

THE CENTER FOR STABILIZATION AND RECONSTRUCTION STUDIES



TOOLS FOR  
CROSS-CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING

JUNE 24-27, 2008  
NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL



# Tools for Cross-Cultural Understanding

June 24-27, 2008



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## ABOUT THIS EVENT

*Tools for Cross-Cultural Understanding* was held June 24-27, 2008, in Monterey, CA. Participants, who hailed from 12 different nations, included 40 representatives from nongovernmental organizations, intergovernmental organizations, government civilian agencies, and the armed forces. These practitioners explored cultural concepts, discussed the impact of deep culture on conflict, and created strategies for addressing the needs and motivations of multiple actors in conflict and crisis. The event, which was facilitated by Dr. Tatsushi Arai of the SIT Graduate Institute, featured both personal and political case studies set in China, Iraq, Japan, Nepal, and Tanzania.



### The Center for Stabilization and Reconstruction Studies

(CSRS) is a teaching institute which develops and hosts educational programs for stabilization and reconstruction practitioners, including representatives from US and

international nongovernmental organizations, intergovernmental organizations, government and civilian agencies, and the armed forces. Established by the Naval Postgraduate School in 2004 through the vision and congressional support of Representative Sam Farr (CA-17), CSRS creates a wide array of programs to foster dialogue among practitioners, as well as to help them develop new strategies and refine best practices to improve the effectiveness of their important global work.

Located at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California, CSRS also contributes to the university's research and graduate degree programs. For more information about CSRS, its philosophy, and programs, please visit [www.csrns-nps.org](http://www.csrns-nps.org).

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“ Many of you work in rational fields where you are supposed to make logic-based decisions. This workshop exposes you to cultural influences you often don’t consider in your work. We will break the patterns of thinking you use every day. ”

— Dr. Tatsushi Arai

# Executive Summary

**Matthew Vaccaro**  
Program Director  
Center for Stabilization and Reconstruction Studies

**Dr. Tatsushi Arai**  
Assistant Professor  
SIT Graduate Institute

Culture defines, shapes, and transforms human experience. From our earliest memories to our last rites, culture helps us define who we are and what we value. It provides deep-rooted patterns of thinking and behavior that critically shape the way we make sense of daily experiences and pivotal moments as individuals and as societies. As a consequence, culture can be a powerful unifying force, creating a sense of belonging and purpose that links us with others. But it can also engender a sense of otherness, dividing us from those who see the world differently and hindering our ability to understand

and empathize with the perspectives of cultural others.

While cross-cultural differences can provide an opportunity for personal and political exploration and connection, they can also be sharply divisive. These issues take on increasing importance in post-war environments in which cultural differences are often manipulated to provoke ethnic skirmishes, protracted civil wars, and even mass genocide. Whatever facet of stabilization and reconstruction (S&R) work they are involved in, practitioners must navigate a cross-cultural field environment that typically includes a diverse group of actors with competing and overlapping priorities; myriad ethnic groups with long-standing grievances,

Participants gathered for an opening lecture where Dr. Tatsushi Arai provided an overview of the workshop and led the group in a simple exercise that demonstrated how differently individuals perceive the world around them.



At right: CSRS's Matthew Vaccaro describes his organization's work to create targeted, relevant events that provide S&R practitioners with opportunities for cognitive learning and skills development.

complex interrelationships, and shifting alliances; and a fragile, ever-evolving political and security environment. As a consequence, practitioners must shed their own cultural biases, practicing radical empathy to understand others' cultural imperatives so that they can help troubled communities navigate their way back to inter-communal existence and peace.

*Tools for Cross-Cultural Understanding*, an interactive workshop created and facilitated by Dr. Tatsushi Arai of the SIT Graduate Institute, helped participants explore culture at a cognitive and experiential level, begin developing cultural fluency, and understand and address the role of culture in conflict. Participants



included 40 representatives from both US and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), government civilian agencies, and the armed forces. While CSRS events are always international in nature, *Tools for Cross-Cultural Understanding* drew individuals from 12 different nations to discuss this important issue. The event, which was held at the Naval Postgraduate School from June 24-27, 2008, and hosted by the Center for Stabilization and Reconstruction

Studies, featured lectures, group discussions, individual presentations, and case studies.

Dr. Arai introduced participants to critical concepts such as cultural carriers, cultural continuums, deep culture, and cultural fluency, using both simple group exercises and sophisticated case studies to demonstrate how these concepts affect interpersonal and diplomatic communication and negotiation



Pictured from left to right: Captain Leonard Sell, 364th Civil Affairs Brigade, US Army; George McGarr, UK Army, The Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Centre, Government of Ghana; and Chibuzor Uzochukwu, Center for Education and Leadership Development, discuss how their cross-cultural experiences have influenced their work.



in countries as various as China, Iraq, Japan, Nepal, and Tanzania. Participants used real-life case studies to explore the different ways culture can ignite, escalate, and widen conflict, using new insights and increasing cultural fluency to understand and address the motivations of actors in such situations as multi-party negotiations involving a hostage crisis in Iraq and Burundian refugees’ right of return to their homeland. Finally, participants presented their strategies for addressing the Burundian refugee crisis to the larger group before breaking into small groups to apply new cultural constructs to a challenge or issue manifested by their own work. Throughout the event, Dr. Arai used such tools as poetry, metaphors, rituals, and psychoanalysis to help participants understand culture’s ability to

impact the conscious, subconscious, and even unconscious motivations and actions of individuals and societies, while creating ingrained behavioral patterns and collective identities that are handed down cross-generationally. Dr. Arai also demonstrated how these tools can enable S&R practitioners to serve as agents of transformation, helping communities to move beyond simply acknowledging cultural differences to exploring opportunities for building bridges and increasing cooperation.

*Tools for Cross-Cultural Understanding* was designed to provide S&R practitioners with the knowledge they need to improve their effectiveness in the field. As they work to rebuild fragile

states, S&R practitioners have a unique opportunity to help local communities examine cultural assumptions and biases; transform symbols and rituals which repeat painful patterns or incite violence; and build bridges with cultural others that can deliver lasting change.

