

President's Address: Reflections on the History of IAICS

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Abstract: My first encounter with IAICS was at the 1991 conference in Taiwan. At that time, the conference was named “Cross-cultural Communication: East and West”. This prescient initiative of several founding scholars changed my worldview. I have observed that other colleagues in IAICS have similarly been impacted and sensitized to the international need for intercultural communication. Since those initial years, the association and the conference have been renamed so as to reflect the global reach of our scholarship and membership. We are now not only concerned with East-West communication, but also with North-South communication, and with multiple cross-cultural relations and trajectories. We are an interdisciplinary association spanning linguistics, translation studies, philology and language teaching, cultural studies, communication, literature, history, anthropology, sociology, journalism, and other related fields. This presidential address traces the history of the association, drawing upon the archives of IAICS and my personal experience.

Keywords: Climate change, Cross-cultural communication, COVID-19 pandemic, East-West communication, intercultural communication, *Intercultural Communication Studies* (ICS), International Association for Intercultural Communication Studies (IAICS), North-South communication

Thirty-one years ago, in April 1991, my Japanese colleague Masako Hiraga, who at that time worked at the University of the Air in Japan (later at Rikkyo University), invited me to a conference held at National Cheng Kung University in Tainan in the south of Taiwan. The conference was “Cross-Cultural Communication: East and West”, later renamed the International Association for Intercultural Communication Studies (IAICS). For me, this turned out to be a life-changing moment.

I had never been to Asia before. Even though I had studied some Chinese and Sanskrit in graduate school, and loved Chinese food, Japanese food and Indian food, I knew very little about Asian cultures. Now, thirty years later, I still would not say that I’m an expert at it. However, I now have first-hand experience of China, Japan, India, and several other countries, and I cherish this hard-won international knowledge, personal and idiosyncratic though it may be.

It all began with the deep impression of visiting a Buddhist temple while on the conference cultural tour in Tainan. I was struck by the lavish décor of red and gold colors, many carved statues, the heavy smoke of incense wafting in the air, and the hushed joy pervading the place. My experience of Christian churches, predominantly Catholic, had been that prayer was usually communal and led by a priest. Here the atmosphere was much more relaxed, worship was individual, and the interior was unlike any I had ever seen. Clearly this was a different religion. It was then I realized that, while I had had a solid Western education, there were vast areas of the world I knew next to nothing about. Indeed, there was an “East”, and the conference was aptly named “Cross-Cultural Communication: East and West”. I was there to learn.

The International Association for Intercultural Communication Studies (IAICS) was founded in the mid-1980s, soon after the introduction of China’s “reform and opening up” policy of greater openness to the West. It was originally based at the Institute for Cross-Cultural Research of Trinity

University at San Antonio, Texas, USA, and was incorporated as a non-profit organization in the state of Texas in 1996. The first issue of *Intercultural Communication Studies (ICS)*, the official journal of IAICS, appeared in the Spring of 1991, at the same time as the conference I attended in Taiwan. This issue lists as its editors three of the principal founding fathers of IAICS: Bates L. Hoffer from Trinity University (who served as President of IAICS in 2005-2007), Nobuyuki Honna from Aoyama Gakuin University in Japan (who served as President of IAICS in 2007-2009), and John H. Koo from the University of Alaska at Fairbanks, USA (later at Arizona State University, USA, from 1995 to 1997). Among the editorial board and the list of authors, this first issue included twenty-six other colleagues, among them two more of the principal founding fathers: L. Brooks Hill from Trinity University and Robert N. St. Clair from the University of Louisville, Kentucky, USA, who respectively held the office of President of IAICS in 1995-1999 and 2013-2015. Notably, the 1991 editorial board included Shyh-jong Ren from National Cheng Kung University in Taiwan, where I had first participated in the conference, and Masanori Higa from the University of the Air in Japan (later from Ryukoku University), from whom Masako Hiraga and I had first found out about the conference, and who was the President of IAICS from 1999 to 2001.

From 1991 onwards, I was hooked on intercultural communication, although for many years my participation in the association and its conferences was just as an ordinary member. Again, it was this association that first introduced me to mainland China, when in 1995 I attended the conference held at the Harbin Institute of Technology in Harbin, the capital of Heilongjiang Province. I will tell you what I remember from my experience at that time.

