

International Conference on Values Research

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SEVERAL YEARS AGO a report on the Asian Values Study, a long-term project of the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture, was given in the pages of the *Institute Bulletin* (23: 59–73). That report focused on the results of a pilot survey conducted in 1998 in the Tokyo and Osaka metropolitan areas. In 2001 the Japanese Ministry of Education and Science approved a three-year research grant to conduct a full study in Japan and to search for research partners interested in conducting the survey in other Asian countries.

Our Asian Values Study finds its inspiration in the work of the European Values Study Group, which has been working on a comprehensive survey of values in the domains of work, family, politics, and religion in the countries of Europe since 1980. The Asian Values Study aims for an equally comprehensive survey of values in Asia, using many of the same questions as the European survey while incorporating items to test for what are commonly assumed to be distinct Asian values, such as harmony, stability, and respect for authority.

The full survey was conducted in Japan in June and July 2001. The Working Group that has been heading up this project is currently working on a comprehensive analysis of the results of the survey, with the hope of publishing a report in both Japanese and English in the coming year. To very briefly summarize some of the main points regarding religious values, the results indicate that while traditional values are still given some level of importance in Japan there is a clear trend towards individualism and rational approaches towards work and life in society. Contemporary Japanese religiosity is characterized by high levels of participation in religious rites, especially funeral and ancestor rites, and a rather pervasive belief in the existence of the divine, with a low level of religious affiliation or identification of oneself as being a “religious person.” Indeed, as a social institution, religious groups attract the mistrust of nearly ninety percent of the population.

Contacts have been established with researchers in the Philippines, South Korea, Taiwan, and Indonesia with the aim of expanding the circle of researchers interested in this project, and eventually establishing an Asian Values Study Group comparable to the European group.



1. Robert Kisala opens the international conference on value studies.

To conclude the three-year project covered by the Education Ministry grant, an international conference on values research was held at Nanzan University from 30 January to 2 February 2004. The conference had three main aims: to review the work of others who have been engaged in value research, to present the preliminary results of our survey in Japan, and to strengthen our ties with researchers in other Asian countries in order to help our project develop into a true Asian values study.

In fulfillment of the first aim, representatives of the European Values Study Group and researchers involved in the World Values Study were invited to participate in the conference. The European Values Study and the World Values Study, which originally used a nearly identical survey instrument and was patterned after the European survey, constitute the standard in comprehensive survey research on values. While the members of the Working Group here in Japan have had extensive contact with the European group in the years since we initially took on this project, we have had comparatively little contact with the World Values Study group.

Loek Halman of Tilburg University in the Netherlands, the coordinator of the European Values Study Group, kindly agreed to give the keynote address for our conference, an overview of values research in Europe in the last twenty years. Although values are universally recognized as central to human action and culture, as a concept “values” is hard to define and research empirically. In broad terms, values are principles that somehow guide human behavior, but they differ from specific aims or goals. They are related to the concepts of norms, convictions, desires, attitudes, and the like, but cannot quite be replaced by these other concepts. Values, rather, seem to underlie these other concepts, and are thus more

fundamental in guiding behavior. As a working definition, Dr. Halman suggested that values are “a deeply rooted motivation or orientation guiding or explaining certain attitudes, norms, opinions, which in turn direct human action, or at least part of it.” Value research is difficult, however, because we generally are not aware of our values, at least to the extent that we are able to give a coherent answer when questioned directly regarding our values. What the European survey seeks to do, therefore, is to test for attitudes, and then search for the values that underlie the attitudes expressed in the results of the survey through statistical analysis techniques such as latent variable analysis.

