



AAOU-2010 Conference Report

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The 24th Annual Conference of the Asian Association of Open Universities (AAOU) was held on Tuesday 26th October, Wednesday 27th, and Thursday 28th, hosted by Hanoi Open University, Hanoi, Vietnam. The AAOU Board Meetings were held the Tuesday morning and afternoon. This is a brief summary of the Conference. Other details may be found at the Hanoi Open University Conference website <http://aaou2010.hou.edu.vn/> and perhaps at the AAOU website.

This year the Conference was at the Melia Hanoi Hotel - a lovely five-star hotel in the Old Quarter near Hoan Kiem Lake <http://www.meliahanoi.com>. This hotel was convenient for the Noi Bai international airport being only 40 minutes by road.

The AAOU Conference was one of the one thousand special activities arranged within Hanoi for 2010 - which is the 1000-year anniversary of the city founding. Almost at the same time, there was an ASEAN Ministers meeting at the Conference venue, so the lobby area was fairly busy. Despite six guest elevators, at several times these did not work, or suddenly stopped. Those inside at the time were a little disturbed. The Melia Hotel was expensive and many guests stayed at other cheaper hotels nearby. The Club Lounge floor staff were excellent as to be expected, although one would rather be encouraged to eat at the El Patio ground floor restaurant that offers a splendid array of food and drinks plus a la carte, beer and wine all included for about US\$30 for each person - truly a bargain.

The Conference was particularly hectic, and perhaps more so for those rushing off on various sightseeing tours arranged for that Friday, Saturday and Sunday. It is generally the case that some scheduled participants cannot arrange flights or are otherwise delayed from attending. One might take the opinion that so long as they have paid for the Conference attendance fee then their actual attendance doesn't matter. However, it is annoying to go into a room to listen to a speaker only to discover that he or she is absent. That said, this year the Conference Secretariat accepted 200 speakers and scheduled only 90 time slots for them. Consequently there was turmoil. The room allocation sheets were changing rapidly and posted up minutes before a session started - posted up here is perhaps not the best verb, since six or so sheets were vertically pinned on a board with the lowest just a few inches from the floor. While aerobic champions could likely bend adequately, this author for one did not enjoy the risk of another hernia. We have often suggested that conferences these days should be re-organised better. All paid-up registrants should have online access to the full papers immediately on payment. The conference itself can then focus on interactive discussions on the papers, rather than a chaotic speed-reading aloud of the first few pages with little time for any meaningful interchange of ideas. One model worthwhile considering would be cracker-barrel layout of rooms with a roundtable for a few authors and interested participants to discuss in earnest the specific papers.

This year the theme was open distance learning towards building sustainable global learning communities. There were five sub-themes as follows :- (1) ideology and philosophy, (2) partnership and communication, (3) methodology and technology, (4) sustainability, access, equity and quality, and (5) opportunities and challenges. The Conference design involved at least one key-note speech on each of these five themes, and arranged as Plenary Sessions although only two or three questions were asked each time.

The keynote speakers (and their presentation title) were Gajaraj DHANARAJAN (Thoughts on open distance education : Has it outlived its course), Jon BAGGALEY (Sustainability, access, equity and quality), Asha KANWAR (Overcoming inequality in an unequal world : sustaining partnerships in open and distance learning), LAM Quang Thiep (Building a strong system of open and distance learning - a measure for sustaining development of higher education - proposed for Viet Nam), Insung JUNG (ICT-supported distance education for marginalized populations in rural Asia : opportunities and challenges), Hiromitsu ISHI (Partnership and communication in open and distance education for building communities of lifelong learning), Anuwar ALI (Going global : ensuring sustainability, access, equity and quality in open and distance learning), and GATOT Hari Priowirjanto (Enhancing open and distance learning through ICT optimization : SEAMOLEC initiatives for Southeast Asia).

The Meritorious Service Award this year was given to Atwi SUPARMAN of Universitas Terbuka, Indonesia, and everyone enjoyed the acceptance speech from Atwi through pre-recorded audiovisual conferencing.

The Gold Medal Award for best paper was won by Jin Gon SHON (KNOU) for his current work entitled 'e-Portfolio standardization for sustainable learning communities'. There were two Silver Medal Awards. These were won by Ishan Sudeera ABEYWARDENA & Ho Sinn CHYE (WOU) for their paper 'Development of a computer-aided ODL course development

tracking system (CDTS)', and by Juvy Lizette GERVACIO for her paper 'Tutors and learners without borders : In a relationship but it's complicated'.

The General Board was uncommonly exciting this year, with a potentially divisive animated discussion on how to refer to some member institutions, plus the exciting election of a new president and the new executive board. Tat Meng WONG was elected unopposed after every one else dropped out during the General Board Meeting on the first day to be the next president of the AAOU. There were initially only 24 eligible voting Full Members present out of a total 46, but after a couple of others were found which had not exactly paid their fees then the number increased to 26, taking the number above 50% and quorum. We offer our congratulations to Tat Meng WONG. At several times during the Conferences we heard that President Tat Meng WONG plans to now revise the Constitution of the AAOU, and we should be interested to see what this will mean for the rest of us.

Next year the 25th AAOU Conference will be hosted by President Tat Meng WONG and Wawasan Open University in Penang, Malaysia, and its website is <http://www.wou.edu.my/aaou25/>. The dates will be Wednesday 28th, Thursday 29th and Friday 30th September. It is perhaps worthwhile here to put this in uppercase **SEPTEMBER** and in red, since this is unusually early, and prospective participants will need to adjust their pacing and schedules. The deadline for abstracts is accordingly one month earlier than last year, and is 30th **MAY** 2011. Our theme next year will be 'Transforming Asia through open distance learning'. There are five sub-themes as follows :- (1) culture and social change, (2) quality, (3) business model and the role of partnership in ODL, (4) technology, and (5) future trends. Details of these sub-themes can be found at <http://www.wou.edu.my/aaou25/abstract.html> on the conference website. The venue will likely be the 5-star Evergreen Laurel Hotel <http://www.evergreenhotel.net>. Surely we can be assured of a grand display next year in Penang.

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Then in 2012, the 26th AAOU Annual Conference will be hosted by President Hiromitsu ISHI and the Open University of Japan <http://www.ouj.ac.jp>. This will be held in October as usual. In 2012 the conference theme will be 'Improving educational services in open and distance learning : International perspectives' with tentative sub-themes as follows :- (1) technologies for teaching and learning, (2) innovations of educational practices in lifelong learning, (3) student support services, (4) functions of local study centers, (5) faculty professional developments, (6) quality assurance, and (7) non-academic support. Further details may be obtained by email kokusai@ouj.ac.jp from them nearer the time. We look forward to OUJ hosting this in Japan.

Two other points can be added here. (1) All participants are grateful to Jon BAGGALEY and Tian BELAWATI for free copies of their new book 'Distance education technologies in Asia' published by Sage. This is an interesting and useful book - easy to read and introducing some background information on more than a dozen Asian countries. And (2) As usual on the sidelines of this AAOU Conference we had the annual ASODE General Meeting. This was held in the Executive Board Room in the Melia Hanoi Hotel. We are grateful to the Manager of the Hotel for his extending such kind hospitality to us. Various issues were covered at that time, and these are mentioned in the Editorial of this volume 8 issue 2 of AJDE.

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