**Learning Objectives**

- Improve self-awareness, including one’s understanding of invisible cultural influences
- Explore the role of deep culture, especially in conflict and crisis
- Develop cultural fluency to navigate cross-cultural differences and turn them into opportunities for constructive relationship building

// As they work to rebuild fragile states, S&R practitioners have a unique opportunity to help local communities examine cultural biases, transform destructive patterns of thinking and behavior, and build bridges with cultural others. //

*Tools for Cross-Cultural Understanding* is just one of many events CSRS holds on an annual basis. We provide education and training events for S&R practitioners within five major themes: health

Established in 2004, CSRS offers educational programs for S&R practitioners on a wide array of timely, relevant issues including: health and humanitarian affairs, institution building and security sector reform, S&R skills and tools, maritime and naval issues, and economic recovery.

and humanitarian affairs, institution building and security sector reform, stabilization and reconstruction skills and tools, maritime and naval issues, and economic recovery. We work diligently to design events that provide targeted, interactive content and afford practitioners with the opportunity to enhance their cognitive learning, share their insights, improve their skills, and expand their professional networks. We are continually refining our programs to make sure that they are highly relevant and useful to all of the diverse communities we serve. We welcome feedback on our programs and how we can enhance them to provide S&R practitioners with the cutting-edge knowledge and skills they need to be maximally successful in their important global work. ••



Matthew Vaccaro  
Program Director

## Targeted Education for the Stabilization and Reconstruction Community

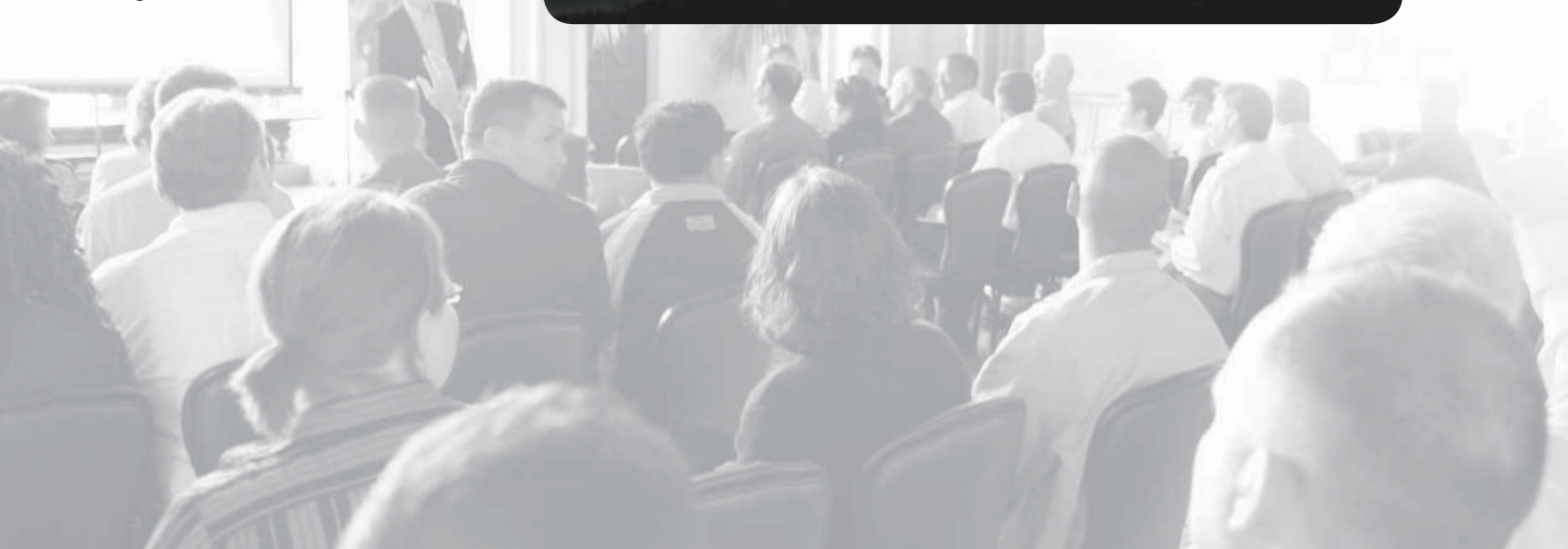


**UPCOMING EVENTS FOR 2008**

ALL EVENTS ARE HELD IN MONTEREY, CA

- **Creating Jobs in Post-Conflict Situations**  
October 26-29, 2008
- **Melting Arctic: Avoiding Conflict in New Waters**  
December 8-9, 2008

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON CSRS EVENTS,  
PLEASE VISIT [WWW.CSRS-NPS.ORG](http://WWW.CSRS-NPS.ORG).



// Culture is carried from the past into the future. One of the clearest examples is language. What we speak is inherited from the past, but is no longer Shakespearean English. //

— Dr. Tatsushi Arai

# Essential Tools and Concepts in Cross-Cultural Communication

As cultural participants and students, S&R practitioners play a unique role in post-war environments. Dr. Arai helped workshop participants increase their understanding of critical tools they can use to explore cultural differences, build bridges, and aid in cultural healing and restoration.

