Peace Psychology in Asia. Edited by Christina Jayme Montiel and Noraini M. Noor. New York: Springer, 2009, pp. 386. ISBN: 978-1-4419-0142-2.

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When William James wrote his now-famous piece *The Moral Equivalent of War* (first published by the Association for International Conciliation as Leaflet No. 27, 1910 and republished under the same title in 1995 in *Peace and Conflict, 1*, 17-28), he was among a few scholars at the time to pose a positive and optimistic view of human nature. It is preposterous, according to James, to argue that terror and aggression are the only means to harness men's inner potentials. With all the physical and mental capacities men possess, surely there are other means to solve disagreements and avoid conflicts. While his ideas back then did not exert significant influence, today it is credited as the inspiration behind peace psychology, one of the fastest emerging research and applied areas in psychology.

Scores of publications on peace psychology have emerged in the last decade. While many of these have addressed important theoretical and methodological issues, very few have discussed its applications in different cultural contexts. The book *Peace Psychology in Asia* is an attempt to address this lacuna in the context of Asia. With articles covering various sub-regions, this book offers researchers, practitioners and general readers a unique insight into how psychology has contributed to peace in various countries in Asia.

The editors have brought together an impressive collection of chapters written by researchers and peace activists from nine countries in Asia. The book is divided into five parts. The first part contains two articles; an overview of peace psychology in Asia, and a descriptive piece on social representation theory. The overview, written by Christina Montiel, one of the editors, starts with a summary of the history of peace psychology in Asia. The author then provides an excellent analysis of the unique nature of peace psychology in

Asia while simultaneously providing a summary of a number of key chapters contained in the book. An important point is made here to remind readers that any peacebuilding effort in Asia must take into account the region's cultural diversities and unique geohistorical background.

The second chapter, which is on social representation theory is co-authored by James Liu and Chris Sibley. Both authors are from New Zealand with extensive research experience in Asia. At first glance, it may seem rather awkward to have an article on a theoretical approach in a publication of this nature. However, as readers go through the various case studies presented in this volume, they will realise the enormous influence of the social representation theory in much of the work presented. Obviously, the article is not intended to analyse the strengths and weaknesses of the theory but rather to describe some practical steps on how it can and has been used to understand conflict and initiate peace.

The next three parts of the book covers three regions in Asia – South Asia, Southeast Asia and East Asia. A point can be made here against the obvious omission in the volume of West and Central Asia. Understandably, West Asia, or in other words the Middle East, is by itself unique with a far more complicated history. Given this, perhaps it would not have blended well with discussions on the three sub-regions covered in this book. The Middle East hence deserves a whole volume on its own. That is perhaps the reason for its omission, which the editors unfortunately did not clarify in the volume.

All the case studies presented in the book are written by native researchers, an obvious strength and ironically also a source of weakness in some of the chapters. Almost all of the chapters follow a standard form of presentation, starting with summaries of the historical background of the conflict under study and followed by descriptions on present and future peacebuilding efforts. While most authors took great care not to indicate their own political inclinations, a few allowed their personal subjective views to creep into their arguments. The two articles on South Asia are good examples.

The first, on Hindu-Muslim relations in India, co-authored by Sammyh Khan and Ragini Sen; is extremely well researched. The historical points presented are supported by references from a variety of sources. Readers who wish to know more about these historical points can refer to the extensive list of references listed at the end of the chapter. The geohistorical analysis of the conflict is extremely useful for readers with minimal background knowledge on Hindu-Muslim relations in India. In doing so, the authors covered arguments from both sides and in the end offered practical solutions for future considerations.

Waheeda Khan's chapter on Jammu and Kashmir, unfortunately, lacks the intellectual rigour shown in that of Sammyh Khan and Ragini Sen. In going through Waheeda's analysis of the geohistorical context of the crisis, readers may not exactly know whether the points presented are of her personal views or based on extensive research of relevant literatures. Some of them, in fact, are statements that require the support of empirical evidence, or at least the backing of credible historical sources. The author, for example, claims, "the failed dream of maintaining a national Kashmiri identity independent of the identity of the nation (i.e., India) it had acceded to, accompanied by a mockery of democracy, was among the main factors leading to discontent and eventually political violence" (p.80). The relationship between the struggles for identity and a malfunctioning democracy on one hand, and public discontent and political violence on the other, is not clearly explained here. While some ordinary readers may accept this argument without questioning, social scientists with greater scientific rigour may well expect a more in-depth analysis.

A number of the chapters in this book deserve special mention for their outstanding contribution to the field. These chapters offered invaluable information on real-life application of psychological tools and principles in peacebuilding efforts. The chapter on the conflict in Maluku, Indonesia by Hamdi Muluk and Ichsan Malik, is a very good example. Based on four years of work dedicated to peacebuilding in the area, the authors illustrate how a systematic psychological programme can work so effectively at group levels. The *Baku Bae* Peace Movement, initiated by the authors themselves

was designed within the religious and cultural framework of both conflicting groups, which further illustrates the importance of geohistorical context in peace psychology. The same principle was also emphasised in the peace and reconciliation effort in Tanjung Priok, Jakarta, which was the focus of another chapter by Hamdi Muluk in this book.

In addition to numerous references to social representation of history, another recurring theme which appears in many of the chapters in the book is the notion that conflicts in Asia involves structural rather than episodic violence. The term 'structural violence' is often understood as a form of violence rooted in a social structure that denies those in the lower rung of a society the opportunity to meet their basic needs. Many countries in Asia have developed so much economically in the last half century that basic human needs is no longer a critical issue. What is of concern are social structures that prevent the poor to rise above their low socioeconomic status while at the same time continue to keep the rich in advantageous positions. Any peacebuilding efforts which aim for permanent or long term effects, must address changes in the social structures. This was firmly addressed in Fan Zhou's chapter on income gap and materialism, and further highlighted by Noraini M. Noor (co-editor of the book) in the concluding article on the future of peace psychology in Asia.

The descriptive nature of the chapters makes this book an easy read for any readers interested in peace and conflict studies in Asia. Nonetheless, readers with some background in social psychology would be able to appreciate more the various social psychological theories and principles utilised throughout the book. The book is an invaluable addition to the *Peace Psychology Series* which will surely help to attract more researchers and students to the field.