Following the keynote address, two members of the core group of the World Values Study gave presentations on their research. Yilmaz Esmer of Bogazici University in Istanbul, Turkey, gave a general introduction to the theoretical constructs used in the World Values Study, particularly a shift from modern to postmodern values, as seen in a decreasing emphasis placed on material concerns and an increased importance placed on individual lifestyle choices. Thorleif Pettersson of Uppsala University in Sweden presented an analysis of the inroads of secularization worldwide based on the results of the most recent wave of the European Values Study and World Values Study conducted in 1999/2000. Two current theories in the sociology of religion hold that secularization progresses along with the rationalization of social processes, as, for example, with advanced social welfare, but that a religiously pluralistic situation will tend to encourage more participation in religious activities as the supply of religious choices available to



2. Discussion during the conference. Around the table (clockwise) are Robert Kisala, Thorleif Pettersson, Yilmaz Esmer, Loek Halman, Hans Mueller, Teresith Calantas, Felipe Muncada, Rosa Clemena, and Fujimoto Tetsushi.

individuals increases. These are often thought to be competing theories, but Dr. Pettersson found support for both of them in the results of the values studies, and suggested that it is the presence and intermingling of both of these trends—rationalization and pluralization—in modern societies that leads to the variety in levels of secularization apparent in contemporary societies.

Finally, Hans Mueller of Stellenbosch University in the Republic of South Africa presented an explanation of the African Values Study, a project that he is currently heading up. Dr. Mueller has been working closely with members of both the European and World Values Study Groups to develop a survey instrument that preserves many of the items used in these surveys while also testing for distinctly African values, similar to our aim in developing the Asian Values Study questionnaire.

The second day of the conference was devoted to presentations on the results of the survey conducted here in Japan in 2001. Yamada Mamoru of Waseda University in Tokyo was unable to attend the conference because of a scheduling conflict, but he sent a paper analyzing the results of the questions added to the survey to test for Asian values. His analysis indicated that while traditional values associated with structures of authority seem to be held in less esteem in contemporary Japanese society, those concerning horizontal relationships remain important. Philip Muncada of Nanzan University presented his analysis of the items in the survey dealing with work values, indicating that the persistent economic downturn in Japan has increased feelings of job insecurity, and perhaps heightened the desire to maintain traditional employment practices as well as traditional workplace relationships. Fujimoto Tetsushi, also of Nanzan University, addressed family and marital values, focusing especially on the rather stark differences in the attitudes of men and women in this area. Men in general seem to want to maintain traditional relationships in the home as well as at work, while women indicate a high level of dissatisfaction with the present state of family and marital life. Finally, I presented an analysis of results yielded by the questions on political values. Perhaps most striking is the high level of interest in politics indicated by the survey, a level much higher than in Western countries. There is little indication of a widespread ideological split between the left and right in Japan, with the overwhelming majority of the respondents identifying themselves as lying within a very narrow band in the middle of this scale. Party loyalty is low, and there seems to be an emerging consensus in favor of a two-party system.

The final day was devoted to values research in Asia. Johannes Chang of Fujen University in Taiwan presented a paper on his research on the values of Singapore youth and their parents. He was somewhat critical of the theory positing a universal shift from modern to postmodern values that underlies the World Values Study, indicating that while this theory may be partially true, there would also seem to be other factors contributing to value change in Asia. Rose Clemena of De

La Salle University in Manila, the Philippines, presented her research on values among youth in the Philippines, pointing out the difficulty of finding appropriate measures to test for attitudes and values, especially the difficulty in adapting items developed in the West. Wom Bom Lee of Dongseo University in Busan, South Korea, also participated in the discussions.

The conference was a success, I believe, in meeting the three goals presented earlier in this report. One of the impressions I came away with is that there is still much we can learn from the experience of those involved in the European and World Values Studies, especially in terms of the wealth of information that can be obtained from our survey results through the use of sophisticated statistical analysis techniques. I think we also came away more confident that our methodology in designing our survey instrument in order to preserve a degree of comparability with the European and World surveys while also testing for distinctly Asian Values has been proven correct, and that our survey makes a unique contribution to the advancement of values research. The next step is to do the survey in other countries of Asia, and the search for further research funds to fulfill that task continues.