

Cultural norms and other people

Psychological Type and Culture Conference: Hawaii 2006



Peter Geyer

*There's been a nightly visit for such
a long time because of you
And it's got all the hallmarks of a
classic affair that we all know ...
It will remind us of what's inside us ...
It may surprise us in the end ...*

John Cale

*Travelling eternity road
What will you find there?
Carrying your heavy load
Searching to find a peace of mind ...*

The Moody Blues

Welcome home.

Ray Moody

Peter Geyer (INTP) researches and teaches personality from an MBTI and Jungian perspective in his own way.

alchymia@ozemail.com.au
www.petergeyer.com.au

I've always liked travelling to Hawai'i.

That might seem unremarkable, given the archipelago's holiday reputation, but a holiday island driven by a tourist economy doesn't exactly fit my notion of a place to go. But I like going there.

My first overseas trip, 15 or so years ago, was to Hawai'i. Apart from a flying visit on the way back from the USA not long after that, all my visits there have been for the **Psychological Type and Culture Conference**, held in Honolulu on a random schedule: 1996, 1998, 2001 and this year, all in January. And I always like to come to this place. It's like an affair of sorts, I suppose.

In many ways the Australian equivalent of Hawai'i—or Honolulu at least—is Surfers Paradise. The sultry weather and the soil have similarities with particular parts of Queensland, although the island temperature doesn't have the extremes we're used to in Australia.

If Hawai'i is where Americans go in order to go overseas but not leave America, the Australian equivalent is probably Kuta in Bali, although in both cases you can go elsewhere than the tourist spots to experience the land itself. SBS provides nightly worldwide weather information which includes Denpasar, but not Honolulu.

In Bali it's the landscape, temples and the music; in Hawai'i, it's Haleakala, Mauna Kea and Kilauea, mountains and coastline in my view. In Honolulu—a tourist centre where a high proportion of the tourists are Japanese, and many Europeans—I like the sweep of Waikiki Beach (with sand from Australia, which is a little droll, really) and Diamond Head, as well as the excellent Borders bookshop just out of reach of Ala Moana.

One of my aims in coming to these conferences is to pay a visit to this bookstore and the local Tower Records for CDs. It might sound strange, given what's also available, but I'm that kind of tourist.

It's fairly relaxed in Hawai'i, 'event time' rather than Western time, and I've found the streets to be pretty safe. I've walked around a bit in previous visits and got to the suburbs that don't get on posters, which makes the place real to me. That helps to give context to the facades of the hotels and their seaside restaurants, musicians and sunsets, enjoyable in their own way. I've found that mainland Americans who settle in Hawaii tend to take up Hawaiian ways as far as time and organisation goes.

The five-year gap between the last two conferences has to do with the death of Mary McCaulley, the prime driver behind the type and culture idea. To my mind, she was one of the few people at these gatherings to really appreciate both the sociology and the psychology. It's an important gap in human understanding, which needs to be significantly addressed.

The event is a research conference, mostly presenting data on the use of the MBTI in non-American countries. It's generally a small conference as numbers go, which has an advantage in being able to talk to many people, particularly presenters and significant people in type who happen to turn up.

The conferences usually combine research into the MBTI and type with a couple of culturally-oriented simulations, on the basis that cultural variants are things that the type community as a whole may not take sufficient notice of. The notion that preferences are content-free is a culturally informed observation.

The conference was held at the Ala Moana Hotel, next to a shopping centre that is an attraction for tourists, and a few minutes walk from the Waikiki area. Past venues have included hotels on the beach itself or elsewhere in the tourist area, and one at the University of Hawaii's Mano'a campus. The university has been a co-presenter, with CAPT, of this conference in the past, and people from other universities have also contributed and attended.

The 2006 conference was organised mostly by **Ray Moody** and **Jerry Macdaid**. I must admit I gave them some prompting and encouragement and promised to turn up with a couple of papers, but that was about all. Numbers were a little less than normal, and were diminished by sudden withdrawals for illness and family reasons by Nancy Barger, Linda Kirby and Jean Kummerow. A couple of people from Bulgaria and Finland were also unable to attend.

Presenters came from Finland, Australia, New Zealand, China, Hawaii and the US mainland. Locals were also strongly represented as attendees; there were many familiar faces, if not names remembered in my case.

The drive and flight were fairly uneventful, other than the pleasant surprise of meeting New Zealander **John Bathurst** and his family at Sydney airport. There are not many flights to Hawaii from this part of the world, so John and his family had to go first to Sydney, rather than a direct flight from New Zealand.

