



**1ST CONVENTION OF THE ASIAN PSYCHOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION, BALI, INDONESIA**

M.C. Knowles

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1ST CONVENTION OF THE ASIAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION BALI, INDONESIA

The First Convention of the Asian Psychological Association (APsyA) was held in Bali from 18-20th August 2006. This historic event marked the founding of the APsyA which is the first association in the Asian region with an individual membership spanning the whole field of psychology. The Conference was organized under the Presidency of Sarlito Sarwono and was supported institutionally by the Faculty of Psychology at the University of Indonesia, Tarumanagara University, the Catholic University of Indonesia, the Indonesian Police Force, the International Council of Psychologists, Division 52 (International Psychology) of the American Psychological Association,) and the International Association of Applied Psychology. The Conference attracted over 120 participants from 17 countries and its Scientific Program covered matters such as indigenous Asian psychology, the contributions of psychology towards national development, and special issues in Asia. The principal symposium of the Conference dealt with terrorism and covered research into the psychology of terrorists, the process by which people become terrorists, and the rehabilitation of terrorists.

La première rencontre de l'Association asiatique de psychologie (AAPsy) s'est tenue à Bali du 18 au 20 août 2006. Cet événement historique a marqué la création de l'AAPsy qui est la première association du continent asiatique à réunir des membres individuels qui couvrent tout le domaine de la psychologie. La conférence était organisée sous la présidence de Sarlito Sarwono et jouissait de l'appui institutionnel de la Faculté de psychologie de l'Université de l'Indonésie, de l'Université Tarumanagara, de l'Université catholique d'Indonésie, de la Force constabulaire indonésienne, du Conseil international des psychologues, de la Division 52 (Psychologie internationale) de l'Association américaine de psychologie et de l'Association internationale de psychologie appliquée. Plus de 120 collègues en provenance de 17 pays ont participé à cette conférence et son programme scientifique comprenait des sujets tels la psychologie indigène asiatique, les contributions de la psychologie au développement national ainsi que des thématiques propres à l'Asie. Le principal symposium de la Conférence traitait du terrorisme and présentait des recherches sur la psychologie des terroristes, sur le processus suivant lequel l'on devient terroriste et sur la réhabilitation des terroristes.

La primera Convención de la Asociación Psicológica Asiática ha tenido lugar en Bali del 18 al 20 de agosto de 2006. Este acontecimiento histórico ha venido a señalar la fundación de la ApsyA, que es la primera asociación asiática que reúne a miembros individuales dentro del campo global de la psicología. La Conferencia se ha reunido bajo la presidencia de Sarlito Sarwono, con el apoyo institucional de la Facultad de Psicología de la Universidad de Indonesia, la Universidad Tarumanagara, la Universidad Católica de Indonesia, la Indonesian Police Force, el International Council of Psychologists, la División 52 de la American Psychological Association, y la International Association of Applied Psychology. La Conferencia ha atraído a más de 120 participantes procedentes de 17 países, y su programa científico incluía muchos temas, entre los que cabe destacar la psicología indígena asiática, la contribución de la psicología a favor del desarrollo nacional, y temas específicos del mundo asiático. El simposio principal ha estado dedicado al problema del terrorismo, incluyendo cuestiones como la psicología de los terroristas, el proceso que lleva a los individuos a convertirse en terroristas, y la cuestión de su rehabilitación.

This Convention of the Asian Psychological Association (APsyA) was held in Bali from 18-20th August 2006 and was an historic event for two reasons. Firstly it marked the founding of the APsyA with the adoption of a constitution, the election of its principal Office Bearers, the election of its Board of Directors, and the creation of its initial membership. A momentous moment such as it was in Bali was an exciting time for everyone who had the privilege of being there, and credit is due to every member of the interim committee who worked so diligently in establishing the Association.

Secondly, this was the inaugural Convention of APsyA and had as its theme "Asian solidarity in diversity: towards a better quality of life in Asia." The principal organizer was Sarlito Sarwono from

the Faculty of Psychology at the University of Indonesia, and the conference was supported not only by this University but also Tarumanagara University, the Catholic University of Indonesia, the Indonesian Police Force, the International Council of Psychologists, Division 52 (International Psychology) of the American Psychological Association, and the International Association of Applied Psychology with which APsyA has a tandem relationship.

PARTICIPANTS

The Conference attracted 113 participants (not including members of the local organizer, who are mostly psychologists) from 17 countries including Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, The Philippines, mainland China (Hong Kong), Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Iran, The Netherlands, England, Canada and the United States.

OPENING CEREMONY

The Opening Ceremony was chaired by Sarlito Sarwono who, together with Chok Hiew representing the International Council of Psychologists and Mike Knowles representing the International Association of Applied Psychology, welcomed all delegates. What was stressed was the importance of having an Association whose members were either Asian themselves or conducted research into Asian issues and were thus interested in developing indigenous schools of thought and paradigms as well as ways by means of which psychologists in the region could contribute to their nation's development both socially and economically.