If culture is comprised of those beliefs, symbols, and experiences that define who we are as individuals and groups, that shape

how we see the world, and govern our behavior, then it can be a fruitful area of study for S&R practitioners. What’s critical is to understand one’s own cultural lenses — those unconscious perspectives and judgments that color one’s own perspective of self vis-à-vis cultural others — before attempting to understand or influence another’s worldview. According to Dr. Tatsushi Arai, our cultural perspectives are like colored glasses: “What we see is a

**Lecture by Dr. Thomas H. Johnson on the Military’s New Emphasis on Cultural Competency**

As a community, S&R practitioners are increasingly savvy about the way culture influences their field work: They know that developing the right working relationships with local leaders, honoring indigenous customs, and creating context-appropriate infrastructures and tools are critical to ensuring the long-term success of their efforts and maximizing donor and military investments. While the humanitarian community has long been sensitive to the need to train staff on local customs and mores, the US military has more recently become aware of its need to cultivate greater cultural competency, or the ability to function successfully in other cultural milieus. As a consequence, the US Defense Department is training personnel for critical overseas roles and is sending anthropologists and other social scientists to work side-by-side in the field in mixed civilian-military teams. Professor Thomas H. Johnson of the Naval Postgraduate School’s National Security Affairs Department profiled some of the cutting-edge work that is occurring in this arena during his lunchtime lecture, *Compiling Afghan Human Terrain*. The lecture highlighted Dr. Johnson’s work to collect sociocultural information on Afghan society that the US military could use in support of its operations. Dr. Johnson and his team have created an online repository of rich cultural information on Afghanistan that appears regularly within the top five Google searches and is available online at [www.nps.edu/programs/ccs](http://www.nps.edu/programs/ccs).

Dr. Arai defined culture as a system of meaning making that meets several important criteria, described in the graphic at right.

matter of perception," says Dr. Arai, "that is based on our cultural heritage."

To set a baseline for the discussion, Dr. Arai presented a working definition of culture as a shared, iterative process of meaning making that is embedded in a group's sense of belonging, guides its behavior, and helps members make sense of their world. While culture is shared among a group's members and passed among generations, it also evolves with time. As such, it is an ever-changing system that is externally driven rather than biologically determined. (See "What Is Culture?" graphic at right.)

So how do S&R practitioners study culture: from how it is shared among its members and transmitted across generations, to how it necessarily evolves and is reshaped through cultural interpretation and experience? According to Dr. Arai, S&R practitioners should analyze cultural carriers, those concrete objects and abstract ideas that convey symbolic messages across time, space, and social contexts. A cultural carrier can be something as evident and public as a ritual or something as abstract as a belief. While many cultural carriers are overt, easily recognizable symbols, others are embedded in our subconscious. As such, they are part of our "deep culture," those behavioral and perceptual patterns that are a critical part of a society's makeup, but are so ingrained at the subconscious and conscious levels that people adhere to them unthinkingly. To illustrate that point, Dr. Arai led a simple exercise where he had participants discuss street names in their native countries.

## What Is Culture?

According to Dr. Tatsushi Arai, culture is an ever-evolving system of shared patterns of meaning making that consciously and subconsciously shapes and reshapes human behavior and perception. Culture is also a dynamic process through which people assign symbolic meanings to natural and social phenomena, validating what they believe is legitimate and rejecting that which does not fit prescribed norms.

Culture forms continuously. As such, it changes from one generation to the next. Culture is catalyzed and facilitated by socially constructed carriers such as stories, education, religion, music, and other shared tools for meaning making. It is not transmitted genetically.

### Culture Is:

- 1 Shared
- 2 Embedded in the conscious, subconscious, and even unconscious
- 3 Repeated
- 4 Part of communal life
- 5 Accepted as normative and guides a group's behavior
- 6 Symbiotic
- 7 Cumulative
- 8 Passed across generations
- 9 Transmitted socially, not biologically
- 10 Ever-changing

In the United States, streets were often named after local or national heroes such as political or military leaders. An Afghan woman said that her country's streets were named after tribes or community life, such as the street where chickens were sold or shepherds tended their flocks. Meanwhile, two Africans said that Kenyan streets were named to signify directionality and Burundian ones to honor famous fighters or communities. In his

experience, Dr. Arai said that he has found that Taiwanese street names often represent virtues or natural phenomena. His point? Something as simple as street names can communicate cultural values and ensure that they are passed across generations. Dr. Arai repeated the exercise with participants' names, again demonstrating that names are an important cultural carrier. While a culture's members may not always be aware of the significance

Pictured at right: Nadia Hashimi of The World Bank and Joanna Franco of Corporación Opción Colombia walk to the opening reception.



of each cultural carrier, they will unconsciously absorb a culture's priorities as their own. Through simple acts such as giving directions, they will reaffirm cultural values on an ongoing basis.

So how can S&R practitioners work with local communities to change deep culture to transform destructive thinking patterns and behaviors? While globalization is changing cultures generally, one way to target and reshape specific cultural beliefs is to change the cultural carriers or symbols that a society values. As an example, Dr. Arai offered up a case study of a seminal project in Mozambique: After a 16-year civil war, Protestant churches banded together to create the Department of Justice, Peace, and Reconciliation of the Christian Council of Mozambique. The group organized an art project called Transforming Arms into Ploughshares, which took guns and hand grenades — very visible and painful symbols of the recent war — and engaged local artists to create works of art, monuments, and public instruments, which were displayed

throughout Mozambique, before being displayed in other countries throughout the world. The message? Cultural carriers can be consciously transformed to aid in cultural healing and restoration.

Obviously this is challenging, highly visible, and sensitive work. Practitioners seeking to reshape cultural carriers must work hand-in-hand with local leaders to make sure that program objectives reflect a culture's wishes, that initiatives are publicly spearheaded by local leaders, and that transformation work is carried out in a manner that honors local customs.

But what happens when cultural beliefs are not overt, but instead are

so deeply embedded that participants are not even aware of them? Dr. Arai set up a simple case study for group discussion — a group of male Marine recruits flying on a plane — that was designed to explore the impact of one's unconscious on social behavior. In the example, one of the Marines, who was taking his very first flight, began swearing about the diminishing size of the world below, making the sign of the cross, and commenting on the physical attractiveness of the stewardess walking by. Dr. Arai asked group members to create hypotheses for explaining the soldier's actions that used psychoanalysis to explain their interconnectedness. Participants posited that the man's fear of the unfamiliar triggered primitive responses that evoked religion, death, and sex.

