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Global *Agoras* for Creating a Knowledge Society: The Example of the Center of Excellence (COE) Boundary-spanning Dialog Approach (BDA) Project at International Christian University (ICU)

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Abstract

Any attempt to create a knowledge society must include global *agoras*. Knowledge only arises from the interaction of people in a group, culture or society. Knowledge is not in us, but between us. The global *agora* [1] is a space where knowledge can be created. The concept derives from the ancient Greek *agora* which was a public space where citizens congregated and discussed common issues. The *agora* was a foundational concept for early democracy and the beginnings of civilization in Europe. Developing global *agoras* is a key requirement for a peaceful and prosperous future for the human race. Global *agoras* are an increasingly applied systems science tool for balancing the divergent needs and interests between nations and cultures of various levels of development and differing worldviews. Global *agoras* through their inclusive approach to dialogue enable us to avoid potential conflict by using systems science techniques to analyze the complexity of the issues and to provide understanding of the root causes and develop action plans for the conscious creation of a better future. The ICU-COE North East Asia Boundary-spanning Dialogue Approach (BDA) Project [2] is an attempt to create an *agora* for the people of Northeast Asia.

Systems science tools such as structured dialogues facilitate complex conversations between diverse participants who may have no mutual socialization. The structured dialogue process creates social worlds, or rather creates a common space in which a social world can emerge. Conversation creates community and with the rise of the community, knowledge is created as well. A knowledge civilization arises out of dialogue between all. Using the tools of systems science it is possible to build a just and peaceful civilization as a future for our children. This was the purpose of the ICU-COE Boundary-spanning Dialogue Approach Project at International Christian University this year.

Keywords: boundary spanning dialogue, conscious evolution, global agora, indigeneity, structured dialogue

1. The Boundary-spanning Dialogue Approach (BDA)

The ICU-COE Boundary-spanning Dialogue Approach Project derives its name from the Boundary-spanning Dialogue Approach (BDA) to meeting design and meeting process. This is a structured dialogue approach, one of many being developed by ISSS members. Previously, this approach was referred to as IM, issues management or interactive management. This particular approach has been developed through a two decade long collaboration between Americans for Indian Opportunity (AIO), a national indigenous peoples' advocacy organization in the USA, and Dr. Alexander Christakis and his colleagues in ISSS. Out of the collaboration has emerged a dialogue process especially adapted to Native Americans called ILIS (Indigenous Leaders Interactive System), the new concept of Indigeneity and a new international organization, Advancement of Global Indigeneity (AGI). This ICU-COE BDA Project was an opportunity to introduce the BDA process and the concept of Indigeneity to both indigenous and non-indigenous people in the Northeast Asian region. By gathering students together in the discussion and as assistant facilitators and observers, the project provided an opportunity for future leaders of the region to experience this process and concept.

The process is an interesting blend of hard and soft approaches to the system of dialogue. While the participants are openly sharing their ideas, the process is computer facilitated and mediated. All comments are entered into a computer and the resultant Root Cause Map is generated through a process guided by the computer. Without the use of the computer, getting the results would be very time consuming. One of the significant contributions of this system of dialogue is that it enables the construction of consensus to be efficient.

In the soft areas, the interaction is clearly following a systemic approach. There is an ethos of inclusivity that pervades the process. There is also a respect for the humanness of all the participants. Beyond a mere discussion, there are ample opportunities for social interaction. In fact, the social interaction precedes the discussion. The social sphere of interaction includes an edible sphere. By eating together, all the participants have a clear understanding of the humanity of each other. This translates into greater respect for each other when the discussions begin.

2. Background of the ICU-COE Project

Following up on discussions in the Indigenous Wisdom of the People Forum at ISSS 2003 in Heraklion, Crete [3], Dr. Wasilewski of International Christian University (ICU) used special Center of Excellence (COE) funding from the Japanese Ministry of Education to begin the ICU-COE Northeast Asia Boundary-spanning Dialogue Approach Project. The project originated through Dr. Wasilewski's long collaboration with the national US indigenous people's organization, Americans for Indian Opportunity (AIO) and ISSS and through the research of two of her graduate students at ICU, Zheng Wei and Elena Kozoulina.

Mr. Zheng is from Shanghai and is doing his doctoral research on the history of Chinese/Japanese human relationships with the goal of identifying factors that contribute to positive interactions between the people of these two societies. This topic grew out of his master's work on Japanese/Chinese communication in the work place [4]. Mr. Zheng [5] is also researching contrasting concepts of harmony in Chinese and Japanese cultures. Chinese-Japanese relationships are often plagued by false assumptions of similarity, particularly around values that stem from Confucian roots.

