

**Consciousness in a Natural and Cultural  
Context (CNCC)****Workshop “Religion and Cognition in Context”****31 May - 1 June 2008****Aarhus, Denmark****Abstracts (tentative)****Culture, Context, and Moral Responsiveness**

Joseph Bulbulia, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand

A common observation from experimental social psychology is that subtle contextual cues often dramatically impact behavioural choices. This paper relates several of these studies to Marc Hauser's evolutionary account of morality, suggesting that 1) Hauser's account is incongruent with these studies and that 2) appropriately revising Hauser requires examining the role that religious culture plays in mediating moral judgement and behaviour.

Keywords: Cognition, Coordination, Culture

**Religious Texts and the Cognitive Science of Religion**

István Czachesz, Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, Finland University of Heidelberg, Germany

This presentation will focus on texts and artefacts that religions produce and use. We will ask how and why religious texts and artefacts are created, how they are transmitted, and how they interact with other aspects of religion, such as experience, rituals, and beliefs. Our main concern will be the production and function of religious texts, in both oral and written forms.

Whereas cognitive science initially studied the mind as a distinct entity, recently the situated and embedded aspects of cognition have received much attention. Cognition does not occur in a vacuum, but rather in a context of other cognitive agents and environmental objects. There are several ways to conceptualize the interaction of minds and texts. One possibility is to regard texts and other artefacts as external memory stores. We can ask about the storage and retrieval of information with the help of such memory stores (cultic objects, architecture, music, texts) and the impact of the change of media (orality, writing, use of scrolls, use of codex, print, electronic media, internet) on different forms of religiosity. A further step is to examine religiosity at the level of social and environmental interaction as a distributed cognitive system. Knowledge is distributed among the parts of such a system, and the behavior of the system shows emergent qualities which cannot be reduced to the behaviors of its parts. On a few examples I will show how network theory and computer modeling can be used to study the behavior of complex religious systems.

## Minds and Bodies in Religious Cognition

Emma Cohen, Centre for Anthropology and Mind, Institute of Cognitive and Evolutionary Anthropology University of Oxford, UK

Mind-body concepts are at the heart of much of what is commonly categorized as forms of 'religious thinking', including beliefs about death and the afterlife, spirit possession, ancestor spirits, souls, gods and so on. According to many anthropologists, mind-body concepts are wholly, or mostly, provided by social learning and they are highly variable cross-culturally. This paper considers how certain cross-culturally recurrent features of mind-body concepts may be partly attributable to panhuman cognitive predispositions that serve to constrain intuitive reasoning about the physical, biological, and psychological properties of human beings and other agents. It is suggested that these same predispositions, activated in everyday reasoning about agents and objects, inform and constrain the emergence and transmission of a range of 'religious' concepts and beliefs. Cross-cultural recurrences in such concepts may therefore be attributable, in part, to the regularities of panhuman cognitive architecture.

## Coin and Healing Ritual among the Amis in Taiwan

### State, Images of Others, and Socio-Cosmic Order in the Early 1930s Iwan

Shiun-wei Huang, Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, Taiwan

To this day, the total population of Taiwan has reached 21 million. Most of the inhabitants of today are descendants of the Han Chinese from Mainland China. However, apart from the Chinese majority, there are still around 440,000 aborigines in Taiwan. The aboriginal peoples of Taiwan belong to the Malay-Polynesian family in terms of physical features, language and socio-cultural characteristics. The Amis, with a population of 140,000, is the biggest among the thirteen aboriginal groups.

The *cikawasay* played an important role in the Amis society of the past. Literally speaking, *ci* is an article for people, *kawas* means gods or spirits here, *-ay* means '...person'. Therefore *ci-kawas-ay* means 'a person that has god's power' or 'a person that has supernatural forces'. The main job of *cikawasay* was to eliminate disasters and pray for well being, which most importantly included treating the ill.

Overviewing past documents about the Amis' *cikawasay* and related healing rituals, mostly the emphasis is put on 'the traditional'; however fail to discuss *cikawasay* in comparison to the course of history. For example, Eiko Hara, the most fruitful researcher in this area, focuses her book (Hara 2000) on spatial and gender differentiations behind the religious phenomena of the Amis. Her fieldwork, done in Nansih, and analysis seem to lead to one objective: the rebuilding of the Amis' traditional religious system. Although her research have touched on the interaction between ethnic groups, the borrowing of cultural elements and also the fact that among the protector gods of *cikawasay* include a chopsticks god attained from Han Chinese religion (etc.), she hasn't further analyzed these phenomena. Therefore, we cannot see the relationship between *cikawasay* and the cultural phenomena of the society at the same period; neither can we understand the changing of the *cikawasay* system itself; and most importantly, we cannot observe how a system changes with the corresponding time and socio-cultural environment.