Once again, I travelled to the conference with my colleague Masako Hiraga from Japan. We first arrived in Beijing and toured its famous historical landmarks. This was my first time to see the Great Wall of China, the Forbidden City and the Temple of Heaven. The latter left an indelible mark on me through its harmonious and joyful colors, and the philosophy that it represented of uniting heaven and earth. We then took a plane to Harbin, and I remember that we arrived close to midnight and were relieved to find a taxi at the airport, although I was nervous about it because the passenger seats had no seatbelts. The conference itself was very professionally organized. Indeed, there were so many sessions that after a while I became exhausted and I started hanging around the coffee break area and chatting with other participants. I was very pleasantly surprised and deeply impressed how well my Chinese colleagues spoke English. As my family heritage is partly Russian, and Heilongjiang Province borders on Russia, I also found several Russian speakers at the conference. Soon, I began to feel relaxed and almost at home. As it later turned out, this impacted my career from then on, because one year later, when I received a job offer from Nanjing University in China, I remembered the pleasant experience I had had at Harbin Institute of Technology, and I accepted the job offer without hesitation, knowing that I would be able to get along well with Chinese colleagues.

In the 1995 volume of *Intercultural Communication Studies*, among the names of the editorial board we find Jia Yuxin from Harbin Institute of Technology, the convener of the 1995 conference I just mentioned, as well as Hu Wenzhong from Beijing Foreign Languages Institute (now named Beijing Foreign Studies University). The 1995 conference in Harbin was also the first one to be held in mainland China, and marks the beginning of extensive participation in the association by colleagues from mainland China. The conference was held once again at Harbin Institute of Technology in 2007, at South China University of Technology in 2010, and at Shanghai International Studies University in 2016. The Special Administrative Regions of China have also hosted the conference, at Hong Kong Baptist University in 2001, Hong Kong Polytechnic

University in 2015, and Macao Polytechnic Institute (now named Macao Polytechnic University) in 2017; the 2015 conference in Hong Kong was held jointly with the China Association for Intercultural Communication (CAFIC), while the 2017 conference in Macao was held jointly with the International Conference on English, Discourse and Intercultural Communication, Macao-Xinjiang (EDIC), and co-hosted by Xinjiang Normal University, Urumqi, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, China. Jia Yuxin from Harbin Institute of Technology served as President of IAICS from 2003 to 2005, Song Li from Harbin Institute of Technology was President from 2011 to 2013, my current term as President (Joanna Radwańska-Williams from Macao Polytechnic University) is from 2021 to 2023, and the President-Elect, succeeding to the presidency in 2023-2025, is Lixian Jin from the City University of Macau. We should also mention that the conference was held again in Taiwan at Chinese Culture University in 2005 and Yuan Ze University in 2012. The 2023 conference is hosted by the City University of Macau. Thus, Greater China has a strong representation in the association.

The United States is also strongly represented in the association. In addition to the colleagues already named above, Presidents of IAICS included D. Ray Heisey from Kent State University (2001-2003), Guo-Ming Chen from the University of Rhode Island (2015-2017), and Margaret D'Silva from the University of Alabama (2019-2021; formerly from the University of Louisville, Kentucky). The website of the association, including the online edition of its journal, *Intercultural Communication Studies*, was formerly hosted by the University of Rhode Island, and is now at Kent State University at Stark, Ohio. The association was re-incorporated as a non-profit organization in the state of Virginia in 2019. Ten of the international conferences of IAICS so far have been held in the United States, at Trinity University, San Antonio, Texas (1989, 1993, 2006); Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona (1997); University of Louisville, Kentucky (1999, 2008); California State University at Fullerton (2003); University of Rhode Island (2014); DePaul University, Chicago, Illinois (2018), and this year online at the University of Toledo, Ohio (2022). In addition, in 2021 the University of Alabama co-hosted the international online conference of IAICS hosted by Manipal Academy of Higher Education in Manipal, Karnataka, India; and the University of Toledo, Ohio will host a face-to-face conference in 2026.

Throughout its history, and especially in the 21st century, IAICS has aimed to be truly international and extend its reach globally. In addition to the colleagues named above from Japan, China and the United States, the presidency of the association was held in 2017-2019 by Robert W. Vaagan from Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway. In addition to the conference locations in Greater China and the United States, the international conference has been held in Seoul, Korea (1985); University of Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico (2004); Kumamoto Gakuen University, Kumamoto, Japan (2009); Ciudad Universitaria Intercultural, San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico (2011); Far Eastern Federal University, Vladivostok, Russia (2013); Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic (2019); and Manipal Academy of Higher Education in Manipal, Karnataka, India (which was originally scheduled face-to-face in 2020, but postponed and held online in 2021). In 2024, the conference will be hosted by the University of Opole in Poland. In the future, we hope to hold the conference in a wide variety of countries, including in the Southern hemisphere. The journal of IAICS, *Intercultural Communication Studies*, represents its international membership. In just the past five years (2017-2021) as an example, the issues of *ICS* have included articles by authors from twenty countries and territories: Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, the Czech Republic, Greece, Hong Kong, Hungary, Japan, Macao, Mexico, the Netherlands, Norway, the Philippines, the Republic of South Africa, Russia, Taiwan, the United

Kingdom, and the United States. The journal welcomes submissions from scholars worldwide. Membership in IAICS is not required for submission but is required for publication.

