

Culture Learning 1972 to 1981: Seed Time or Harvest?

Verner Bickley

**A Paper delivered at the 50th anniversary celebrations of the East-West Center,
Sunday, July 4, 2010 (10.30am to 12 Noon) in Room 317B, Hawaii Convention
Center**

Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is a privilege for me to be at the East-West Center once again; to be involved in a substantive programme and to meet old friends. It is a particular pleasure for me to know that the Center is flourishing and is engaged in so many significant projects. It is an institution to be proud of and a force for good in a topsy-turvy world.

Unless Dr Lee Jay Cho is here, intrigued by the growth of the alumni population, I may be the only former Institute Director present at this Conference. During my ten years at the Center, I was honoured to have, as fellow directors at different times, Manuel ("Manny") Alba, Harrison Brown, Lee Jay Cho, Paul Demeny, Lee Hahn Bin, Nick Luykx, Jack Lyle, Bill Mathews, Wilbur Schramm and Lyle Webster. It is very gratifying today to know that the President of the East-West Center is a Culture Learning Institute alumnus, as is Lyn Flanagan, a member of the present Board of Governors.

Although I attended the relatively recent 1970's Reunion of the Center's Alumni Association— and even reminisced on a Jefferson Hall Conference platform— I managed (I don't know how) not to draw too much attention to the Culture Learning Institute. On this fiftieth anniversary of the Center, however — a moment in history— it seems important to me to consider once again what we, in the Culture Learning Institute,

were trying to do. I cannot say that, in the nineteen-seventies, we broke entirely new ground but I believe that we may have sown some healthy seeds. We did make genuine efforts to identify and suggest solutions to problems that occurred, and still occur, because people of different linguistic, tribal, national and international backgrounds differ in their ordering of values.

Years have gone by, and I do not know today if the East-West Center as a whole has made any substantial difference. I hope, however, it was able to plant a few seeds of hope, at least for all the many men and women who worked with us during a turbulent decade, marked, in particular, by the war in Vietnam, fears about Russian intentions and the resignation of a President. Times have changed, as is inevitable, but in the late nineteen sixties when the Center was "young" and the country was pre-occupied with the political differences and the clash of cultures marked by a "hot" war (with Vietnam) and a "cold" war (with the USSR), it began to focus on a pluralistic approach to learning and investigation and on what has been described as "the irreducible complexity and progressive enlargement and interweaving of the disciplines of knowledge". This approach took firmer shape from 1975 when the Center and the University of Hawaii reached a partial parting of the ways. The Chancellor (later President), Dr Everett Kleinjans, was a linguist and the late Dr John Brownell, Vice-Chancellor (later Vice-President for Academic Affairs), was an expert on curriculum development and the co-author of a ground-breaking book on curriculum design. Both men understood the need for investigations into how individuals and whole societies coped in bicultural and multicultural contexts and into the problems presented by different cultural norms. Both men were aware of the pioneering work undertaken by educationists such as Professor

Jerome Bruner. Bruner's advocacy of a problem-oriented approach to the pursuit of knowledge proved to be of particular interest to the Culture Learning Institute. In his book, *The Culture of Education*, published in 1996,ⁱ Bruner acknowledged the importance of culture as shaping the mind and providing a "tool kit by which we construct not only our worlds but our very conception of ourselves and our powers", an approach that would certainly have found favour with the Culture Learning Institute. In 1984, however, both the Culture Learning Institute and the Communication Institute were dissolved and a new Institute named the Institute of Culture and Communication was born, to be dissolved, in its turn, in 1988. I left both the Center and the Culture Learning Institute at the end of 1981, after a ten-year stint. My colleague, Gregory Trifonovitch, acted as Director of the Culture Learning Institute until Robert Hewett, the former East-West Center corporation secretary, became Interim Director. In 1984, Dr Mary Bitterman was appointed Director of the new Institute and served in that position until 1988.

How did it all begin?

