

# Fear and Respect: Overlap of Emotional Domain in the Japanese and Thai Lexicons

Chavalin Svetanant, Macquarie University, New South Wales, Australia

*Abstract:* Feelings of fear as well as feelings of respect are language-specific. They occasionally occur separately but they are also likely to share the same emotional domain. When fear and respect are combined, the result is either a feeling of "awe" which implies a sense of fear rather than respect, or a feeling of "reverence" which implies a sense of respect rather than fear. Ancient Japanese employed the word "kashikoshi" to express a sense of fear that came together with a sense of respect toward transcendental existences such as divinities or emperors. A sense of fear in the word "kashikoshi" faded, and it was gradually replaced by a sense of respect or a sense of gratitude. In modern times, the word "kashikoi", derived from "kashikoshi", describes a state of excellence or superiority, particularly the quality of being clever and sensible that usually brings a feeling of admiration from others. In Thai, the word "kreng" has come to be used for the expression of respect or deference as well as a fear or worry. Originally, it was used to express a respectful feeling toward a ruling king from the divine spirits, as found in "Silajaruek Pho Khun Ramkamhaeng" (Stone Inscription of King Ramkamhaeng), the earliest known inscribed stone of Siamese in Sukhothai period (1238-1438 A.D.) The word began to emphasize a stronger sense of fear toward the divine right of the Kings when absolute monarchy was introduced during the Ayutthaya period (1351-1767 A.D.) The extended meaning came to include a sense of worry. The current usage can be found in the compound word "kreng jai" (to be considerate, to be afraid of offending or making a trouble on others), which is regarded as the most distinctive Thai cultural value.

Keywords: Emotion Words, Fear, Respect, Thai, Japanese

## Introduction

**T**HE RESEARCH PAPER starts from a simple question; "Are human emotions universal or culture-specific?" In recent psychological literature, it hypothesizes that human emotions are "innate" and "universal". The theory is proposed with a set of 10 fundamental human emotions as 'interest', 'joy', 'surprise', 'sadness', 'anger', 'disgust', 'contempt', 'fear', 'shame/shyness', and 'guilt' (Izard 1977:17, Izard and Buecheler 1980:168, Ekman 1980 and 1989, Johnson-Laird and Oatley 1989). The relevant literature suggests that such feelings are perceived universally as distinct emotions, and recognizable among all human kinds by the way they are expressed.

However, systematic empirical investigations on a broad cross-linguistic and cross-cultural research on human emotions, argues that the emotion terms available in a given lexicon provide an important clue to the speakers' culture, and that differences in ways of talking about emotions are connected with differences in the emotion themselves because "the emotional lexicons of different languages vary considerably and this points to profound differences between ideas and beliefs about emotions and between cultural models of emotions (Wierzbicka, 1992)". Therefore, it cannot be taken for granted that the English words listed

---

The International Journal of the Humanities

Volume 8, Number 10 (2011) <http://www.Humanities-Journal.com>, ISSN 1447-9508

© Common Ground, Chavalin Svetanant, All Rights Reserved, Permissions:  
cg-support@commongroundpublishing.com



COMMON  
GROUND

in such a set of fundamental human emotions as 'joy', 'fear', or 'shame' are neutral and culture-independent as universal human concepts or basic psychological realities (cf. Wierzbicka 1992, Goddard 2006, and Harkins et al. 2001 among others)

Recent cross-linguistic evidence also raises a significant question on a conceptual connection between different labels of emotional experiences in different languages. Although a similar emotional experience can be lexicographically categorized by the same group of words in a specific linguistic context, it may not be applicable across thousands of different languages even with a translation from dictionaries because "the link between cultural identity and emotions identified by particular words, often held to be untranslatable" (Harkins et al. 2001). A good example of a practically untranslatable emotion concept that shows a good connection between a specific culture and its own set of "ready-made emotion words" is "kreng chai" in Thai (= <literally> awe heart, <practically> to be afraid or fear of offending or making trouble toward others). "Kreng chai" is regarded as the most distinctive Thai cultural value which links to a significant aspect of Thai cultural norms and its social relations. It is a lexicalized concept which is particularly salient in Thai culture and there is no equivalent to any of these in English words (Svetanant 2003).

