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## Networking Among Southeast Asian Psychological Societies to Improve Services\*

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### INTRODUCTION

Psychology as a common sense knowledge about people and their behavior might have been familiar to every culture since the beginning of the human history. As a scientific discipline, however, it seems to be a Western invention. Some even contented that is only the product of the transition from traditional or premodern to modern Western society in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Sampson, 1989). This transition involves change of the functional unit of the social order from the community or any other form of social groupings to the individual. Based on a liberal individualist framework as well as a voluntarist notion of personhood, the modern Western world view the person as a self-contained individual whose values and relations are the products of her or his own choice. Individuals are antecedent to the society in which they live and the possession of a self is given prior to its

ends (Sampson, 1989). Hence, understanding and concern with the self-contained individual as well as studying its dynamics, is the key to understanding the human life. In other words, as a scientific and autonomous discipline psychology has been the creation of the modern industrialized Western societies of the nineteenth century.

In the Western world, four figures have been identified as the founders of the new scientific and autonomous discipline of psychology (Mueller, 1979). The first figure is *Gustav Fechner* (1801-1887), a German physiologist, philosopher and psychologist. In his important book, *Elemente der Psychophysik* (1860), he defined psychology as "the exact science of the functional relations between mind and body". The second figure is *Hermann von Helmholtz* (1821-1894), another German scholar whose field of expertise is physics. He contributed to the development of psychology as an empirical science through his empirical studies on perception and sensation that he published in his two volumes, *Sensations of Tone* (1862) and *Physiological Optics*

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(1866). The third figure is *Wilhelm Wundt* (1832-1920), still another German scholar and physiologist. He has been identified as the founder of the structuralist school in psychology through his works that he published in his major volume, *Principles of Physiological Psychology* (1873-1874). The fourth figure is *William James* (1842-1910), an American philosopher and psychologist. Through his specific scientific method known as "*the stream of consciousness approach to mental phenomena*" that he published in his *Principles of Psychology* (1890), he has been identified as the founder of the functionalist school in psychology.

Among the four figures, however, *Wilhelm Wundt* has been proclaimed as the real founder of psychology as a scientific and autonomous discipline for several reasons (Mueller, 1979). First, he specifically and explicitly contended that "*he intended to mark out psychology as a new science*". Secondly, since about 1880 his psychological laboratory that he founded in 1879 in Leipzig, Germany, has been the major place of destination for those from both Europe and the United States of America who intended to study psychology as a scientific discipline. Thirdly, he published the first scientific journal of psychology in 1881.

More importantly, it was Wundt who originally identified two traditions in psychology, namely *Naturwissenschaften* or the natural sciences tradition and *Geisteswissenschaften* or the cultural

sciences tradition (Kim & Berry, 1993). The former is reflected in general psychology with the experimental approach as its major tool in the conduct of psychological research. The goal is the formulation of universal laws of the basic psychological processes. The latter focuses on the examination of psychological phenomena that are shaped by language and culture, and which would not be appropriate to be studied using the experimental method. It recognizes the need to develop methods that incorporate human qualities as well as their cultural contexts into the research design. They include the historical-developmental methods of the social sciences such as cultural anthropology, ethno-science, and cross-cultural psychology (Kim & Berry, 1993; Cole, 1996).

### THE THREE WORLDS OF PSYCHOLOGY

It is reasonable thus to contend that in Western countries the discipline of psychology had apparently been developed and taught at universities since 1879. Although it originated in Europe namely in Germany, but it gained its real thrust to growth as an autonomous discipline in the United States of America in the following decades. More specifically, in the hands of the pragmatist American scholars the dual psychology that had been initiated by Wundt has then been reduced into a single psychology with a single

approach, namely the positivistic experimental one based on the epistemology of operationism that had become what Edwin G. Boring called "*the basic American psychological faith*" (Mowrer, 1961).

The development of psychology as an autonomous discipline in other countries took place in much later times, which apparently include in 1946 in Japan (Azuma, 1984), 1953 in the Republic of Indonesia (Hassan, 1975), 1955 in the Philippines (Lagmay, 1984), 1956 in the People's Republic of China (Ching, 1984), and in 1973 in Turkey (LeCompte, 1980). In all those countries the kind of Western psychology that has been developed was apparently imported from either certain country in Europe such as the United Kingdom or mainly from the United States of America.