The East-West Center itself had been functioning since 14 May 1960. As you know, 1960 was the year when President Eisenhower signed a Mutual Security Act authorizing the Center's creation. Although I did not arrive at the Center until 21 April, 1971, I was fortunate to participate in early discussions relating to the East-West Center's mission. On Monday, 21 November 1960, then posted to Rangoon as a British Council officer, I was a member of a planning meeting in Rangoon led by Dr Thomas Ige, Director of the University of Hawaii's Asian Studies Programme. Ige was a member of a six-person delegation from Hawaii, comprising the University's Administrative Vice-President, Dr William Wachter (memorialized in one of the poster sessions); Dr Baron

Goto, Director of the University's Agricultural Extension service; Mr Keneth K. Lau, Director of the University's Legislative Reference Bureau; Dr John Stalker, Director of the University's Operations Programme; and Dr Robert Hiatt, Dean of the Graduate School, and Director of Research at the University.

After this meeting in Burma, my involvement with Hawaii resumed on 21 April 1971, when I arrived at the Center to take up duties as Coordinator of a "Language Improvement Programme". I was to "coordinate" this programme in cooperation with Dr Agnes Niyakawa-Howard, who was a social psychologist at the University of Hawaii, and with the Acting Director of the new "Culture Institute", Dr Minoru Shinoda, a historian of Japan and Vice-Chancellor of the East-West Center from 1966 to 1970. Dr Shinoda had a particular interest in Japanese history and was the author of a significant book on *The Founding of the Kamakura Shogunate* (1180-1185).ⁱⁱ

Two years before I arrived in Hawaii, four scholars met to "conceptualise" the work of a "Culture Institute". These scholars represented different disciplines. Dr George Beckman (a cultural historian), Dr Herbert Passin (an anthropologist), and Dr Niyekawa-Howard (a social psychologist, as already mentioned) all had backgrounds in Japan studies. Dr William Henthorn was an expert on Korean affairs.

In the autumn of 1969, Dr Niyekawa-Howard and Dr Henthorn took up residence at the Center as "Senior Specialists". In 1970, and in the early months of 1971, Dr Niyekawa-Howard and Dr Henthorn were joined by several other scholars who were appointed to the East-West Center and each given the title, "Senior Fellow". Five of these Fellows stand out in my mind. One of these was Dr John Walsh, formerly Vice-President for Development at Notre Dame University, Indiana. After his first spell at the Centre,

John gave up holy orders and joined the Culture Institute, later re-named the Culture Learning Institute. The other four Fellows were Dr Gregory Bateson, a British polymath, distinguished in the disciplines of social and clinical psychology and anthropology and the third husband of the anthropologist, Dr Margaret Mead; Dr Boonsanong Punyodna, a Thai social psychologist who, on his return to Thailand after the conclusion of his Fellowship, dabbled in politics and was *assassinated* (for his politics and not for his social psychology); Dr Evangelos Afendras, now Director of the Center for Learning Innovation and Quality at the Asian Institute for Technology in Thailand; and Dr Ronald Taft, an Australian social psychologist who finished his career as Chair Professor at Monash University after engaging in a distinguished period of research, teaching and publication at the University of Melbourne. Ron and I got on particularly well because of a common interest in New Orleans and Chicago style jazz.

After a period of several months as "Research Coordinator", I was appointed the first substantive Director of the Culture Learning Institute (CLI). — With the approval of the President, Dr Kleinjans, I had changed the name of the Institute, the better to reflect our objective; which was to study aspects of intercultural learning and also to investigate processes of socialization within persons' own cultures. — With this objective in mind and with the invaluable input of visiting Fellows, I and my colleagues began to develop a problem-focussed programme of research and development in "CLI".

By 1975, the Culture Learning Institute's research staff included two social (cross-cultural) psychologists, three anthropologists, three linguists and two literature specialists. This relatively small core staff of Research Associates worked together with visiting research Fellows and graduate students who were studying for Master's and

Doctoral degrees as the University of Hawaii, but who also participated in the Institute's academic programmes. Over the ten year period when I was CLI Director, many research papers, articles and books were published by Institute Research Associates or Fellows.