Ms. Kozoulina is approaching her doctoral research as a linguist with a mixed heritage that includes Polish-Jewish, Tengu (also known as Evenks), and Ukrainian roots. She also has relatives in the Buryat community. She is exploring the identity maintenance strategies of the three communities of people considered by the government of the Russian Federation to be "native" to the Buryat Republic: the Russians, the Buryats and the Evenks. Her recent paper [6] focused on identity discourse in the Russian and English languages. While there seem to be some similarity in identity terms on the surface level, in fact, the languages do not overlap. The vocabulary to describe identity is very different.

These two areas of research share a common concern for articulating and elaborating intercultural relationship dynamics in areas that until now have had little attention in our studies of intercultural communication and our ideas regarding self and identity. This is complimented by the long work that AIO has done (and which AGI is beginning) on explorations of non-Euro-American cultures and societies.

The ICU-COE BDA Project's goal is to create an inclusive dialogue space for the various peoples of Northeast Asia. Unlike other parts of Asia, such as Southeast Asia (e.g., ASEAN), there are no formal, standing organizations that focus on consistent periodic interaction, communication and issues management in Northeast Asia. This project is an attempt to bring people together, particularly the young people in the region, from whom the next generation of leadership will emerge, with the hope that such an organization or organizations may eventually grow out of these dialogues.

3. The ICU-COE Boundary-spanning Dialogue Approach (BDA) Project: Dialogue I

The initial three day meeting at International Christian University (ICU) in Tokyo, February 4-6, 2005, brought together 20 participants (mostly students) and about 30 observers (mostly academics). The active participants functioning as stakeholders in the dialogue process were from Japan, South Korea, the PRC and Taiwan, Russia, Uzbekistan and Mongolia. The observers were from the above countries, as well as from the United States, Germany, Belgium, South Africa, Myanmar, Canada, and the Netherlands. The four advisers to the process were from the United States and Russia, and the three chief facilitators were from the United States and New Zealand. There were 15 graduate and undergraduate students from Japan, the U.S., Germany, and the Philippines who were being trained in the process and who functioned as assistant facilitators. The participants included indigenous people from the region, Ainu from Japan and Evenks from the Buryat Republic in the Russian Federation, as well as participants from various parts of China, including Western China, which has a large number of minority peoples. Native American and Maori members of the indigenous people's organization, Advancement of Global Indigeneity (AGI), facilitated the structured dialog process. The participants discussed the question, "What are the obstacles to creating dialogue in Northeast Asia?"

Interestingly, the dialogue was facilitated by Maori and Comanche representatives of AGI (Advancement of Global Indigeneity). The wisdom of indigenous people around the world has enhanced the academic research that has lead to modern systems science tools like structured dialogues.

During the two days of discussions, 78 obstacles were identified that prevent greater dialogue and communication among the members of the various political, cultural and ethnic groups of Northeast Asia. These obstacles were clarified, then a subset of 11 of these obstacles were chosen as most important and compared and contrasted in order to form a Root Cause Map of the obstacles. Based on this map, the participants then generated a list of 32 actions which might address the obstacles. Then the participants divided into five roughly national sub-groups and developed action plans for overcoming these obstacles and for creating a growing, dynamic *agora* for future communication in the Northeast Asian region.

The 78 obstacles were as follows:

1. Controversy between economic development of different countries
2. There are no public forums that value diversity.
3. There is a controversy between land distribution between the Evenks and the government.
4. Lack of information and isolation
5. Controversy between the geographical position of the Russian Far East and the people's self identification
6. The nation's leaders put the highest priority on national interest.
7. The imbalance of economic growth of the countries of Northeast Asia
8. Territorial disputes
9. Different historical perspectives
10. Different social systems
11. Because of the lack of national government effort in initiatives, lack of private level exchanges, rumors may create misperceptions.
12. Conflict over historical issues
13. Lack of mutual trust
14. Loss of motivation in making dialogue
15. Lack of positive self-identification
16. Lack of multicultural language
17. Unsettled war in the Korean Peninsula
18. Prejudice and discrimination based on ethnicity
19. Inequity in access to information
20. Being unable to have a long term perspective because of sticking to past memories
21. Difference in religion
22. Lack of accountability in governments
23. Difficulties in preserving the cultural heritage of minority populations
24. Inability to accept foreign values
25. Lack of interest towards neighboring countries
26. Too much emphasis in education on self-esteem creates a superiority feeling towards others
27. Different level of people's civility in Northeast Asia
28. Differences in communication styles
29. Fear of knowing another culture
30. Too many people put the highest priority on individualism
31. Possibility of being brain-washed by government which may or may not be true and correct
32. Lack of common values
33. Occidentalism
34. Dilemma of language abilities and differences
35. Lack of social and political awareness
36. Lack of opportunities for North East Asian peoples to meet each other
37. Each government's security policies rely too much on military power
38. Lack of resolution of wartime and colonial oppression
39. Failure to recognize one's role in relationships with others
40. Exclusion of either part of a divided nation from the regional dialogue
41. Suppressed motivation to expose own culture
42. Dependency of minority populations on the federal government and federal policies
43. Poverty of minority populations
44. Wrong interpretation of intercultural values
45. Reliance on inter-governmental relations rather than people to people ties
46. Too much emphasis on nationalism rather than people-ism
47. Different levels of being westernized
48. Ideology of pitting people against each other
49. The fact that different people have grown up with different cultural views and political views
50. Too much ethnocentrism
51. Lack of interdependence
52. Egoism
53. Failure to show the diversity within a country
54. Monocultural viewpoint
55. Lack of competing political force against the conservative
56. Lack of application of international law
57. Overbearing US influence in the region

58. Inability to have your own opinion without being driven by the majority around you
59. Separatist trends within a country
60. Destruction of ecological niche where indigenous people live
61. Absence of the common enemy
62. Lack of understanding and knowledge of one's own ethnicity and resulting in an inferiority feeling
63. Difficulty in achieving understanding through language
64. Lack of effort to understand people of other countries
65. Lack of sense of responsibility
66. Double standards
67. Confusion with other arguments' framework
68. Lack of Northeast Asian boom
69. Lack of textbooks and fiction in the minority languages
70. Inability to make mutual concessions
71. Too much strict immigration policy, especially in Japan
72. State supported mainstream culture imposition
73. Identity crisis
74. Lack of transportation within the region
75. No apology
76. Busy everyday business prevents thinking about international peace
77. Inability to question authority
78. Lack of exchange of ethnic music of other countries

The 11 following obstacles were the ones collectively deemed most important (some of the obstacles have been combined):

1. Discrepancy between the economic development of different countries & the imbalance of economic growth of the countries of Northeast Asia.
2. There are no public spaces that value diversity & the lack of opportunities for Northeast Asians to meet each other.
3. Territorial disputes
4. Different historical perspectives & conflict of historical issues
5. Prejudice and discrimination based on ethnicity
6. Being unable to have a long term perspective because of sticking to past memories
7. Differences in religion
8. Lack of accountability in governments
9. Differences in communication styles
10. Lack of resolution of wartime and colonial oppression
11. Reliance on inter-governmental relations rather than people to people ties

And these 11 obstacles were collectively organized by the participants into the following *Root Cause Map*, with Level IV being the root cause:

Level	Discrepancy between economic development & the imbalance of economic growth in Northeast Asia	Unable to have a long term perspective because of sticking to past memories	Prejudice & discrimination based on ethnicity	Difference in religion
Level I			∧	∧
			∧	∧
				∧
			∧	∧
		∧	∧	∧
	∧	∧	∧	∧
	∧	∧	∧	∧
Level II		Lack of resolution of war time and colonial oppression	∧	∧
			∧	∧
			∧	∧
			∧	∧
		∧	∧	∧
Level III		Different historical perspectives & conflict over historical issues	∧	∧
			∧	∧
		∧	∧	∧
		∧	∧	∧
		∧	∧	∧
	∧	∧	∧	∧
Level IV	There are no public spaces/places that value diversity & lack of opportunities for Northeast Asians to meet each other			

In response to the total list of obstacles and to the Root Cause Map, the participants then generated the following list of 32 actions which, if taken, could address the causes of the obstacles to dialogue in the Northeast Asian region:

1. For each country governments should have discussions to have an agreement on historical perspectives
2. Enrich empowerment programs for minority people and the oppressed
3. Increase and support student exchange
4. Increase joint governmental projects for the common interest