According to Dr. Arai, psychoanalysis provides a useful prism for understanding deep culture. These thought processes are most visible when the conscious is no longer able to control or repress unconscious urges, and thus they are manifested publicly. Such behavior

// Deep culture is the sum of individual subconscious and unconscious mental thought processes that are also shared at a collective level. //

Participants had ample time to network with other S&R practitioners.

can be harmless, as when Americans taped their windows and braced for another terrorist attack in the aftermath of 9/11, or result in deeply destructive psychopathology, as when Hutu militia killed hundreds of thousands of Tutsis in the Rwandan genocide. Humans can also sublimate critical emotions, such as grief, during times of national crisis and oppression, only to let them surface collectively months, years, or even decades later. Dr. Arai cited the Indonesian tsunami as an example of collective suppressed grief. Victims, who were searching for family members and struggling to survive, simply did not have the time or ability to process their myriad losses.

Such events — when individuals align around them — can be powerful tools for shaping national identity and motivating specific behavior. Societies can align around both chosen glories or traumas, collective mental representations of events that are seen either as magnificent triumphs that celebrated a society's power or as terrible sources of shame



that created significant losses or exposed a society to the depredations of another. Politicians and demagogues are masters at exploiting these symbols to rally support for their causes, inspire action, even instigate mass hysteria.

To show how chosen glories and traumas still influence cultural behavior today, Dr. Arai presented an analysis of the Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo, Japan. The shrine honors the 2.5 million Japanese killed in wartime, including nearly 1,000 individuals who were designated as Class A war criminals. It also includes powerful symbols, such as the last message of a doomed soldier, a kamikaze

plane, and a Japanese flag spattered with the blood of teenagers. As such, the shrine has become both a rallying point for Japanese citizens, who see it as an emblem of nationalistic sacrifice and heroism, as well as a source of tension in diplomatic relations with neighboring countries, who feel that it honors common criminals as gods and validates aggressive behavior. At the heart of the matter is whether Japan's military expansion in Korea, China, and other Asia-Pacific countries was legitimate self-defense, as the shrine's messaging posits, or wrongful invasion, as Japan's neighbors believe.

“ I have never understood my own culture well enough. When I looked back and tried to answer questions, I couldn't. Why do we do what we do? I just don't know. ”

— International participant

While some of the Japanese leaders have consciously used the Yasukuni Shrine as a political tool, justifying military expansion and upholding Japanese values of self-sacrifice, nationalistic honor, and imperialism, they could also seek to balance the shrine's impact. One way to accomplish this objective would be to create a multi-national, religiously neutral venue for reflection and dialogue. To that end, Dr. Arai presented a proposal for an Asia-Pacific Peace Memorial. ••

“ Conflict exposes all kinds of emotional judgments: right versus wrong, moral versus immoral, appropriate versus inappropriate, and conceivable versus inconceivable. ”

## The Interplay of Culture and Conflict

Conflict provides a perfect microcosm for analyzing cultural differences. S&R practitioners learned how to use new tools to expose cultural assumptions, frame effective dialogues, and help guide groups to resolve immediate crises, while also addressing the future.

Cultural patterns of thinking and behavior are most evident during times of conflict and crisis, when actors' ideologies clash. Conflict exposes all kinds of emotional judgments: right versus wrong, moral versus immoral, appropriate versus inappropriate, and conceivable versus inconceivable. (See “Understanding Conflict” box below.) Due to conflict's evolving, dynamic nature, actors can often demonstrate

intensifying attitudes and behaviors that reinforce hostilities, causing them to widen, deepen, or even repeat conflict patterns. Cultural communication styles and values can also play a large role in illuminating and worsening differences. For example, in high context societies, individuals will typically rely on social cues and contexts to inform their interactions, whereas in low context societies, individuals will be extremely specific and direct in their verbal style. Similarly, individuals from collectivist societies will place a greater premium on preserving group harmony than on achieving their own objectives, while their counterparts from individualistic societies will often pursue their aims single-mindedly and competitively, even to the detriment of others.

### Understanding Conflict

Dr. Arai offered the following definitions to frame group discussion about conflict:

- Conflict is an evolving process of dynamic interdependence between two or more actors pursuing aspirations that they are unable to achieve because they perceive that the other stands in the way of the attainment of their goal.
- Conflict transformation is a sustained process of examining conflict sources and contexts systematically and developing relevant means to redirect its momentum into constructive relationship building.
- Violence is any form of social influence that harms the human body, mind, and/or spirit either directly or indirectly, intentionally or unintentionally.
- Peace is a sustained process of overcoming all forms of violence, whether direct or indirect, personal or structural, to actualize the fullest potential of individuals and groups in society.

## Case Study:

### Constructing a Cross-Cultural Apology

#### China-US Negotiations Over the Downing of Chinese F-8 Fighter Jet

- **March 31, 2001 (US)/April 1, 2001 (China)**

A US Navy surveillance plane, which is conducting routine surveillance of Chinese electronic activity, collides with a Chinese F-8 fighter jet several dozen miles off the coast of China. The damaged US plane makes an emergency landing in a military airfield on China's Hainan Island, where its 24 crew members are detained. The Chinese pilot, Wang Wei, is presumed dead. Chinese media and political communiqués describe the incident as one involving a "spy plane."

- **April 2, 2001**

Both countries blame the other for the crash. The White House says that the planes were flying in international airspace and that the US did nothing wrong, while China states that the US is fully responsible for the incident. Meanwhile, the US demands that China release the crew and aircraft, and China demands that the US accept full responsibility for the collision and halt all surveillance activity off China's coast.

- **April 3, 2001**

Formal negotiations begin in Beijing between the US ambassador to China, Ambassador Joseph Preuher, and China's Assistant Foreign Minister Zhou Wenzhong. The Chinese demand that the US apologize (daoqian) to China. The US refuses to apologize.