The opening of the Conference was followed by an elegant display of traditional Balinese dancing and an exquisite performance of Balinese music.

SCIENTIFIC PROGRAM

The Scientific Program covered a wide range of topics but by and large these could be grouped around four main themes, namely, family, women and children issues in Asia; indigenous Asian psychology; contributions towards national development; and societal issues in Asia. The latter group could have included the question of terrorism but since this was the primary symposium of the Conference it will be treated as a theme in its own right.

Family, women and children issues in Asia

Given the collectivist nature of Asian societies, it is little surprise that a dominant theme revolved around the family and the influence that parents have on family functioning. Topics investigated included the role of the family in whether or not the child develops a meaningful sense of life, the role of parents and especially the mother in enhancing the development of the psychological health of children, the influence of parenting style upon the development of resilience in children, and the dual role of women in those wanting to build a strong foundation for their families as well as establish a successful career. The efficacy of parent education programs dealing with family development and child rearing practices was also examined, as was the effect of family involvement in improving the physical and psychological conditions of prisoners who were drug abusers affected by HIV/AIDS.

Indigenous Asian psychology

This series of presentations dealt with that which was unique to Asian people. One presentation highlighted the importance of the holistic approach in Eastern cultures in understanding consciousness and altered states of consciousness. This was illustrated in another presentation which gave an example of the holistic view of mind and body in the East whereas in the West the two tend to be viewed in a more segmented and dichotomous way. This distinction helps to explain differences in people's sense of well-being as well as their attitudes to therapy, counselling and social intervention.

A third paper gave insight into the Asian mind by illustrating how shadow puppetry (Wayang) and story-telling play an important part in transmitting and sustaining the values underlying Javanese culture which is grounded in both Hindu and Islamic traditions. This helps to explain the deeply spiritual nature of many indigenous societies in the region where, for example, in Bali, practically every farm has its own shrine in which offerings are left daily.

Contributions towards national development

One set of papers in this group dealt with issues concerned with improving academic performance and covered topics such as learning English as a second language, and reducing the stress of examination anxiety.

An important driving force of economic growth in developing economies, especially in rural areas, is entrepreneurship, and a second stream of papers concerned papers in this field of inquiry. One study examined the attractiveness of entrepreneurship among young people and, since this occupation offers many opportunities for females to enter the workforce, a second research analysed the attributes of women leaders in this particular context.

Societal issues in Asia

Relationship between communities is an issue of world-wide concern, and two papers provided insight as to how this matter was being dealt with in the Indonesian archipelago which comprises over 600 different tribes. The problem is that each of these tribal groups not only has their own territory and culture but also their languages are mutually unintelligible. In the Maluku Islands, for example, tensions between Christians and Muslims have a long history in which relations have varied between the extremes of peace and violence, and one paper described a community-based program which has made progress in improving cross-cultural understanding through social and emotional learning.

As in many Asian countries, religion is an integral part of life and one study demonstrated that, among other things, it can make a significant contribution in reducing stress levels among Indonesian workers. A second study also showed that understanding the Islamic point of view about disaster and living after disaster was important if psychologists were to work with the survivors of the tsunami in provinces such as Aceh. A third study, however, reported that those people in general with a higher religious orientation tended to be older, more educated, and women, a finding which is not uncommon in other parts of the world.

One problem in the region involves people who are displaced as a result of inter-communal violence where it is estimated that approximately 70 per cent of such Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are children and women. One study assessed the condition of adolescent IDPs who, compared with their host counterparts, were found to have lower status and higher levels of emotional problems such as anxiety and trauma.

Another allied problem concerns child trafficking in which the region is both a source and a transit country for men, women and children who are traded internationally for sexual exploitation or forced labour. A study in this area dealt with a program administered to primary school children in

a high risk area in eastern Java where Puppet Theatre was again used to increase social awareness among children of the dangers they faced in becoming a victim of trafficking.

A range of other studies were on topics such as the connection between delinquency and problematic peer relations and low self-esteem, the use of expressing writing to facilitate cognitive change in victims of trauma, attitudes towards virginity among adolescents, the positive and negative effects of mobile phone use among university students, the mental health problems of veterans in The Philippines, unhealthy dietary habits among children, the effect of room colour on the mood of prisoners who were drug abusers with HIV/AIDS, and the effect of community leadership and networking in maintaining a neighbourhood that was clean rather than dirty.

Terrorism and the process of terrorism

Notwithstanding the importance of the research just described, the feature of the Conference was the day and a half symposium on terrorism. Its importance could be attributed to the incidence of terrorism, its prevalence in some regions of the world, its potential threat in many other parts of the globe, and above all the pervasive lack of knowledge and understanding about the nature and causes of terrorism and how contemporary society can go about handling the problem of terrorism.

Contrary to popular misconceptions that most terrorists are psychopaths, this symposium provided evidence from several studies to show that terrorists can come from a range of age groups, from both genders, from different socio-economic backgrounds, and that a single 'terrorist' personality does not exist. Certain traits, however, are common among many terrorists including low cognitive complexity, the absence of goals, low self-esteem, an extraordinary need for glory, and a high valence of religion. But in the words of one presenter, "from a motivational perspective their willingness to die is one thing but in many ways their intention and willingness to harm other people is more difficult to understand".