I arrived at the conference hotel the day before the scheduled start. On checking in I discovered that I'd messed up the dates and wasn't expected until the next day. This was fixed swiftly and pleasantly. As it was late morning, I wandered around to browse the book and CD establishments. After a few hours I returned to a message from Ray Moody welcoming me 'home', as it were, and providing advice about the conference presentations.

The hotel is a tall building. I found myself on the 32nd floor, with broad views to the mountains behind the city. At one time I saw it raining in a valley, yet nowhere else.

I enjoyed the view, but after a few days thought too much about the windy nights and my exposed position in the air, which was a little silly, really, and unusual.

The conference started out in 'event time' and continued on that way. It was nice to be at a conference where scheduling was not the main point of the exercise. As a presenter, you knew you were on next, whenever that was, and no-one seemed to be worried about the time presenters spent setting up, or if equipment wasn't working as it should.

Most of the presentations were effectively in plenaries, with a few requiring a choice between sessions. Not everybody realised there was a choice at those times. Papers from the majority of presentations were, however, left out for conference attendees to pick up, so that was really helpful.

The conference opened culturally with a presentation from **Farzana Nayani** on Individualism–Collectivism, following Hofstede's studies, which involved some group work. It's good to be reminded, particularly in the present situation in Australia and elsewhere, that different cultures have different presuppositions about appropriate behaviours, which naturally colours the expression of type.

Ray Moody then set the context for the conference with an overview of type and culture. The noted sociologist **Richard Brislin** followed up the next day with a simulation to illustrate cultural differences.

In general, presentations revolved around type and values, careers and leadership, mostly from Finland, often in collaboration with researchers from Bulgaria, and also Hawaii. **Shanping Wang** and **David Freeman** presented on the translation of the MBTI into Chinese characters, which was apparently an interesting session. 'Concept' is a word that doesn't readily translate into Chinese, for instance.

After the first day I realised that if there were to be photos of the event to go with my report, then somebody else had better take them, as I'm not good at taking people photos; it's intrusive for me in some way. The people photos are the work of **Brent Massey**, who genially took up the task.



Conference convenor **Ray Moody** with **Peter Geyer**

An interesting session for me was **Ray Moody** on type and abnormality, using results from the Big 5 perspective, and overlaying a simple type interpretation. Regrettably, but somewhat predictably, the more psychologically troubled members of the population tend to be INPs or ITs, or more blatantly, INTPs. Just goes to show how difficult it is to lead a 'normal' life. This was a rather humorous session, with a bit of laughter around my regular identification as someone who, under particular circumstances, could be mad, bad, and dangerous to know.

Bernie Ostrowski presented a couple of quirky papers on doing research on type (he's a preference-pair person), and some observations on type and careers. Bernie is an interesting person to talk to, and we had a chat later about type and personality and Walter Lowen's approach to type and the brain (1982; Scanlan 1987-8).

I presented to a small but interested audience on the Step II (Form K) research and theory collaboration between Ian Ball and myself. On the last day I presented to the whole group on consciousness and my experience teaching MBTI accreditation.

John Bathurst presented on Belbin's team roles and connections with the types. **Jerry Macdaid** gave an initially unscheduled presentation on the work of *Companies are people, too*, saying something about his role as a statistical adviser.

While the conference was proceeding there were also celebrations going on in the hotel. Celebrating a child's first birthday is apparently important here, in particular cultures at least. There was a Filipino celebration and a Japanese celebration in that time, as well as a church service.

A highlight of the conference was a moving presentation, by Jerry Macdaid, of the inaugural Mary McCaulley Cross-Cultural and International Research Award to **Vesa Routamaa** from the University of Vasa in Finland. Vesa has attended all the Hawaii conferences and has presented as far away as Sydney. Jerry had worked with Mary at CAPT for two decades or more.

In the evenings, people made their own way. I ate in the hotel the first night, and observed that the menu provided me with

a choice of 'starch' (potatoes, rice, etc), which seemed rather impersonal, if improving, in its tone.

Other days, I wandered around looking for a sunset. These were mostly cloudy; but I also met up with Jerry Macdaid and we chatted about various aspects of type happenings, and enjoyed some Hawai'ian music with an elegantly sinuous dancer. Music presentations in Hawai'i sometimes have a cabaret-like approach to their presentation, but this one had more to do with the personal joy of playing and singing in as authentic a way as possible (2000).