5. Establish a media network for the 20-35 year old generation in the region, especially in the cities of Northeast Asia
6. Create belief in pursuing the benefit of not only one's own nation but also of all the Northeast Asian people
7. Create nongovernmental organizations for dialogue in Northeast Asia
8. Provide incentives for people to take part in exchange
9. Think independently
10. Create an international day of reconciliation
11. Allow people to move freely between countries
12. Encourage cultural exchange
13. Encourage people and governments to take positive attitudes about improving their relationships with others
14. Create a contest for mass media in Northeast Asian countries
15. The need for governmental support
16. Increase the number of exchange students to promote intercultural understanding
17. Nurture Asian leaders and famous people in the world
18. Build many, many more international dormitories
19. Decrease the political tension due to actions that prevent providing investment for public spaces
20. Peoples' efforts to have an objective understanding of history
21. Create a fund to support projects which contribute to dialogue in Northeast Asia
22. Have forums be founded in international law and mediated by internationally recognized objective parties
23. Learn to accept and appreciate difference
24. Continue to provide lunches for free
25. Continue to have Boundary-spanning Dialogues at ICU
26. Conduct large scale research on the cultures of people in Northeast Asia
27. Develop more trade and economic cooperation between countries
28. Invite the political leaders of each country to join this project
29. Establish an institution to do more research on the farmers in each country to learn about their culture
30. Establish a cultural institution to promote the exchange of culture
31. Diversify your interests
32. Know how you are related to other countries' economies

Finally, after the above actions were clarified, the participants divided into the five national sub-groups and developed the following Action Scenarios based on the actions above:

Russian/Evenk/Uzbek
25. Continue to have Boundary-spanning Dialogues at ICU
3. Increase and support student exchange.
12. Encourage cultural exchange, including the creation of an organization to support such exchanges, … to create mutual trust.
10. Create an international day of reconciliation.
11. Allow people to move freely between countries … to not be afraid of "foreigners" – open borders, ban passports – embrace our neighbors

Japanese
9. Think independently … don't negate being able to be friends with the "enemy."
31. Diversify your interests … be interested in others.
11. Allow people to move freely between countries.
12. Encourage cultural student exchange … it can act as an ice breaker. If students have no fear about talking, then they can talk about history.
20. Peoples' efforts to have an objective historical understanding.

Japanese-Ainu
25. Continue to have Boundary-spanning Dialogues at ICU.
5. Establish media network for the 25-35 generation in the region, especially in the cities of Northeast Asia … to broaden the dialogue process, especially in cities.
18. Build many, many more international dorms … to deepen the dialogue.
2. Enrich empowerment programs for minority people and the oppressed.
26. Conduct large scale research on the cultures of the people of Northeast Asia … bring their data to create an historical consensus.

Chinese
3. Increase and support student exchange … enable people to meet while young … none of the participants would have been able to participate in this dialogue if they had not been on exchange.
7. Create non-governmental organizations for dialogue in northeast Asia.
28. Invite political leaders to join the project … although some of our group disagreed with this point as being unrealistic.
1. Each country's government should have discussions to have an agreement on historical perspectives.
11. Allow people to move freely between countries.

Korean-Chinese-Japanese-American
4. Increase joint government projects for the common interest … need government support … need government support to allow people to participate.
8. Provide incentives for people to participate … government approval to overcome financial constraints … make sure that people join.
2. Enrich empowerment programs for minority people and the oppressed … e.g., human rights might constitute a common interest project.
1. Then … each country's government should have discussions to have an agreement on historical perspectives.
10. Create an international day of reconciliation.

4. Planning Meeting for Dialogue II

On June 12, 2005, the participants in and observers of Dialogue I who were still in Japan were invited to participate in a planning meeting for a subsequent dialogue activity which will take place at ICU and/or virtually on the Internet during Winter Term 2006. The main task of this day long meeting was to discuss the feedback on Dialogue I and to integrate the five above Action Scenarios. Thirty participants and observers were able to assemble. We used a modified version of the KJ Method [7] to integrate the five action plans together. The result was the following four part Action Scenario:

4.1. Short Term Goal: *Continue to Have Dialogues*

Continue having Boundary-spanning Dialogues at ICU (and elsewhere)

Invite political leaders to join the Boundary-spanning Dialogue Approach Project (although some of our participants disagreed with this point as being unrealistic).

4.2. Sources of Support

Government Support for Dialogues in General

Each country's government should have discussions in order to have an agreement on historical perspectives.

Increase the number of joint government projects for the common interest … need government support to allow people to participate.

Provide incentives for people to participate to make sure that people join … need government approval and help to overcome financial constraints.