Hence, in terms of the capacity to produce psychological knowledge and to export it to other countries Moghaddam (1987) identified three psychology communities at the global level that he called the "*the three worlds in which psychologists research and practice*" (p. 912). The first world consists solely of the United States of America. The second world comprises the other industrialized Western or European countries such as the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union. The third world comprises all the remaining developing countries in Europe, Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

Moghaddam (1987) further contended that the first world is the major producer of psychological knowledge and exports it to both the second and third worlds in an almost exclusively one-way manner. In fact, not so long after its introduction from Europe until practically today, the American psychology has gained the status of the world's mainstream psychology with its emphasis on the use of the positivistic and experimental approach in studying human behaviour.

The second world rivals the first world in some spheres, namely in the cultivation of the cultural or non-experimental facet of psychology as originally identified by Wundt. However, its influence tends to be greater only in certain segments of the second and third worlds than in the first one. Its influence in the third world stems from the historical ties that some second world countries have maintained since their colonization times. The third world is mainly an importer of psychological knowledge from the other worlds and especially from the United States of America that as the first world had succeeded in establishing its psychology as the world's mainstream psychology.

#### WESTERN PSYCHOLOGY IN THE THIRD WORLD

There might have been some changes to what Moghaddam (1987) had

observed. Significant contributions in the development of new concepts and approaches in psychology apparently have appeared from new developing countries, namely the newly industrialized and wealthy countries from East Asia and South Asia including Japan, Taiwan, Korea, and India. Such contributions apparently result from the efforts of the local communities of psychologists to indigenise the discipline of psychology in their respective countries. As Gabrenya, Jr. (2004) contended, aside from the local irrelevance path, the conditions of work path, the national identity path, the great leader path, and the social movements path, a sixth path that the indigenisation of psychology movement in a country may take is wealth. Psychology is really an expensive endeavour, and the development of indigenous psychology in a country depends on its achievement of a certain level of "psychological infrastructure", such as sufficient Ph.D. psychologists, research opportunities and the like, which all require some pretty amount of wealth or money.

Moghaddam's (1987) keen observation, however, apparently still holds for less wealthy and less industrialized countries in the rest of the world such as ours in Southeast Asia. Our dependence on the first and second worlds includes among others the adoption of the American curriculum in the education of our young psychologists especially in the undergraduate level, the use of Western

psychology textbooks and journals as the major sources for our teaching and research in psychology, the sending of our talented faculty members to American and European universities to pursue their graduate study in psychology, our reliance on models and paradigms as well as methods and techniques developed in the West in the conduct of assessment, research, and psychotherapy.

The reliance of the third world countries on the mainstream psychology that especially comes from the United States has resulted in among others the lack of responsiveness of psychology in those countries to the challenge posed by problems of social change in their respective communities (Sinha, 1984). In addition to the creation of the local irrelevance problem as indicated by Gabrenya, Jr. (2004), such a situation may create what Moghaddam & Taylor (1986) called a dual perception. Psychologists in the third world countries tend to have different perceptions of the social reality that evolve in the traditional and modern sectors in their respective communities. Being more familiar with as well as expecting more rewards from the modern sector they tend to dedicate themselves more to the modern sector to the neglect of the urgent needs of the local and traditional sector that comprises the bigger portion of the community that they should have served. Hence one of the major issues the

psychological communities in the developing countries are facing is the creation of a psychology that is appropriate as well as responsive to the real needs of the whole local communities.

## **TWO WAYS TO DEVELOP AN APPROPRIATE PSYCHOLOGY**

There seems to be two ways for Third World countries to free themselves from the hegemonic influence of the mainstream psychology and to develop a psychology that is appropriate to their local social and cultural realities. Borrowing from the ideas of Greenfield (2000), the two ways include indigenisation and what we may call culturisation.