As the Culture Learning Institute grew, we adhered for the most part to the Center's problem-oriented approach in programme planning and before undertaking any research enquiry. Disseminating the results of such enquiries was sometimes problematic since our only means of doing so was through traditional academic channels, that is, seminars, conferences, face-to-face meetings, occasional broadcasts and publications. Nevertheless, what I believe to have been different about our enterprise was that we carried out the work in a cross-disciplinary fashion, incorporating language pedagogy and the three disciplines, anthropology, social psychology and literature. This approach was enriched by the opportunities that we had to cooperate with women and men who hailed from different cultural, disciplinary, national and racial backgrounds and whose societies had their own histories, cultural heritages, values and ways of explaining the world. Despite these advantages, we were not always on firm ground. The sands of scholarship shifted, as sand tends to do, just as they did in each of the four disciplines that were at the core of the Institute's work. There is the further point that we did not address sensitive local and cultural issues such as the feeling among Hawaiians and part-Hawaiians that they had, to some extent, been robbed of their cultural heritage. Neither did we examine the cultural reasons for the differences that existed among first and later generations of the Japanese community in Hawaii during the Second World War.

The approach through anthropology

In the diverse fields of anthropology and sociology there have been many attempts to define culture. This was understood by Alfred Kroeber, Clyde Kluckhohn, Alfred G. Meyer and Wayne Untereiner who set out a list of 164 definitions of culture in a book published in the early nineteen fifties.ⁱⁱⁱ We tended, for our part, to accept E.B.Taylor's definition of culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man (and woman) as a member of society."^{iv}

Clearly it is not possible at this forum to list the many projects undertaken by the Culture Learning Institute during its history, but a glance at our research and development programme for the years 1980 and 1981 would show, for example, that under the leadership of such scholars as Jerry Boucher, Geoffrey White and David Wu, we were at that time investigating cultural factors that affect personal adjustment and social relations in multi-cultural settings. In particular, we were considering the cultural factors which affect the interpersonal and mental health problems of expatriate students and overseas employees. The multi-national make-up of the research and development team becomes obvious when I add to the list Kritaya Arayasiri, Ngahuia Te Awekotuku, Jonathan Okamura, Mary Brandt, Kathleen Pampika, Joe Abalos and Thomas Marezki.

The approach through linguistics , language learning and use.

Before the Culture Learning Institute was formed under that name, the East-West Center convened a meeting of sociolinguists who were interested in the status of languages in different countries and the ways in which languages were used in different cultures.

Among the specialists in this field who attended this meeting were the well-respected scholars Joshua Fishman, Jyotirin Das Gupta, Björn Jernudd and Joan Rubin. Arising out of this early meeting, the then Culture Learning Institute launched a project related to language planning; that is, efforts "to influence the function, structure or acquisition of a language or language variety within a speech community". Two prime examples of language planning are the adoption as the official language of a form of Malay in Indonesia, a country that boasts over five hundred different languages and dialects, and the language reform programme in China that focussed on character simplification and included the adoption of a phonetic alphabet, *pinyin*.

After several visits to Hawaii to participate in conferences related to language use, Jernudd and Rubin were appointed Senior Fellows in the Institute. One regular product of their work was a monthly *Language Planning Newsletter* and bibliophiles have been able to make good use of Rubin's *Directory of Language Planning Organizations* and Rubin's and Jernudd's *References for Students of Language Planning*, both published by the Institute.

In the early days of the Institute we offered various training programmes (later called "development" programmes) to practitioners from many of the Pacific Islands that, since the conclusion of the Second World War had come under American influence. These programmes were designed mainly by my colleagues, Gregory Trifonovitch and Larry Smith; and were often conducted by University of Hawaii personnel. They included courses and seminars on such subjects as Library Science, Museum and Archives Management and short-term courses for trainers of teachers of English as a second or foreign language, and for administrators of such programmes. One particularly

fruitful conference took place in 1978. Planned by Larry Smith, it examined the role of English as an international and intra-national language and it led indirectly to the formation by Larry and Professor Braj Kachru (of Indiana University) of an organisation named *The International Association of World Englishes* which still flourishes today.