The conference is intended to be offered at a similar time each two years, and to be essentially a research conference, which distinguishes it from the APT and other conferences. This doesn't mean it's a dry event, as there are many insights given into other cultures by the way MBTI and type is used and understood. On the contrary, it's a recommended event.

After the conference, I had to change lodgings for a day or two before flying home. This place wasn't as well presented as the Ala Moana, but quite relaxing in its own way, as well as close to the key Waikiki areas. There are pluses and minuses to this: it was easier to enjoy a mango-daiquiri sunset, but a struggle to find a bookshop or similar to browse in.

The bookshop I discovered was adequate at best, but it was there. Interestingly, a worker there interrupted my reverie by asking, 'Are you finding the books you need?', which startled me somewhat, as I don't think of books in that way; perhaps a want, but not a need.

In some ways, life in Honolulu seems a curious amalgam of local approaches and general American customs. Most prominent to me are the money aspects: tips and local taxes. A 15% tip seems mandatory, which adds to your bill somewhat. This system is designed to provide a livelihood for the waiters performing the service, as though they're touting for business in the place they work. In Australia, there are minimum wages for these people (at least for the moment), and so a tip is an extra, rather than a basic. It's a different way of looking at employment.



Jerry Macdaid presents the Mary McCaulley Award to **Vesa Routamaa**

I also found out that stamps are sold at a profit outside post offices. This is illegal in Australia, where places that sell stamps do so for no profit, on the presumption that those wanting stamps will also buy other things. Finding a letter box was difficult. The presumption is that a hotel will mail them for you, but I prefer to be more non-personal and private, which is a difficulty in many ways as sometimes you get the idea that a personal interchange is considered necessary for every transaction.

I read a couple of the local papers to see what was going on: mostly local issues, sometimes intercultural issues, but also the usual stuff regarding corruption in government departments and elsewhere, job losses and achievements. The language seems more clear or blunt, and different words are used from what we might use in Australia. There was also the obligatory article on Baby Boomers and Generation X, which seemed a little simpler than what's been presented on the topic here, although the accuracy was still as tendentious.

I checked in at the airport a couple of hours before my flight, as is my custom, particularly since the 1996 conference when I realised around midnight that my flight was leaving in half an hour or so. I searched for the Qantas Club without success, until I discovered it by accident, but only after I'd unwittingly crossed into a restricted area.

The Club had issues of the travel magazine *American Way*, published for the Qantas partner American Airlines, so I thought I'd have a cultural glance. The magazine seems to have a series on what they call Road Warriors, people who, for business reasons, spend too much time on planes. So there are vignettes about various people: where they go, stay, eat, relax and so on. The southern hemisphere didn't seem to get a look in at all, but I suppose that's Qantas's area mostly, so not reported on.



Photos: Brent Massey, Peter Geyer, Jerry Macdaid

It's very corporate, but not unthinkingly so. In a 'Recommended Recreational Reading' column were a variety of responses, some unusual, which was interesting. One of the respondents, Patrick Kowalczyk, recommended Barbara Ehrenreich's *Nickel and Dimed*, which almost became a purchase at the place where I was asked about my needs. This book, which has been excerpted in the Australian press, is about the author's experience working in low-paid jobs, and living that way as well. Very powerful social research.

Kowalczyk found it 'better than any self-help or management book', and 'a powerful reminder to treat all people—whether waitress, employee, or family member—with respect and dignity'. When I read that, I wondered whether he also thought there might be a need for systemic change in a culture that allows such inequality. But that would be my perspective, and may not be a cultural one.

There were also interesting items on the rise of a company, Whole Foods, which sells organic produce (Carroll, 2006), and a sharp article regarding sloppy thinking in business (Greenberg, 2006), e.g.

- outsourcing work to India or Asia saves money long-term (*no*);
- solid market research increases the odds of success and minimises bad decisions (*yes*)
- tighter controls and management methods keep workers focused and on track (*no*);
- driving down product and wage costs is essential in a low-margin business (*no*);
- incentive pay boosts productivity and generates desired behaviour and results (*no*).

To be honest, hardly any of that is rocket science, but it seems to be beyond many of the people in charge of public and private organisations. I hope they caught a relevant flight.

So, all in all, cultural learning of all sorts, wherever you look. In a different form it will all be in Honolulu, in January 2008, for the next conference. I'll be there. ❖



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