Culturisation is the hard way. It consists of developing a cultural psychology, which is actually the merger of psychology and anthropology. As a movement in the discipline of psychology, it grew out of dissatisfaction with the universalism and decontextualized methodology of psychology in general, namely the mainstream psychology. Being influenced by anthropology, it aims to study cultural-psychological processes directly using methods that include research techniques coined as qualitative such as naturalistic observation, ethnography, and discourse analysis. It is effective to develop an appropriate psychology for it focuses on problems and procedures that are

derived from the life ways as well as the modes of communication of the local culture. However, it is the hard way for at least two reasons. First, its empirical research tradition is not based on formal psychological theories with culture-specific origins. Second, it gives great deal of attention to relatively stable subsistence village or non-urban cultures. These two issues are usually unfamiliar to the majority of psychologists in the Third World countries who are trained in the Western mainstream psychology tradition.

The more convenient way to develop an appropriate psychology is through indigenisation or developing an indigenous psychology. As a movement in the discipline of psychology, it was born as part of an attempt to decolonise the mind among native psychologists in countries that are former colonies of either some European countries or the United States (Greenfield, 2000). After years of following Western models, they felt that the theories, constructs, and basic principles that originated in Western cultures did not really apply to them and had even made them alienated from the real psychology of their respective local communities. Although it shares some important aspects with cultural psychology in developing an appropriate psychology, it maintains certain particular facets that make it more convenient to follow for psychologists trained in the Western mainstream psychology tradition. They

include among others, the tendency to study variables than processes, the tendency to rely more on the standard psychological methodology than that derived from anthropology, and the tendency to privilege elite populations, namely university students, as subjects of study than common people in remote areas (Greenfield, 2000).

### DEVELOPING AN INDIGENOUS PSYCHOLOGY

However, *indigenisation* or the development of an indigenous psychology is really more an evolutionary rather than revolutionary process that involves several steps or stages. Reflecting on the development of psychology in Japan, Azuma (1984) identified the following stages of the incorporation and adaptation of Western psychology into Japanese culture.

The first stage is the *pioneer period*. Intellectual pioneers, either foreign or native or both, realize the potential relevance of psychology and introduce it at the textbook level. The second stage is the *introductory period*. Psychology is recognized as an important field of study and either foreign experts or members of the local intellectual elite trained overseas or both introduce the technical knowledge of psychology to the local community. These two stages are comparable to what Adair (2004) called the *importation stage*. The new psychology becomes part of the university

curriculum, becomes a popular subject and prospective faculties are sent abroad namely to the first world countries to be trained.

The third stage is the *translating and modelling period* that is comparable to what Adair (2004) called the *implantation stage*. The returning scholars teach and conduct research in psychology by emulating the Western model they are familiar with. The majority of concepts, theories and methods are translations of those from the developed countries. However, application is possible only at a technical level for problems that are relatively culture-free. Hence, some of the more mature scholars begin to reflect critically on their undertakings and conclude that what they are doing seems not to fit their native culture and irrelevant to their society (Adair, 2004).

The fourth stage is what both Azuma (1984) and Adair (2004) called the *indigenisation period*. New concepts, theories and methods appropriate to culture bound phenomena are advanced by psychologists who know both native and foreign cultures. As Adair (2004) contended, this effort is usually initiated with the translation and adaptation of foreign psychometric tests to more appropriate content and language as well as calls for research on topics that are appropriate to the local needs, and followed by the identification of unique behaviours and thoughts by their linguistic distinctiveness or by

traditional cultural writings or lore. Thus, the development of an indigenous psychology. As Kim & Berry (1993) contended, indigenous psychology is the scientific study of human behaviour that is native, that is not transported from other regions, and that is designed for its people. It upholds the view that each culture needs to be understood from within its own reference frame. In this stage, the application of an appropriate psychology to culture-bound phenomena becomes more effective (Azuma, 1984).

The fifth and last stage is what Azuma (1984) called the *integration period* that is comparable to what Adair (2004) called the *autochthonization stage*. Psychology in a developing country gets freed from the rigid but otherwise unnoticed mold of traditionally Western concepts and logics. It subsumes thoughts and concepts of non-Western namely local origin, deepening and generalizing the understanding of

human nature, and hence it becomes capable of dealing with local phenomena without imposing a Western mold. Development of the imported psychology into a self-sustaining independent indigenous discipline is achieved as the final step in this process (Adair, 2004). The two schemes may be presented in the following Table 1.