- **April 12, 2001**

After several rounds of negotiations, the fifth version of Ambassador Preuher's letter is accepted by the Chinese side. The English version states that Secretary Colin Powell and President George W. Bush express "sincere regret for your missing pilot and aircraft" and to "the Chinese people and the family of pilot Wang Wei that we (Americans) are very sorry for their loss." The letter also states, "We are very sorry for the entering of China's airspace and the landing did not have verbal clearance."

## Chinese Expressions of Apology

- **Daoqian**

“Apologize” – a formal, explicit statement of apology and an admission of wrongdoing

*The document used the following Chinese expressions of apology:*

- **Baoqian**

“Feel sorry” – a sincere but slightly less formal apology that accepts responsibility for an action

*“yihan” and  
“baoqian”  
but not  
“daoqian”*

- **Yihan**

“Regret” – a more casual apology that does not accept blame; the expression is used both formally and informally

*Only three expressions of apology – **daoqian**, **baoqian**, and **yihan** – can be used in an official Chinese document. China demanded that the Americans issue an apology using the word **daoqian**, a very formal and explicit apology.*

- **Nanguo**

“Feel grieved” – used only between individuals; expresses sorrow without assuming responsibility

- **Duibuqi**

“Have failed you” – a colloquial, informal expression that is equivalent to the American “excuse me”

- **Buhaoyisi**

“Embarrassed” – a very casual, informal way of saying sorry

Graphic synthesized from content presented by Venashri Pillay in "Culture Exploring the River" in *Conflict Across Cultures*, edited by M. LeBaron and V. Pillay, Intercultural Press, 2006.

(See "Understanding Cultural Continuums" graphic at right.)

To prevent or short-circuit intractable conflict between opposing groups, S&R practitioners should use cultural tools to explore deeply held cultural assumptions and create opportunities for discussion. One such tool is *A Walk Through History*, where each group selects several of the most important events that its members believe have initiated and defined the conflict. When Dr. Arai undertook this exercise with two groups of delegates from Mainland China and Taiwan who were negotiating a conflict over the future of the Taiwan Strait, they were amazed to realize that they had completely different perceptions of the conflict. The Chinese delegates dated the origin of the conflict to 221 BC, when China was unified under the Qin Dynasty, whereas the Taiwanese group dated it to the first modern-day conflict incident which occurred on February 28, 1948. By illustrating history's role in igniting and escalating crisis, as well as illuminating participant perspectives about the crisis, tools such as *A Walk Through History* can help groups shape effective discussions about their assumptions and objectives and negotiate a resolution that considers both the immediate crisis and the longer-term future.

## Understanding Cultural Continuums

### HIGH CONTEXT

- Nonverbal communication emphasized
- Contextual, implied meaning
- Indirect, implicit, often covert

### LOW CONTEXT

- Verbal communication emphasized
- Specific, literal meaning
- Direct, explicit, often overt

### INDIVIDUALISM

- Autonomy
- Self-reliance and competition
- Relationships of separate coexistence
- Guilt (particularized blame, internalized by an individual)

### COLLECTIVISM/ COMMUNITARIANISM

- Group harmony and cohesion
- Interdependence and cooperation
- Relationships of living together
- Shame (a shared sense of unworthiness projected by a group)

### SEQUENTIAL TIME

- Clock time
- Linear
- Time as finite
- Past, present, future separation
- Early life (youth) valued

### SYNCHRONOUS TIME

- Recurrent, episodic time
- Cyclical, circular and overlapping
- Time as repetitive
- Past, present, future integration
- Late life (elderly) valued

To explore the clash between individualistic and collectivistic societies, participants worked through a case study on a diplomatic crisis between China and the United States. (See graphic spread on pages 10-11.) The crisis: the collision of a US Navy surveillance plane with a Chinese F-8 fighter jet, which resulted in the loss and presumed

death of the Chinese pilot, as well as a forced landing of the American plane in Chinese airspace. The issue at hand: how to craft a culturally appropriate apology that acknowledged the loss of the pilot and the lack of clearance for the Americans' landing, while securing the return of the downed US plane and its 24 crew members. The apology had to prove acceptable to the Chinese government, while not causing the United States to lose

Pictured from left to right: Debbie Hoover, World Hope International; Lieutenant Commander Sharon DeCant, Maritime Civil Affairs Group, US Navy; Senior Chief Jon McMillan, Maritime Civil Affairs Squadron One, US Navy; and Darren Wagner, International Council of Voluntary Agencies.



face internationally. Participants, who were assigned roles as American diplomats, Chinese diplomats, or third-party mediators, were asked to describe the negotiation process and create a scenario and appropriate language for the apology. After brainstorming in table groups, participants offered their ideas. Participants representing the Chinese used language like “an act of aggression,” “invasion,” “violation of national security,” “landing without permission,” and demanded that a public apology be delivered publicly in a news conference or press broadcast from Beijing. The participants said they intended to use the 24 crew members as a bargaining chip to accomplish critical goals: decreased intelligence gathering; compensation for the pilot’s family; and better political standing regionally and domestically, with the Chinese people. The Americans stated that they were willing to apologize for the loss of the pilot’s life and

unapproved landing, but hoped to resolve the hostage crisis first. One sticking point: They would not accept responsibility for killing the pilot, but would express regret to the Chinese people and his family for his loss.

Meanwhile, the mediators said they needed to buy time to gather information and discover what constituted an apology for each country, what audience the apology was designed to reach, and what the apology was intended to accomplish. Building on the mediators’ objectives, Dr. Arai challenged participants to think about the audiences, their concerns, and different linguistic tones

that could be used for a multi-part apology. While the opening language of the official apology would likely be straightforward, the subsequent apology for the pilot’s loss could use softer and more emotional language to display true sorrow for his loss.