The importance of the *cikawasay* in the Amis society can also be found in the fieldwork site of this research: Iwan. According to the Amis of Iwan, before accepting Christianity in the 1950s, there were four schools of *cikawasay*: *tada cikawasay*, *misapayciay*, *misakaramay* and *misaiyannay* (in the order of appearance). In this essay, *tada cikawasay* is translated as the 'original school'; and this school has been in existence since the village was created in the mid 1860s. The founders of the village came from some northern villages, such as Makuta'ay, Kiwit, and Ciwkangan. Three senior members of this school also came from these areas. With ten members in total, although the original school did not completely disappear until the last *cikawasay* died in 1963, this school has been on the decrease since two senior sorcerers died subsequently in the 1930s. In contrast, *misapayciay*, with six *cikawasay* in total, replaced the place of *tada cikawasay* in the 1930s and continued to prosper until the last *cikawasay* converted to Christianity. Therefore, compared to *misakaramay* and *misaiyannay*, which separately appeared in the early and mid 1940s, *misapayciay* not only appeared earlier, but also lasted longer. This essay shall focus on exploring the meaning of the appearance of *misapayciay* in Iwan in the early 1930s.

Simply speaking, the *misapayciay* has three main rituals for illness healing; the second ritual, *militoday*, a ritual which eliminates the roots of illnesses, consists of the following procedures: The *cikawasay* puts her left hand on the patient's body; meanwhile, she holds a wine glass in her right hand. She looks at the patient and says a prayer. After saying, she uses her mouth to suck the area in which the patient feels the most pain, and she sucks out a coin that carries the root of illness. She then takes the coin out of the house which means that the root of illness has been thrown away.

The appearance of Japanese coins in this school's healing ritual is a phenomenon worthy of exploration. This research begins with the question: Why do coins appear in a healing ritual in the early 1930s? Or, from another point of view, what is the meaning of coins in a healing ritual in this particular time? This paper shall introduce the original school first, observing their status in the old Amis society. Then, I will introduce the development of *misapayciay* in the 1930s and its typical healing routine. After that, I shall explore the use of Japanese coins in the Amis society of that time, in hope of providing a background to address the questions above.

In short, through the research of the rise and fall of *cikawasay*, I hope to explore the continuance and creativity of Amis culture, and observe its relationship with political and economical change. On the basis of my previous study, I suggest that for the Amis in Iwan during the Japanese rule (1895-1945) state was the main dynamics behind the change of Amis culture and society. A radical sociocultural change occurred after mid 1920s. First, a young man, with four years Japanese education, was officially appointed as the village leader in 1923. Then between 1926 and 1929, under the instruction of the Japanese, the whole village, lead by the young leader, built an irrigation system and began paddy rice agriculture in 1930. Thus I tend to view the early 1930s in Iwan as the critical period of emergence of a new socio-cosmic order. This paper will interpret the meaning of the appearance of *misapayciay* in this historical context. Apart from observing the political and economical dimensions of change, I shall emphasize on how the Amis confront and deal with these changes, and focus on the Amis' "images of others".

### **Multilevel Mechanisms and Religious Cognition**

Iikka Pyysiäinen, University of Helsinki, Finland

The cognitive science of religion has made an important contribution to the study of religion by reframing some old questions and by opening up new perspectives. However, its relationship with other ways of studying religion has often been strained. Both the so-called "cognitivists" and their critics have by and large preferred keeping a distance to the other party. There is also little in the way of philosophy of science of the study of religion, and the same seems to hold for the cognitive science of religion. There is one important difference, though: to the extent that religion rest on general (natural) cognitive mechanisms, philosophy of cognitive science can be applied to clarify the nature of the cognitive science of religion as a science. I use recent work on mechanistic multilevel explanation (Bechtel, Craver) to argue against all kinds of fundamentalism with regard to the proper level at which religion supposedly should be explained or interpreted. This is not only an argument against reductionism; it is equally a critique of anti-reductionism.

### **A Neurophenomenological Study of a Catholic Firewalking Ritual**

Uffe Schjødt & Dimitris Xygalatas, University of Aarhus, Denmark

This paper presents the anthropological methods and experimental design of a forthcoming field study on the firewalkers of San Pedro Manrique in northern Spain. The firewalking ritual is the climax of a midsummer festival and it offers a unique opportunity to measure a range of physiological processes during a high arousal ritual e.g. blood pressure, pulse and possibly EEG (electroencephalography).

The fact, that both religious and secular persons participate in the firewalking, provides us with the opportunity to measure the specific effects of having a believe system to rely on in high arousal practices. Also, we will measure the reactions of religious spectators to explore the possible mirror effects of bodily arousal in collective rituals. Every comment on methodological and experimental issues is more than welcome!

## **Explaining the Experiences of Religious Virtuosos: The Socio-Cultural Implications of Cognitive Theories of Hypnosis, Dissociation and Psychosomatic Illness**