The research aims to investigate the use of 'kashikoshi' and 'kreng' in Japanese and Thai lexicon according to each own historical and cultural context to clarify the development conceptual domains of 'fear' and 'respect' across time and across Japanese and Thai cultures. It takes a historical and cross-linguistic semantic approach for textual analysis to examine the change of emotional concepts – vertically (across time) and horizontally (across culture). Literary samples from a wide range of ancient and modern literature including slang and new words in fictions and newspaper, lexicalized items in the dictionaries, as well as conventional phrases and idioms, are used to provide concrete contexts and illustrate the use of emotion terms

### **'Fear' VS 'Respect': Two Sides of the Same Coin**

Feelings of fear as well as feelings of respect might be considered universal but paradoxically, they can also be language-specific. They occasionally occur separately but they are also likely to share the same emotional domain. An example of this may be found in an indefinable feeling toward God or other supernatural beings. When fear and respect are combined, the result is either a feeling of "awe" which implies a sense of fear rather than respect, or a feeling of "reverence" which implies a sense of respect rather than fear.

'Fear' is counted as one of the 10 fundamental human emotions (Izard 1977:17, Izard and Buecheler 1980:168, Ekman 1980 and 1989, Johnson-Laird and Oatley 1989) while 'respect' is not. These specific types of semantic structures actually share a cognitive domain but are associated with different type of conceptual structure. 'Fear' represents an unpleasant inner feeling toward someone or something which are considered superior and more powerful than you either physically or spiritually. When you fear someone or something, you feel that you can be harmed or offended by its existence so this feeling usually causes you feel uncomfortable, unsafe and insecure.

On the other hand, 'respect' is a pleasant feeling toward someone or something which are considered superior and more powerful than yourself. The object which arouses your inner feeling is very similar to what scares you. However, you do not feel a sense of danger toward that object unless it is accompanied by a sense of fear. When you respect someone or

something, it is usually focused more on a sense of deep admiration, rather than a sense of fear.

Other English key terms which can be included in the same conceptual domains of ‘fear’ and ‘respect’ are, for example; ‘awe’, ‘reverence’, ‘deference’, ‘afraid’, and ‘worry’.

### ‘Kashikoshi’: Dynamic Transition of Semantic Structure

*Nihon Kokugo Daijiten*, the largest *Japanese-Japanese dictionary* published in 14 volumes by Shougakukan, defines the meaning of ‘kashikoshi’ as below. (Note: English translation by the author).

1. *a state of dreadful supernatural powers and a feeling of awe toward such dreadful supernatural power*
2. *a awe-inspiring and respectful feeling toward a person of noble birth or authority*
3. *a state of excellence which is honoured and respected by others, a feeling inspired from that state*
4. *a state of importance of people or things, which is respected or regarded by others, a feeling inspiring from that state*
5. *a state desirable state of things, a delighted feeling arising from such state*
6. *a state of skilfulness or ingenious ability to calculate a good opportunity for oneself*
7. *(adverb) tremendously, extremely*

Associated characters are one of the significant clues to the conceptual change in Japanese semantic system. According to Kenkyusha New Japanese-English Character Dictionary, there are, at least, three associated Chinese characters attached to the word ‘kashikoshi’ in Japanese language.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 畏 | 1) to be overawed, stand in awe, fear<br>2) be awed, humble oneself, listen respectfully |
| 恐 | 1) fear, be afraid of, dread   |
| 賢 | 1) wise, intelligent, sagacious, bright  |

The use of these three associated characters can be examined from the literary samples as follows

1) 畏 / 恐 - ‘kashikoshi’ as a feeling of awe toward god, emperor and supernatural beings. The word is firstly found in *Kojiki*<sup>1</sup>, followed by *Manyoushuu*<sup>2</sup> during 8th century. Both are written in *Manyougana*, a Japanese ancient writing system that employs Chinese characters to represent sounds in Japanese language.

<sup>1</sup> Kojiki or “Record of Ancient Matters” is the oldest chronicle of Japan, dating from the early 8th century. It is written and composed by emperor’s order.