Most situations allow room for “constructive ambiguity,” or exploration of a wider range of solutions that could meet opposing parties’ needs. To illustrate this point, Dr. Arai shared a simple story from his cross-cultural marriage to a Taiwanese woman. Early in their marriage, the couple shared a small apartment in Osaka. One day, Dr. Arai returned to find his wife sweeping dust into the house, rather than out of it. When he asked why she was not using good common sense, an argument escalated; eventually he discovered that his wife was simply observing her customary Taiwanese family practice for preserving good fortune. According to Dr. Arai, most couples in this situation would have negotiated one of three options: a complete victory for either party

“ Most situations allow room for ‘constructive ambiguity,’ or exploration of a wider range of solutions that could meet opposing parties’ needs. ”

# Conflict Dynamics

Protracted conflict can go through repeated cycles that include such phases as:

- **Escalation** - Intensifying hostilities that often display repetitive patterns of goal-seeking behavior or behavioral patterns that change qualitatively and quantitatively.

- **Polarization** - Labeling relationships and issues as either adversarial or friendly. At its extreme, polarization can lead to the Dualism-Manichaeism-Armageddon Syndrome, while psychological polarization can involve dehumanization of perceived adversaries.

- **Enlargement** - Bringing in additional actors to widen the conflict.

- **Deepening** - Bringing in additional issues to widen the conflict.

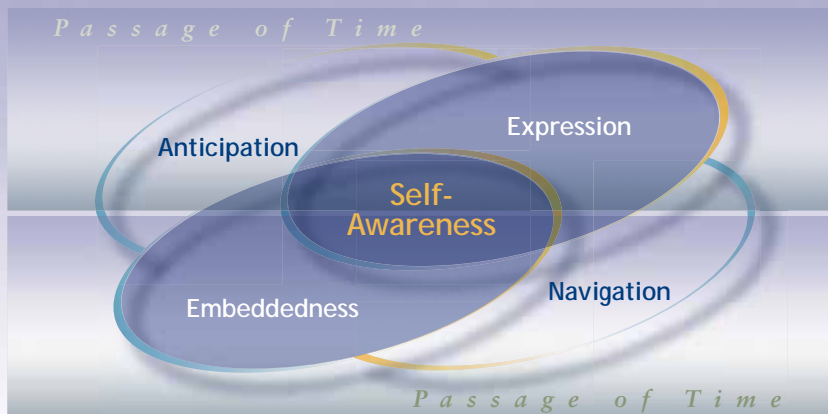
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- **De-escalation** - The process of reducing hostilities.
  - **Stalemate** - A state where parties perceive conflict as intolerable and hope not to escalate it further, while still seeking to prevail over the other side. Parties realize that it hurts more to continue the conflict than to settle it.
  - **Impasse** - A state of interparty communication, often during negotiation, where parties remain so persistently locked in goal-seeking behavior and attitudes that they cannot move away from their stated positions toward agreement.
  - **Entrapment** - Overcommitting and losing the flexibility to stop political, economic, and psychological maneuvers actors make to "win."

To develop cultural fluency, S&R practitioners need to develop four types of capacity – anticipation, embeddedness, expression, and navigation. By so doing, they will move beyond simple understanding to a place where they can discuss cultural imperatives and build a cooperative future with cultural others.

or a compromise. But it would also be possible to create an alternate scenario: one where both parties' objectives were fully met. "There are often many solutions to problems that allow us to meet critical objectives while deepening our understanding of each other's cultures," said Dr. Arai. He also led the group through a discussion of conflict dynamics to demonstrate how repetitive behaviors of goal seeking can short-circuit cultural understanding and creative thinking.

To tease out cultural objectives and develop innovative solutions, practitioners need to develop cultural fluency. Cultural fluency is the ability to understand a culture so deeply that you can anticipate, internalize, express, and help shape its process of meaning making. (See "Developing Cultural Fluency" graphic at right.) To develop cultural fluency, practitioners must build four types of capacity: anticipation, embeddedness, expression, and navigation. Anticipation is the ability to analyze one's own and other cultures and their interactions, while remaining open to new perceptions. Embeddedness is the ability to identify and share unconscious assumptions with cultural others. Expression is the ability to communicate cultural priorities, using empathy to deepen one's understanding and ability to share meaning making patterns with

## Developing Cultural Fluency



### ANTICIPATION

- Observe behavioral patterns of cultural others
- Reflect on one's own cultural patterns
- Explore how these different patterns may interact
- Be open to unexpected interactions and resist stereotyping

### EMBEDDEDNESS

- Acknowledge deep-seated unconscious assumptions
- Reflect on where such assumptions have come from

### EXPRESSION

- Activate empathy and imagine oneself in the shoes of cultural others
- Jointly explore how to communicate deep-rooted assumptions

### NAVIGATION

- Pragmatically envision how to co-create a future of cross-cultural synergy
- Take joint action toward achieving the vision, assuming inevitable risks

others. And navigation is the ability to recognize cultural expectations in specific contexts, while co-creating an interdependent future with cultural others.

Not surprisingly, the need for cultural fluency is most apparent when one's own cultural assumptions are exposed and revealed as diametrically

opposed from another's. Participants discussed past situations when they had lacked cultural fluency: a military officer didn't understand that he should shake his European counterparts' hands, while an NGO worker in Pakistan didn't realize she needed to spend time meeting with local officials in their homes before working with them over the phone. Meanwhile, an Afghan NGO worker in America experienced another's cultural sensitivity when a

Dr. Arai shares examples of his work facilitating cross-cultural dialogues and negotiations in Africa, East Asia, and the Middle East.

new friend prepared halal meat for her and discussed her experiences in Afghanistan. Surprised and delighted by the woman’s cultural fluency, the NGO worker quickly formed a friendship with her.

Dr. Arai cautioned participants against stereotyping, offering a story about his experience teaching in Rwanda as an example. Two of his students, twin sisters, suffered a devastating loss when their soldier brother was massacred. As a consequence, Dr. Arai expected that his students would be gone for weeks to mourn their loss. Instead, they returned two days later, prepared to take their midterm exams. While their grief was very real, these sisters had grown up in a culture of war and were thus well aware of the fragility of human life. As a consequence, they were able to move on quickly with their lives, while still acknowledging the pain of their brother’s loss. The point of the story? S&R practitioners should be careful not to impose their ideals or rituals on cultural others. They should also remain open to cultural surprises in terms of the unique and unfamiliar ways in which coping mechanisms function in post-war contexts.