Ann Taves, University of California at Santa Barbara, US

In a series of articles, Richard Brown and David Oakley have developed a cognitively based theoretical model for understanding hypnosis and the abilities of highly hypnotizable subjects (Oakley 1999a,b; Brown & Oakley 2004) that Brown has further developed and extended to various forms of psychosomatic illness (Brown 2004) and certain types of dissociative phenomena (Brown 2006). Though Brown extended the model in order to better understand certain clinical disorders (i.e., psychosomatic illness, conversion and dissociative disorders), the model can also be extended to account for a range of unusual experiences – e.g., seeing visions, hearing voices, experiences of felt presence, trance channeling, and spirit possession -- that appear in religious contexts across cultures and are often associated with religious virtuosos (Taves 2006, 2008). Drawing on mainstream models of consciousness, cognitive control, and development of a sense of self, Brown suggests ways in which “rogue representations” can create disturbances in the memory retrieval process that can lead to the development of either clinical symptoms or unusual experiences. Since such representations are ubiquitous, Brown posits other factors, e.g. focused attention, conscious or unconscious misattribution of causation, and personality characteristics, to explain how and why some people transform “rogue representations” into subjectively compelling and seemingly involuntary clinical symptoms or unusual experiences. Although he doesn’t develop this aspect of his theory, Brown’s “rogue representations” are representations that arise either from personal memory and/or from socio-cultural sources and interactions. From a cross-cultural rather than a clinical vantage point, his “rogue representations” are better understood as cultural representations. As such the “disturbances” these representations cause in memory retrieval processes provide an explicit theoretical window on the way in which different cultural and religious systems can influence cognitive processes. Extension of Brown’s theory to unusual experiences that recur across cultures, thus, offers an opportunity to develop the socio-cultural aspects of the theory and to test key hypotheses advanced by the theory in light of historical and cultural data.

Brown, Richard J. 2004. “Psychological mechanism of medically unexplained symptoms: An integrative conceptual model.” Psychological Bulletin 130(5), 793-812.

Brown, Richard J. 2006. “Different types of ‘dissociation’ have different psychological mechanisms.” In Exploring dissociation: Definitions, development and cognitive correlates. Edited by Anne P. DePrince and Lisa DeMarni Cromer. Binghamton, NY: Hawarth Press.

Brown, Richard J. and David A. Oakley. 2004. “An integrative theory of hypnosis and high hypnotizability.” In The highly hypnotizable person: Theoretical, experimental and clinical issues. Edited by Michael Heap, Richard J. Brown and David A. Oakley. London: Routledge.

Oakley, David. 1999a. Hypnosis and consciousness: a structural model. Contemporary Hypnosis 16(4), 215–223.

Oakley, David. 1999b. Hypnosis and conversion hysteria: a unifying model. Cognitive Neuropsychiatry 4(3), 243–265.

Taves, Ann. 2006. “Where (Fragmented) Selves Meet Cultures: Theorizing Spirit Possession.” Culture and Religion 7(2), 123-38.

Taves, Ann. Forthcoming. “Channeled apparitions: On visions that morph and categories that slip.” Visual Resources.

## **The Moral/Religious Imagination of Mediumship in Contemporary Taiwan: the Case of the Mediums' Association**

Yi-Jia Tsai, Department of Religious Studies, Fu Jen Catholic University, Taiwan

In 1989—around the period when the government lifted martial law—a group of mediums founded their own association. It represents a conscious self-recognition of a time-honored religious professional who strives to come to terms with modern frame of professionalization. It is also a spiritual endeavor that tries to respond to contemporary Taiwanese political and moral struggle by appealing to the traditional Chinese cultural resources and the modern educational design. The Mediums' Association proposes its peculiar spiritual/historical understanding of Chinese history based on the model of the correlation and resonance of heaven, earth and the human realm. And they emphasize their mediating roles among the three realms. The turbulence of human world can be attributed to the turmoil of the spiritual realm. As the mediators between heaven and earth, the mediums are obliged to restore the peace to the three realms. Although the mediums still perform the traditional roles of healers, exorcists, and fortune-tellers, the new missions to serve the public and to bring peace to the world are much emphasized. The new vision of mediumship are actualized by various religious practices, including the mediums' meeting for the visiting of spirits, the ritual of national protection and spiritual appeasement, and the educational programs for the cultivation of mediums. The new form of mediumship can be characterized by the restructuring of spiritual relationship, the resolving of the karmic entanglement, the task to harmonize with the cooperative ling and the emergence of cultivational subject. It also entails a specific moral/religious imagination of Chinese history and contemporary political situation. In this paper I attempt to discuss the reformative vision of mediumship from the cognitive perspective. I'd like to argue that the redefinition of mediumship is related with a cognitive reconfiguration of original spiritual categories. And such cognitive reconfiguration makes a new kind of mediumship possible.

### **Explaining Religion**

Harvey Whitehouse, University of Oxford, School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography, UK

Much research in the cognitive science of religion emphasizes that some features of religious thinking and behaviour are universal, arising from our species' evolutionary history. Examples include certain qualities attributed to supernatural agents (e.g. gods and ghosts), which humans everywhere appear to recognize with minimal need for instruction. But there is also growing evidence that many religious concepts require considerable cognitive, social, and technological resources to create, remember, and pass on. Cross-culturally variable aspects of religion arise in part from the evolution of cognitive systems devoted to connecting concepts (e.g. through the formation of novel analogies) and storing them (e.g. in semantic memory) and in part from the historically changing sociopolitical conditions in which such systems can be exploited. Only a coordinated, interdisciplinary effort that takes into account the role of both evolved cognition and human ecology in religious innovation and transmission will be sufficient to provide the broad empirical and theoretical base necessary for explaining religion.