<sup>2</sup> Manyoshu or “Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves” is the oldest existing collection of Japanese poetry, compiled in 8th century

A. Watatsumino kashikokimichiwo yasukekumo nakunayamikite imadanimō shimonakuyukamoto

(*Manyōshū* 3694)

= (Praying to the god of sea) May the **awing** sea path be safe from sea disaster  
(English translation by the author)

The word ‘kashikoshi’ was used in a wider range of meaning in Heian period (8<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> century) when it was not only used toward gods, god-like emperors, and supernatural powers but also in a more pleasant way toward an ordinary human being who is in a high rank of social status, or people of high moral character. Those examples can be found in *The Tale of Genji* (~11<sup>th</sup> century), the first modern Japanese novel written during the peak of Heian period (8<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> century). The use of ‘kashikoshi’ in *The Tale of Genji* expresses a mixed feeling of an awe-inspiring and respectful feeling toward a person of noble birth or authority, rather than a fear toward gods, and supernatural powers as in *Kojiki* and *Manyōshū*.

B) “Me mo mie wa beranuni, kaku kashikoki ooseigoto wo hikari ni tenan” totemitamafu  
(*Tale of Genji–Kiritsubo*)

= “Though tears darken my eyes” the lady said, “by the light of his **most wise and gracious** words....” and she began to read.

(English translation by Royall Tyler, 2001)

This extended usage in *the Tale of Genji* added a new semantic element to the word ‘kashikoshi’, which later developed to a new meaning attached with the different associated Chinese character, 賢. In other words, the meaning of ‘kashikoshi’ switched from the feeling of awe and fear (畏 / 恐), to focus more on a brighter side of the same coin, that is, a feeling of reverence and respect. Kawabata (1990) found 50 usages of ‘kashikoshi’ toward human beings out of 78 examples (68%) during this period.

2) 賢 - ‘kashikoshi’ as a state of excellence which is honoured and respected by others, a feeling inspired from that state toward a person with an adorable character or ability. The beginning of this usage, again, started from *The Tale of Genji* during Heian period.

B) Ben mo, itozae kashikoki hakasenite, ihikahashitarukoto domonamu, itokiyo arikeru  
(*Tale of Genji – Kiritsubo*)

= The controller himself was a man of **deep learning**, and his conversation with the visitor was most interesting.

(English translation by R. Tyler, 2001)

‘Kashikoshi’ later became an adjective of generic characters with a meaning of ‘wise, clever, smart’, similarly to ‘kirei (beautiful)’ or ‘yasashii (kind)’ in modern Japanese usage. The word itself can be used to describe a character of a person, or in a more extended meaning, a character or state of a thing or an action that is considered sensible and logical.

D) Kare wa **kashikoi** node hiyou ga sukunakute sumu keiketsuhou o mitsuketa.  
= He was **clever** to find a cheaper solution.

E) Yosan o herasu koto wa **kashikoi** kettei deshita.  
= It was a **wise** decision to reduce the budget.

### 'Kreng': Mixture of 'Fear' & 'Respect' in Thai Language

Let us start from the lexical meaning of 'kreng' compiled from Thai monolingual and bilingual distinguished dictionaries.

- to respect, to fear, not to dare (Siamese English Dictionary, 1854, 1896 )
- ( V. ) to fear; to respect; to revere, ( Adj. ) respectful; fitted to awaken esteem (Mcfarland, George Bradley. Thai-English Dictionary, 1944)
- to worry, to bother about (Royal Thai Dictionary , 1999)

*(Translation from Thai to English by author )*

'Kreng' also has a wide range of use, varied from ancient to modern times. However, the switch of semantic structure of 'kreng' is well-kept within in the same conceptual domain, not in a dynamic way as what we have observed in the Japanese word 'kashikoshi'.