The next case study helped participants explore the challenges and nuances of developing cultural fluency, particularly when the cultural other is an opponent. The scenario: the capture of three Japanese — two male journalists and a female NGO worker — in Fallujah, Iraq. The situation: An unknown group has taken responsibility for the kidnapping and is demanding the withdrawal of Japanese troops



from Iraq within 72 hours. The group broadcast the following message on Al Jazeera on April 8, 2004:

You have provided the US Army weapons and soldiers. You have disgraced our holy places and land, and you caused us bloodshed and killed our children. We need to respond to you likewise. We hereby declare that we have taken hostage three of your children. Withdraw your troops from our country, or we will burn these three people alive and give them as food to our soldiers craving blood. We will give you three days to meet this demand.

While Japan has a small force operating in the southern part of Iraq, the soldiers are not combatants, carry small weapons for self-defense, and are actively and visibly engaged in reconstruction work. Dr. Arai instructed participants to break into table groups and discuss an approach that used all the cultural tools and insights they had learned, including cultural carriers, deep culture, chosen glories and traumas, and cultural fluency. Participants reconvened to share their strategies.

**Among participants’ suggestions:**

- Humanize the hostages and their non-military roles by creating a video campaign with their families.
- Issue an official statement from the Japanese government that expresses regret for the kidnapping of innocent civilians and clarifies any misinformation.
- Broadcast a television appeal that shows the Japanese foreign minister quoting Koranic verses about non-violence and Muslims in Japan reading the Koran.
- Involve local officials and mediators in back-channel negotiations for the hostages’ release.
- Highlight the positive contributions of the Japanese forces, who are involved in reconstruction work.
- Build cultural rapport with the hostage takers by linking the values of the Japanese and Iraqi people, such as honor and family.
- Use shared Japanese-Iraqi cultural values to decry hostage taking and contextualize the work of the Japanese military.

Many of the workshop's 40 participants are involved in designing cross-cultural training for their organizations.

While Dr. Arai validated participant suggestions, he recommended that they begin such work in the future by conducting a conflict analysis. To do this, practitioners need to adopt the mindset of the cultural other and ask themselves the simple question: What do I want? "You have to put yourself in the shoes of people who do not like you. Extend radical empathy and understand their needs and their objectives," Dr. Arai said. Participants playing the hostage takers said that they needed respect for their people and country, validation for their collective suffering, and honor for those who had perished.

Dr. Arai pushed participants to consider a wide array of solutions that met either all of the Japanese government's objectives, all of the hostage takers' objectives, or both. The group said that if Japanese priorities were met, the hostages would be released without requiring removal of the troops, and the US-Japanese relationship would be preserved. If the hostage takers' goals were met, on the other hand,



the troops would be withdrawn and the hostages would likely be killed. Other solutions could include implementing a phased withdrawal, removing the troops to an operational base outside the country, creating a joint Japanese-Iraqi reconstruction force, or training local workers to take over infrastructure projects from the Japanese troops. A truly creative solution might involve focusing on another issue entirely, such as creating a monument in Fallujah that honored the Iraqi fallen, which could be built by Iraqis, but would leverage symbolic technical assistance from the Japanese.

During the actual crisis, the Japanese team involved with the negotiation implemented a multi-

faceted approach that used multiple channels of communication and built on local religious leaders' capacities to influence the hostage takers successfully. The hostage takers issued a statement saying that they realized that the Japanese government didn't represent the will of its people, but instead obeyed US President George Bush and UK Prime Minister Tony Blair. The three hostages were then released.

Dr. Arai offered the following best practices for successfully mediating conflict: focus on resolving the larger conflict, not just settling the immediate dispute; use small successes to create larger-scale victories;



Pictured from left to right: Rob Kauffman and Brennan Banks, both from the American Red Cross.



leverage insiders and local leaders to mediate with critical parties; consider all parties' human needs for meaning and identity; and develop innovative solutions that address parties' true interests, rather than attempting to bridge intractable positions. "To come up with creative breakthroughs, you have to appreciate deeply what is at the heart of the substantive contradiction between competing goals," urged Dr. Arai. "Too often, we are content with the intrinsic value of implementing good negotiation processes: asking questions like who sits where, who speaks when, and in what sequence we should discuss different issues. While process-oriented thinking is undoubtedly important, we need to develop a more systematic perspective on how to orchestrate both process and outcome-oriented thinking for transforming conflict."

For the final group exercise, Dr. Arai offered a case study that explored the complexities of national identity, particularly when it becomes fragmented during a time of extended crisis and displacement.<sup>1</sup> The scenario: the possible repatriation of two groups of Burundian Hutu refugees that

have been living in different areas of Tanzania for more than a decade. While the two communities share the same ethnic heritage, the experience of living as refugees, and a chosen trauma of an exodus from Burundi's 1972 massacres, they diverge in their attitudes toward a possible return to their native country.

One group, which has settled in the physically isolated, rural area of Mishamo, has become a highly regimented, agrarian society. Its members see themselves as the rightful citizens of Burundi and engage in frequent discussions about a return to their "homeland" of Burundi. The group believes that past injustices and current tribulations are purifying and preparing them for this glorious future event.

Meanwhile, the other refugee group has settled in Kigoma, a cosmopolitan, highly mobile town, where its members have intermarried with Zairian citizens and taken up occupations that combine petty trade with fishing or farming. Unlike their Mishamo counterparts, the residents of Kigoma do not have a cohesive, collective identity. Instead, they have worked hard to assimilate, downplaying their ethnic heritage and refugee status and assuming new names and religions to blend in. As a consequence, these refugees have become highly individualistic, more interested in pursuing individual ambitions than in leaving for an uncertain future in Burundi.