The approach through social (cross-cultural) psychology

The two Institute Research Associates who worked in the cross-cultural, social psychological area were successful as workshop leaders and as contributors to the growing field of cross-cultural psychology. Dr Jerry Boucher had a particular interest in how people's emotions are expressed in different cultures, and he published widely in that area. Professor Richard Brislin, now Shidler College Distinguished Professor and Professor of Management at the Shidler College of Business, University of Hawaii, was equally productive. In his most recent publication, *Working with Cultural Differences: Dealing Effectively with Diversity in the Workplace* (2008),^v he uses what he calls "critical incidents", to indicate the interactions that have a major role in the fostering, or otherwise, of intercultural relationships in the workplace. During his time as a Research Associate in the Culture Learning Institute, Professor Brislin was a leading member of a large team that focused on problems of international cooperation in different societies and cultures. It might be that some members of that team attended the East-West Center's 50th anniversary conference (July 2010). They included Gregory Trifonovitch, Kathleen Wilson, Eric Casino, Norman Dinges, Michael Hamnett, Paul Pederson, Amarjit Singh, Sajean Eng, Bazbu Prasad, Seok Hoon Seng, Josede Figirliyong, Navi Rai, Daniel Suda,

Lillian Lew, Ephraim Apelis, Stephen Eckerd, Faauma Seu, Donald Shuster, Yasuo Yamada, Thomas Goodrich and Norman Geschwind.

The approach through literature

The basis for our enquiries into the relationships between literature, society and culture was laid by Dr Thelma Kintanar, a member of the English Faculty of the University of the Philippines. Coining the term, "Socioliterature", she asserted that an important focus of culture learning is the learning of languages, "not only because language is an important part of culture and an indispensable tool of culture learning but because language learning provided analogies to culture learning." She saw that this might include an investigation into the social context of literature or into how socio-cultural traditions, social attitudes and/or the realities of a given socio-historical situation have influenced form and idea in literature.

Following Kintanar's lead, the Institute narrowed down her term, "Socioliterature", and addressed its implications at a number of conferences that featured not only Institute staff and Fellows, but also a number of distinguished, award-winning conferees. These included Wole Soyinka, created Nobel Literature Laureate in 1986; Malcolm Bradbury, knighted in England in 2000; Tom Keneally who won the Booker Prize in 1982; Keri Hume who won the Booker prize in 1985; Vincent Eri who was knighted and became the Governor-General of Papua New Guinea in 1990; R.K. Narayan who was awarded the A.C. Benson Medal by the Royal Society of Literature and also given India's second highest civilian honour, the Padma Vibhushan, in 2000; Khushwant

Singh who was awarded the Padma Vibhushan in 2007; and Albert Wendt who was made a Companion of the Order of New Zealand in 2001.

I have so far described four disciplines that were at the heart of the Culture Learning Institute's work. But I must not finish without referring, briefly, to a programme to which I gave the name, "Cultural Manifestations", and to two other programmes in which we had parts to play. I launched the "Cultural Manifestations" series in 1974, when a man named Richard ("Dick") Via, then a Visiting Fellow fresh from a one-year Fulbright scholarship in Tokyo, agreed to organize it on a regular basis. — Before arriving in Hawaii, Dick had been involved in a number of Broadway and Off-Broadway shows, latterly as stage manager during a tour of the Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein musical, *South Pacific*, a tour arranged to entertain American troops in Vietnam and elsewhere in Southeast Asia. The production starred the popular Mary Martin in the role of Nellie Forbush, a part that she had made her own in the original Broadway production.

I met Dick for the first time shortly after he arrived in Honolulu and we immediately realized that we occupied common ground. I believed, as did Dick, in the value of using drama to teach English to non-native speakers and I had practised that approach in Singapore, Burma and Indonesia. Dick was just the man to pass on this approach not only to East-West Center persons but also to the language learning and teaching community at large. He was also the man to develop a continuing programme of cultural presentations and, indeed, following the success of the first performance in this series — a performance by a Chinese Opera Company from Taiwan — Dick arranged presentations for many years for the Culture Learning Institute and its successor, the

Institute of Culture and Communication, until he finally retired. These presentations ranged from a demonstration of Balinese puppetry to a visit by four members of the Royal Shakespeare Company, including the actor Patrick Stewart, well known for his commanding role as Captain Jean-Luc Picard in the series, *Star Trek*, televised from 1987 to 1994.