#### NETWORKING AGENDA FOR THE ASEAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATIONS

Established on August 8, 1967, in Bangkok the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) now consists of all ten Southeast Asian countries including Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei Darussalam, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia. However, only six countries have their national psychological association, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.

**Table 1.** Stages of the Indigenisation Process

Azuma (1984)	Adair (2004)
Pioneer period	Importation stage
Introductory period	
Translating and modelling period	Implantation stage
Indigenisation period	Indigenisation stage
Integration period	Autochthonization stage

*Himpunan Psikologi Indonesia* or the Indonesian Psychological Association was founded on July 11, 1959, in Jakarta as *Ikatan Psikologi Indonesia* (ISPsi) or the Indonesian Psychologist Association. Its current name was established in an Extraordinary Congress in 1998 in Jakarta. It currently has 8,100 members nationwide. *Persatuan Psikologi Malaysia* (PSIMA) or the Malaysian Psychological Association was established in 1988. It currently has 190 members nationwide. The Psychological Association of the Philippines (PAP) was founded in 1962. It currently has more than 1,471 members. The Singapore Psychological Society was founded in 1979. It currently has 220 members. The Thai Psychological Association (TPA) was founded on August 9, 1961. It currently lists over 500 members. The Psycho-Pedagogical Association of Vietnam currently lists 1000 members (*Congress Book*, 2006).

Only five out of the 10 members of ASEAN countries - apparently out of six countries that have their national psychological association - are also National Members of the International Union of Psychological Science (IUPsyS). However, the national psychological association of the six ASEAN countries have recently founded the ASEAN Regional Union of Psychological Societies (ARUPS) and organized their first congress July 31-August 2, 2006, in Jakarta. Among the major goals of the organization is to provide a forum for

networking and standardizing to improve the psychological service in the ASEAN countries.

As members of the third world countries that imported psychology from the first and second world ones, all ASEAN psychological communities are facing the same need to develop a psychology that is appropriate to both our respective local and common regional settings. Without an appropriate psychology or appropriate psychologies it seems impossible for us to improve our service to our respective communities. Thus in order for us to be able to design an agenda of networking and cooperation to improve our services at both the national and regional levels, it seems imperative for us to take the following efforts. First, both independently and cooperatively each of us needs to reflect on and identify the phase or phases in the indigenisation process that we are in within our respective national community. Having a solid knowledge of our own situation, then we would be able to cooperate in the regional level in developing further our own appropriate psychology, developing a common psychology that would be appropriate to our commonalities as ASEAN nations, and working together in making our psychologies known to the global community and, at the same time, enriching the horizons of the world psychology as well.



With regards to indigenisation, I assume that all of us have passed the importation and implantation phases. Some may have achieved a pretty advanced stage in the indigenisation phase whereas some other may have just started, but none I assume, have reached the integration or the autochthonization stage (which I might be wrong).

Hence our agenda of networking and cooperation should mainly include the following: (1) A mutual support for the unearthing of our respective local psychological concepts, theories and methods; (2) The development of psychological assessment and intervention approaches as well as psycho-physical well-being criteria which are tailored to the local concepts and practices, and their cross-validation through cross-cultural examinations; (3) In order to support such an undertaking, exchange programs among our communities for our scholars and practitioners to either pursue further study both formally and informally, or conduct research cross-culturally are most welcome; (4) A close networking and cooperation in developing curricula for both the pre-service and in-service training of our psychologists at the undergraduate through the post doctorate levels, both on the scientific and professional tracks are also very desirable; (5) To facilitate intellectual communication and other exchanges of ideas and experiences among our scholars and practitioners the institution of an official website and

regular conferences as well as the foundation of either a scientific or applied journal seems also imperative; (6) Both individually and collectively we also need to support our scholars and practitioners to make scientific contributions to the global psychological community.

With regard to standardization, a rigid standardization of the various issues mentioned above among all of us might not be productive at this point of time, or worse it might even contradict our shared spirit to localize our psychologies. What we might need instead is a common and shared view of the basic principles and requirements in the teaching, conduct of research as well as the delivery of various kinds of services of psychology, which are appropriately tailored to our respective cultural and social realities.

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