The past two and a half years of the COVID-19 pandemic have seen particular challenges and opportunities. The epidemiological exigencies of social distancing, quarantines and travel restrictions, have impacted our ability to see each other face-to-face. IAICS is a global community where ideas are exchanged and friendships are forged. It is also a platform for experiencing and understanding other cultures. While the directness of face-to-face contact and immersive cultural experience are irreplaceable, online technology provides us the opportunity to meet up in virtual space when otherwise we would be unable to meet or to travel. In this way attending an international conference becomes much more economically accessible, and we fervently hope that this will draw new members from across the world to our association. All scholars of intercultural communication from all countries are welcome to join and participate.

As we advance further into the 21st century, the world is facing ever greater challenges. I would like briefly to contextualize just one of these great challenges, which is climate change. You may think that seemingly this is not related to communication. However, it is climate change, as well as human infrastructure development, that creates habitat encroachment and displacement for animals. When human beings are brought into increased contact with wild animals or species they did not have contact with before, new diseases jump from the animal populations to the human population, and we have a global crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic. The crisis can impact not only our physical health but our mental health; we have feelings of isolation, anxiety and fear. Fear can lead to psychological projection of negative feelings onto cultural “others” and thereby exacerbate conflicts between groups of people. Conflicts can erupt into violence and war. When bogged down in vicious cycles of blame and violence, we lose sight of the bigger picture that we are just one animal species, *Homo sapiens*, on an overpopulated planet that we may have mismanaged. The problem of how to understand other cultures, how to get along with other nations, is a perennial one, but never has it been more pressing. As scholars of intercultural communication, let us each try our best to do our small part to make this world a better place.

Ever since the early years of IAICS as a platform for East-West dialogue, the association has extended its global reach and membership. We are now not only concerned with East-West communication, but also with North-South communication, and with multiple cross-cultural relations and trajectories. We are an interdisciplinary association spanning linguistics, translation studies, philology and language teaching, cultural studies, communication, literature, history, anthropology, sociology, journalism, and other related fields. At this conference, may our discussions of the impact of the pandemic on our life and communication yield valuable insights that will help guide our changing world. On behalf of IAICS and all its officers, from the bottom of my heart, I thank the conference conveners, Gaby Semaan and Kasumi Yamazaki; and also Linda Rouillard, Chair of the Department of World Languages and Cultures; the leadership of the University of Toledo, including President, Gregory Postal, and Dean of the College of Arts and Letters, Melissa Gregory. Special thanks go also to Charlene Gary for administrative support, Youmna Karim for logistic support, Raj Nagisetty for technical support, as well as the faculty, staff and students, and all other persons involved in the organization of this historic conference.

I wish you all a very fruitful, memorable and enjoyable conference! Thank you!

Author Note

Joanna Radwańska-Williams holds the B.A. in English Literature & Linguistics (double major) and the Ph.D. in Linguistics from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She taught Slavic Linguistics (Polish and Russian) at Stony Brook University (1989-1994) and University of Illinois at Chicago (1994-1995), then English Applied Linguistics at Nanjing University, China (1996-1999) and the Chinese University of Hong Kong (1999-2003). In 2003 she joined the Macao Polytechnic Institute (now, Macao Polytechnic University), in Macao S.A.R. China, where she is a Professor of English at the MPU-Bell Centre of English in the School of Languages and Translation.

Joanna's Ph.D. dissertation research was published as *A Paradigm Lost: The Linguistic Theory of Mikołaj Kruszewski* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1993). Her interests include intercultural communication, history of linguistics, language teaching methodology (English, Polish, and Russian), phonetics, phonology, poetics, semiotics, sociolinguistics, cultural studies, and poetry creative writing. Her recent publications include the book chapter, "The Kazan School: Jan Baudouin de Courtenay and Mikołaj Kruszewski", in B. Elan Dresher & Harry van der Hulst (eds.), *The Oxford History of Phonology* (Oxford University Press, 2022, pp. 179-202), and the poem *Confucius Temple in Qufu*, in Gillian Bickley & Verner Bickley (eds.), *Mingled Voices 6: Proverse Poetry Prize Anthology* (Hong Kong: Proverse Publishing, 2022, pp. 142-143), for which she was awarded First Prize in the 2021 International Proverse Poetry Prize competition.

Joanna has been an active member of the International Association for Intercultural Communication Studies (IAICS) since 1991. She was elected Editor of *Intercultural Communication Studies (ICS)* in June 2010, and has served ever since, having edited Volumes XX to XXXI. She also served as President of IAICS from 2021 to 2023.