashima, 1997 for selected conference papers). No such single overarching theme could adequately describe the second conference.

### **Cultural orientations**

From my subjective position, it seemed that Japanese scholars tended to be firmly North American in orientation, both in terms of methodology and sources of cross-cultural comparison. Scholars from Hong Kong and Singapore were perhaps the most relentlessly multi-cultural in their orientation, whereas by contrast the Taiwanese, Koreans, and some Indians (India must be the most difficult country in the world to make any generalizations about) appeared deeply committed to developing indigenous psychologies. Research in developing areas of South and Southeast Asia had a strong focus on application. If there

could be an inarticulate theme for Kyoto, it might be that there are at least two paths Asian social psychologists are taking with respect to their relationship to the North American juggernaut.

In terms of content, culture and society remained at the heart of the conference. Research on cross-cultural comparison, indigenous cultural representations, mediating factors of collectivist society (eg., self, relational and transactional structures, social norms, etc.) were all well-represented across numerous symposia and posters. There were also a number of more “mainstream” papers devoted to testing nomothetic hypotheses, but among these, there was little that could be characterized as North American-style social cognition; interpersonal, not intrapersonal processes were the focus. However, given the size of the second meeting, I cannot say with any confidence that these capture all of the major content areas.

## **Milestones**

The Kyoto conference was the scene of several milestones for AASP.

### **1. AASP Publications**

First, a beautifully bound volume of papers from the first conference entitled Progress in Asian Social Psychology was on display. The book captures the diversity and vigour of research presented in Hong Kong. The reader can almost imagine how stimulating the lunch and dinner conversations were in between these papers! The second volume promises to be even more substantial, given much greater range of papers it has to choose from.

Second, the first issue of a new journal was announced for 1998: the Asian Journal of Social Psychology, a joint publication of AASP and JGDA (to be printed by Blackwell). Among the aims of the journal are to “expand the boundaries, substance, and direction of social psychology”, “move away from the narrow focus on intra-individual processes”, “promote research that links Asian cultural traditions, philosophies, and ideas with psychological concepts”. It has over 1,000 subscribers already.

AASP offers a multi-cultural editorial process for both these publications: for Progress, papers are submitted in English but the editors provide whatever editorial support is necessary to ensure that the final manuscript meets international standards in English. For the journal, papers can be submitted in English, Chinese, Korean, or Japanese, and will be translated into English if accepted

### **2. Institutional Support**

Third, several universities, including Chinese University of Hong Kong, Department of Social Psychology, University of Tokyo, LaTrobe University (Melbourne), Chung Ang University (Korea), have announced their support for the organization, including financial support and facilities.

The next conference is scheduled for August 4-7, 1999 in Taipei, Taiwan hosted by National Taiwan Institute under the leadership of Dr. Kuo-Shu Yang. Thanks to journal subscriptions and institutional support, AASP is on sound financial footing.

### **3. New AASP Executive Elected**

Finally, the second executive board was elected consisting of:

- Past-president Sang-Chin Choi (Chung-Ang U)
- President Kwok Leung (Chinese U of Hong Kong)
- President-elect Kuo-Shu Yang (National Taiwan U., Academia Sinica) Secretary-General Yoshi Kashima (La Trobe U)
- Treasurer James Liu (Victoria U of Wellington)
- Research and Publications Committee Chair Uichol Kim (Chung Ang U) Teaching and Training Committee Chair Susumu Yamaguchi (Tokyo U) Regional Representatives:
- East Asia, Tomo Atsumi (Osaka U)
- South East Asia Wei-ning Chang (Singapore National U)
- South Asia Manas Mandal (Banaras Hindu University)
- Insular-Pacific Cynthia Fan (Victoria U of Technology).

The new board shows continuity and change, essential ingredients of any successful organization.

Issues this new board must address are the continued difficulty of getting scholars from mainland China to join the organization, and how to support programs of psychology that will make a difference in other developing countries. Pre-conference workshops were one strategy of engagement that was discussed.

#### **Consolidating the promise**

The hope expressed by Liu & Kashima in 1995 that “AASP will serve to promote an Asian worldview in psychology, holding a central belief that interdependence and harmony are fundamental characteristics of what is best in Asian culture” may be a long way in the future.

Although there is widespread consensus regarding the interdependent, collectivist nature of society in Asia, there are substantial differences regarding how social psychology should capitalize on these characteristics.

The second meeting of AASP consolidated the promise of the first conference, by increasing attendance, publishing proceedings, launching a journal, and maintaining continuity of leadership while recruiting new officers. It will remain to future conferences to realize the promise of using the organization and conference to promote greater Asian unity.

#### **References**

Leung, K., Kim, U., Yamaguchi, S., & Kashima, Y. (1997). Progress in Asian Social

Psychology (vol 1). Singapore: John Wiley & Sons.

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