Support for the Inclusion of Minorities in Dialogue and Minorities as a Topic of Discussion

Fund empowerment programs for minority people and the oppressed … e.g., human rights might constitute a common interest project in the region.

Support for Cultural Exchange

Encourage cultural exchange, including the creation of organizations to support such exchanges, … to create mutual trust.

Encourage cultural student exchange in particular … it can act as an ice breaker. If young people have no fear about talking with each other, then they can talk about history.

Increase and support student exchange … enable people to meet while young … none of the participants would have been able to participate in this dialogue if they had not been on exchange.

Support for Places of Dialogue (i.e., Global Agoras)

Build many, many more international dorms … to deepen dialogue.

Non-governmental and Media Support for Dialogue

Create non-governmental organizations that support dialogue in Northeast Asia.

Establish a media network for the 25-35 year old generation in the region … especially in the cities of Northeast Asia … to broaden the dialogue process.

4.3. Personal/Individual Outcomes

Qualities, Attitudes and Knowledge to be Enhanced

Diversify your interests … be interested in others.

Think independently … don't negate being able to be friends with the "enemy".

Conduct large scale research (at the grassroots level, as well as in the academy) on the cultures of the peoples of Northeast Asia (not just national level culture, but include the multiple cultures of each of the nation

states) … bring the data together and, through dialogue, create a widespread historical consensus.

People should make an effort to have an objective historical understanding of the region.

4.4. Long Term Goals

The IDR

Create an International Day of Reconciliation.

A Borderless East Asia

Allow people to move freely between countries … to not be afraid of "foreigners" … to open borders, ban passports … to embrace our neighbors.

5. Dialogue II at ICU and on the Internet

The next dialogue will take place both at ICU and on the Internet. This will be an open space, unstructured dialogue centered around a sharing of historical perspectives in order to create of 360 degree view of the history of the Northeast Asian region. The virtual space will use a wiki technique (wiki.org) in which the participants will comment on, edit and annotate each other's materials. By creating both a place of face to face interaction (at ICU) and a place of virtual interaction (on the Internet) we hope to include as many of the first dialogue participants as possible even as the circle of interaction expands to include new participants.

Participants in this second round must be willing to do some pre-participation assignments. These will include 1) reflecting on the history they learned in school, 2) reflecting on the history passed down in their families (interview relatives), 3) reflecting on the discussions carried out in the media on history, 4) reading at least one of the joint history texts being produced in the region, e.g., the Chinese, Japanese, Korean joint history book produced by Koubunken (www.koubunken.co.jp), and 5) visiting contrastive historical presentation sites, for example, in Japan, the Hiroshima Peace Park and Museum, Yasukuni Shrine, etc. These activities are intended to enable them to share a more rigorous personal perception of history.

To support this expanded dialogue, information science students at Kwansei Gakuin are in the process of constructing a website which will present the results of the first dialogue and provide a virtual meeting space for further dialog. Key to this next stage of the project is the recording and posting on-line of the personal histories outlined above. By sharing in an open and non-judgmental way the experiences of members of all of the communities, the clash of official histories can be avoided, and communication can begin. While still in the early planning stages, this project offers great opportunities for real communication among the peoples of Northeast Asia.

6. The Linguistic Issues Affecting Implementation

The first critical issue is the issue of the linguistic diversity of the participants. The first dialog at ICU benefited from the presence of simultaneous translators for Japanese and English. This extended the discussions among more participants than would otherwise have been possible. Sometimes the ideas were conveyed through a series of languages, as in Evenki to Russian to English to Chinese. One of the key points in the BDA is that every participant understand every idea put forth. This puts a heavy burden on participants that are multilingual and also increases the time necessary for the BDA process.

At the virtual level of dialogue a truly multilingual site is necessary, although not every bit of information can be provided in every language. Some languages may not even have an orthography. Merely recording a personal history, however, is not enough. It is the sharing of these histories that leads to understanding. Posting these on a web site where they can be accessed with multilingual summaries is one option. Having participants record their histories in two languages, Russian and Japanese for example, may be another possible solution. In any case, various approaches are being discussed and will be tried in order to allow participants to feel comfortable both in the face to face space and within the virtual space.

Beyond the issues of the multilingual problems in the dialog process, there are linguistic issues for the creation of an ongoing *agora* which is open to all people, whether they are participants in particular dialogues or merely residents of the area. If the results of the discussions are only available to the immediate participants, then much of the effectiveness of the *agora* is lost. Our goal is to see that the BDA Project creates a dialogue space in which knowledge can arise for a broad range of real world issues.

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