Dr. Arai divided participants into three groups: Kigoma residents, Mishamo residents, and third-party mediators exploring the possibility of

// To come up with creative breakthroughs, we need to appreciate deeply what is at the heart of the substantive contradiction between competing goals. //

—Dr. Tatsushi Arai

<sup>1</sup> Malkki, Liisa. *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology Among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

Pictured at right: Jessica Adler, Center of Excellence in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance, US Pacific Command.

the refugee groups' return to Burundi and how to structure Tutsi-Hutu power sharing. The Hutu coalition would be equally split between Kigoma and Mishamo residents, complicating the negotiation. As a consequence, mediators would need to work hard to identify common themes and priorities to create a single platform for negotiating with Tutsi leaders. After brainstorming with other participants, the mediators recommended:

- Holding prenegotiation meetings with each group separately to explore their concerns in a private forum.
- Using *A Walk Through History* and cultural interpreters to explore and communicate each group's understanding of their shared history, chosen traumas and glories, their lives as refugees, and their perspectives on returning to Burundi.



- Identifying critical cultural carriers, such as holidays, rituals, and public celebrations that both groups wanted to preserve or that were highly symbolic of their life in Burundi.
- Positioning the opportunity to go back to Burundi as a right to choose, rather than a right to return, to appeal to the Kigoma residents' individualist orientation.
- Planning field trips to introduce the two refugee groups, while ensuring that the trips are carefully designed to address each group's concerns.
- Ensuring the confidentiality of the negotiation processes to ease Kigoma residents' fears and desire to remain politically invisible.
- Creating legal structures that would provide refugees with citizenship and power sharing opportunities.
- Developing an attractive repatriation package that would offer land, financial support, medical services, and education opportunities.

What is critical, according to Dr. Arai, is to leverage the full set of cultural tools to explore shared patterns of meaning making and opportunities for building bridges between the groups of refugees. Of equal importance, mediators need to position their work as one of fostering dialogue, rather than negotiating, which could imply a possible loss of power at the bargaining table, instead of a desire to explore common goals. ••



// Culture becomes both a catalyst and a window of opportunity. It shapes and reshapes conflict either constructively or destructively, depending on how we activate its potential. //

— Dr. Tatsushi Arai

# Conclusion

While cultural values and differences can fuel conflict, they can also provide valuable insights that S&R practitioners can use to facilitate societal reconciliation. Workshop participants developed a versatile toolkit they can use to help communities defuse tensions and prevent intractable conflict.

Culture and conflict are inextricably intertwined. Cultural values and misunderstandings often fuel conflict, intensify it, and impede resolution, both within and across cultures. According to Dr. Arai, "Culture is like a fever. Fever doesn't kill people by itself, but it can create complications. Culture becomes both a catalyst and a window of opportunity. It shapes and reshapes conflict either constructively or destructively, depending on how we activate its potential."

While culture can be a catalyst for conflict, it can also serve as a valuable aid in conflict resolution. As they work in post-war environments, S&R practitioners serve in a variety of roles: providing vital relief services, helping ensure peace and security, and rebuilding degraded infrastructures, among others. In all of these capacities, however, S&R practitioners also function as cultural anthropologists, using their insights and tools to deepen their understanding of their own and other cultures and how they influence individual and societal motivations. Skilled S&R practitioners can use their cultural fluency to increase their personal effectiveness, building more successful working relationships,



Pictured at right: Brigadier General Mohammad Awwad, US Joint Forces Command, The Government of Jordan (Liaison); Captain Leonard Sell; and Lieutenant Commander Roland Bolado, Philippine Navy, Government of the Philippines.

At right: Dr. Arai sets up the group's final case study, a multifaceted cross-cultural dialogue between Burundian refugee groups.

navigating potential pitfalls, and ensuring that new services and systems are culturally appropriate and acceptable. As donors and practitioners have learned through past development failures, cultural relevance is often the most salient differentiator between failed and successful initiatives.



As S&R practitioners seek to calm community tensions, prevent a return to violence, or transform intractable conflict, they can use cross-cultural insights and tools to help conflict participants explore their conflict history. By discussing their different beliefs about a conflict's origin and trajectory, warring parties can often unearth shared values and areas

for potential cooperation. Small successes and carefully managed expectations can then be leveraged into broader gains, building trust and goodwill between cultural others. The goal? To help former antagonists understand the shared benefits of peace and envision a collaborative future as a positive development, rather than one that causes them to lose status and resources.

Culture scholars Kevin Avruch and Peter Black state that

every community possesses its own common sense knowledge about conflict. This knowledge, or what Avruch and Black call ethnoconflict theory, should guide the development of conflict resolution strategies and solutions. As cultural outsiders who possess a deep understanding and empathy for post-war societies, S&R practitioners can be vital allies and advocates in this important process, helping local communities move beyond individual goals that perpetuate violence to shared goals that bring sides together for an increasingly interdependent future. ••





## Tools for Cross-Cultural Understanding

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Tatsushi Arai, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor of Conflict Transformation at the SIT Graduate Institute, located in Brattleboro, Vermont. Previously, Dr. Arai taught at the National University of Rwanda in the aftermath of the 1994 genocide.

Dr. Arai has more than 10 years of hands-on experience in conflict work, including negotiation, mediation, arbitration, reconciliation, program design, and policy advocacy. He has worked in an interventionary role in labor disputes, community dialogue, inter-state conflict resolution, and post-genocide nation building in the Middle East, the African Great Lakes region, East Asia, and North America. His most recent publications include *Creativity and Conflict Resolution: Alternative Pathways to Peace* (forthcoming, Routledge) and chapters in *Conflict Across Cultures* (2006, Intercultural Press).

Dr. Arai is actively involved with several NGOs, including Global Majority, where he serves as an International Advisory Board member. Dr. Arai holds a BA from Waseda University in Tokyo, an MA from the Monterey Institute of International Studies, and a Ph.D. from George Mason University. ••

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