Other predisposing factors are contextual involving the family and the community. For example, a child may have experienced trauma through seeing their mother humiliated or their father killed, and families and communities affected in this way provide a network of sympathisers, supporters and collaborators from which the terrorist is recruited. Thus the situation can play a vital role in the formation of the terrorist's basic motivations and attitudes. This research also helps to explain the distinctive nature of terrorism in Southeast Asian countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and The Philippines where there is little community support for the atrocities of terrorism compared with some other parts of the world.

In similar vein another line of inquiry demonstrated that a terrorist does not become one overnight. Rather it is something that is learnt, with the process involving a search for meaning, the presentation of an ideology, the cultivation of the terrorist, gaining control over the person (for example, through taking an oath of allegiance), moral disengagement (for example, de-individualisation through both the power of the group and shared responsibility), and the performance of a task to demonstrate loyalty. The intense group dynamics that are involved in this process lead to polarisation of thinking in which good (we) is pitted against evil (them) so that there is no sense of guilt or remorse attached to the performed task.

Other research reported on the organization of terrorism and cited the case of Jemaah Islamiyah in particular on account of it being an international organization with members in a host of different countries in different parts of the world. The belief system of this organization was described as being based upon violence and terror through misrepresentation of Islamic concepts, and as combining a military system together with a policy of exclusivity and extremism to position itself at the vanguard of the Muslim community. It not only legitimised but also glorified martyrdom (Syahadah) and suicide bombing (Istimata). In terms of its organization structure, its support group comprised sympathisers, supporters and collaborators as mentioned above on top of which operated the recruits, the cadres and the leaders, all of whom promulgated the ideology of Jemaah Islamiyah.

Apart from counter-measures involving the police and the military, the seminar also described the emergency of the first Bali bombing and how the crisis was met through the provision of first aid in the field, the mobilization of doctors in the hospitals, the formation of the Disaster Investigation Team to identify those responsible for the bombing, the establishment of the Disaster Aid Unit which provided blankets and other essential services to the victims of the bombing.

One of the most illuminating presentations in this absorbing symposium described the work of the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorist Research which is a Centre of the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies at the Nanyang Technological University in Singapore. The aim of this work was to change the way of thinking of the Jihadist by convincing them of the erroneousness of their beliefs, and thus facilitating their personal rehabilitation and social reintegration into their communities. This method relied upon determining the beliefs of detainees and then utilising the knowledge of Islamic scholars to demonstrate where these beliefs were at variance with the tenets of the Quran. In short, this was a long term process but its outcomes were impressive for three reasons. Firstly, its success rate was approximately 90 per cent. Secondly, the procedure had been replicated in Saudi Arabia with similar results. Thirdly, and most impressively of all, it changed the way of handling the vexed problem of how to deal with convicted terrorists from incarceration to rehabilitation.

CLOSING CEREMONY

The Closing Ceremony was chaired by Sarlito Sarwono who thanked all delegates for coming from near and far to be both founding members of APsyS as well as participants in its inaugural Convention. He expressed his thanks also to all members of the Organizing Committee which, he emphasized, worked as a team to make the Conference possible. In turn, expressions of congratulations and gratitude came from all around the room to both Sarlito Sarwono and the Organizing Committee not only for its success but also the wonderful experience which everyone had who were fortunate enough to attend the Conference.

IMPACT OF THE CONFERENCE

The Asian Psychological Association is not the only organization of psychologists in Asia but it is the first association with an individual membership whose interests traverse the whole field of psychology as well as specialise in particular areas such as cross-cultural psychology and inter-ethnic psychology. As such it supplements the activities of the Asian Social Psychology Association, the Asian Cognitive Behaviour Therapy Association, which are both associations of individual psychologists, and the recently established ASEAN Regional Union of Psychology Societies (ARUPS) which is an association of national societies of psychology developed with the encouragement of the International Union of Psychological Science (IUPsyS) with which it hopes to affiliate.

Thus, and the point was made in one of the Conference's Keynote Addresses by Ray Fowler, psychology is growing and indeed booming in Asia which some day should become the largest region of psychology in the world. Already it is firmly established in some countries and will become increasingly so in the years ahead. In this context it can be seen that this Conference has given a major impetus to this development. In this regard one of the delightful outcomes of the Conference could be witnessed in the sessions in which individual papers were made. On a number of occasions there was timely mutual support with respect to language and statistics, and the appreciation and bonding that resulted from this was warming and powerful.

Perhaps the other major achievement of the Conference was the symposium on terrorism and the bringing together of so many people who were researching and working on this issue which is one of the world's most pressing problems. The importance of this symposium is attested to by the fact that it was attended by representative of two of the foreign embassies located in Jakarta. This

symposium has a huge potential to change the way terrorism is both understood by both the general public and policy makers alike, and the manner by which the challenge of terrorism is dealt with and managed.