On 8 March 1975, the voyaging canoe, *Hōkūle'a* ("Star of Gladness") was launched. As described by the Polynesian Voyaging Society head navigator, Nainoa Thompson, *Hōkūle'a* sprang from the dreams of three people, Dr Ben Finney, Herb Kawainui Kane and Tommy Holmes. The CLI became involved when Gregory Trifonovitch came to see me and told me that the project needed help. He suggested that I might meet with Ben Finney who would explain the project. The upshot was that I arranged a Fellowship for the man who became the second navigator, the deputy to Mau Piailug. His name was Dr David Lewis. The project still continues, thirty-five years after it began.

Our contribution to the third programme that I have mentioned was minimal but, nevertheless, of some significance. One day, a CLI graduate student named Tom Jackson (now Professor Thomas Jackson) came to see me to describe his and others' ambition to launch a Film Festival in Honolulu. I encouraged him to go ahead. Perhaps I should have done more because, today, the Hawaii Film Festival flourishes. It has an international reputation and — led by Dr Jeanette Hereniko (Paulson) — it is making a significant contribution to the world of cinema.

Based on a problem-orientated approach, Institute enquiries focused on the commonalities that exist across cultures, as well as on the misunderstandings that occur

across cultural and national boundaries. I cannot say that, in the late nineteen-sixties and early nineteen-seventies, the Culture Learning Institute broke entirely new ground but I *can* say that we attempted to avoid, as far as was possible, inaccurate statements about the cultures of different societies and peoples. We found that such statements appeared in the publications of even the most distinguished of scholars. To take just one example, the sociologist, Edward Hall's, much acclaimed book, *The Hidden Dimension*,^{vi} includes what are surely inaccurate, ludicrous and over-generalised— certainly amusing— statements about the proxemic behaviour of English and French persons.

Not everything that Hall wrote came out as debatable. He was correct when he stated that Americans should be willing to underwrite and participate in team research on a massive scale directed toward learning more about the interrelationship of man and his environment. I think that it is fair to say that the Culture Learning Institute was trying to do this, although not on the massive scale envisioned by Hall. Fruitful team research is not, of course, always easy to achieve. It is in the nature of most organisations that from time to time healthy professional disagreements occur among the key "players". The Culture Learning Institute was no different. With so many nationalities represented among the staff, its Fellows, and its students, opposing points of view were almost inevitable. The Tamil English literature specialist might not see eye to eye with the American cross-cultural psychologist. The Japanese linguist might not agree with the Chinese anthropologist. Furthermore, in the highly individualistic milieu of an American centre of higher education, would the psychologist and the anthropologist and the literature specialist and the linguist find it possible to work together and free themselves from the confines of their own disciplines? Would they pay lip service only to this

cooperative model whilst, at the same time, taking care to safeguard their positions within the world of academe? And where would the arts —the "cultural manifestations"— fit in, and the training programmes for the English teachers, the librarians, the musicologists, and for the directors and staff members of small museums in the Pacific Islands?

And yet somehow, it worked well for most of the time, despite methodological differences. Understandably, the researchers involved continued to plough their own furrows, but, on the whole, they paid more than lip service to the Institute's broader goals. And, in any case, were not the differences among them more imagined than real?

I think that our approach through the four major disciplines was justified, bearing in mind that such disciplines grow and change and that individual cultures are dynamic rather than static. Cultures change as people learn and share new behavioural traits and produce different artefacts. Are these not common characteristics of all peoples and are they not of interest across *all* academic disciplines? I believe that we were able to provide some sensible answers to such questions.

Although the seeds have scattered, I like to think that some have taken firm root. One day, when we have all come to our senses, I hope that they will bring a bountiful harvest to a peaceful world.

Thank you very much.

ⁱ Jerome Bruner, *The Culture of Education*, Harvard University Press, 1996.

ⁱⁱ Minora Shinoda, *The Founding of the Kamakura Shogunate, 1180-1185*, Columbia University Press, 1960.

ⁱⁱⁱ A. Kroeber, C. Kluckhohn, A.G. Meyer, Wayne Untereiner, *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions*, Peabody Museum, 1952.

^{iv} E.B. Taylor, *Primitive Culture*, New York, J.P. Putnam's Sons, 1871.

^v Richard Brislin, *Working with Cultural Differences: Dealing Effectively with Diversity in the Workplace*, Praeger, Westport, Connecticut, 2008.

^{vi} Edward Hall, *The Hidden Dimension*, Anchor Books, 1966.