

The University of Hong Kong
Department of Psychology

Departmental Seminar

***Control orientations among Asians:
Beyond primary-secondary dichotomy***

Date: January 28, 2013 (Monday)

Time: 11:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Venue: Room 813, 8/F The Jockey Club Tower, Centennial Campus,
HKU

Speaker: Professor Susumu Yamaguchi
Department of Psychology
University of Tokyo

Adequate control over environment is essential for individuals' psychological well-being, let alone their survival. Despite this widely accepted view, some researchers have claimed that Japanese prefer to change themselves to fit well with the environment (secondary control) rather than attempting to change existing realities for their liking (primary control) (e.g., Weisz, Rothbaum, & Blackburn, 1984). More recently, empirical research in Japan as well as that in China demonstrated that a simple dichotomy between primary and secondary control cannot explain cultural differences in control orientations across cultures. For example, we asked Japanese undergraduate students to answer their preferred control strategy when they face various interpersonal conflicts, which were described in vignettes (Sawaumi, Yamaguchi, Park, submitted). Consistent with the universality hypothesis that preference for primary control (i.e., control over environment) is universal across cultures, Japanese participants preferred to exert primary control strategies rather than secondary control. Furthermore, it was found that Japanese repertoire of primary control strategies is larger than it had been presumed: Japanese employ various primary control strategies, in addition to direct personal control (which is a prototypical primary control), when they are concerned about interpersonal harmony, such as indirect personal control, direct/indirect collective control, and proxy control. These results suggest that Asians attempt to exert control over environment in a way that does not interrupt their harmonious relationships with others. Thus, we argue that cultural differences in control orientations reside in how people exert primary control, which is universally more preferable to secondary control.