1) 'Kreng' in The Inscription of King Rama Gamhen of Sukhodaya (13th century), the oldest known Writing of Siam (Thailand) → to regard, to respect (a respectful fear between the king and a demon-spirit of the realm)

F) Bueang Huanon Mueang Sukhothai Ni... / Mi Phra Kha Phung Phi / Thepphayada Nai Khao An Nan Pen Yai Kwa Thuk Phi Nai Mueang Ni / Khun Phu Dai Thue Mueang Sukhothai Ni Lae / Wai Di Phli Thuk / Mueang Ni Thiang / Mueang Ni Di / Phi Wai Bo Di / Phli Bo Thuk / Phi Nai Khao An Bo Khum Bo **Kreng** / Mueang Ni Hai

= ... In yonder mountain is a demon-spirit in this realm. If any Prince ruling this realm of Sukhothai reverences him well with proper offerings, this realm stands firm, this realm prospers. If the spirit be not revered well, if the offerings be not right, the spirit in the mountain does not protect, does not **regard**; -this realm perishes.

(English translation by Bradley, Cornelius Beach (1909) and George Coedes (1924))

This 'kreng' shows a social relationship between King of Sukhothai who **physically** ruled the realm and the demon spirit who **spiritually** protected the realm. In Thai cultural context during Sukhothai period, it is considered an equal and interdependent relationship between allies rather than a vertical relationship between higher and lower rank (that usually comes out of fear).

2) 'Kreng' in The Inscription of King Lithai (14th century) → not dare to do something out of deference toward a person (based on horizontal relationships)

G) Phokhun Pha Mueang Chueng Yang Mueang Sukhothai Khao Dai Wen Mueang Kae Phokhun Bang Klang Thao / Phokhun Bang Klang Thao Mi Su Khao Phuca **Kreng**

Kae Mitsahai / Phokhun Pha Mueang Chueng Ao Phon Ok Phokhun Bang Klang Thao  
Chueng Khao Mueang

= Pho Khun Pha Mu'ang could then enter Mu'ang Sukhodaya. He entrusted the government of it to Pho Khun Bang Klang Thao. But Pho Khun Bang Klang Thao did not dare to enter (Sukhodaya) **out of deference** towards his ally. Pho Khun Pha Mu'ang withdrew his army, and then Pho Khun Bang Klang Thao entered the city.

(English translation by George Coedes (1924))

George Coedes, a distinguished archaeologist and historian of Southeast Asian made a note on his translation as follows.

*"The word 'kreg' which I have translated "out of deference" might equally well be rendered by "through fear". It seems that, from motives either of fear or of respect, Bang Klang Thao insisted on the army of his ally evacuating the town before he would take up the government of Sukhodaya"*

From the translator's interpretation, it is obvious that 'kreg' expresses a feeling of King Bang Klang Thao who was reluctant to enter a town while his ally, King Pha Mu'ang, another King who fought together against Khmer in the battle, has not yet evacuated. This reluctant feeling did not come out of fear, but rather discretion as it is believed to be an ancient tradition to have only one ruling King in the town. Again, this is considered as an equal relationship based on mutual consideration rather than a vertical relationship based on fear.

During Ayutthaya period (14<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> century), the political ruling system was changed from a paternal administration between a king and his people to absolute monarchy under the god kings who were believed to have descended from gods or deities. This political concept was strongly influenced by the ancient Khmer and Hindu religious belief.

During this period, the use of 'kreg' in Thai literature slightly switched from a sense of respect to focus more on a sense of fear toward the existence of such supernatural beings as the god kings as well as his absolute power.

3) 'Kreg' in Lilit Yuanpai (15th-16th century) → to fear or to be frightened → to be worried that something bad may happen

G) *Taengtang Wai Laeo Chueng Khuen Khlai/Lae Na  
Chak Yu Nan Khlaen Kreg/Pin Kela*

= After King Tilokkarat appointed the feudal lord in charge at Chiangchuan, he decided to return to Chiangmai in a sudden because he was **in fear toward** King Trailokkanat (that King Trailokkanat may dispatch the army to the city...)

In *Lilit Yuanpai*, 'kreg' is also used to express a feeling of fear or worry toward something bad that may happen in the future

H) *Krung Lao Loi Khayat Na / Ta Tai / Sak Hae  
Chak Yu Mueang Kreg Kan / Bo Dai*

= King Tilokkarat was so **worried** that he might not be able to protect the people and the city when King Trailokkanat started the attack.

'Kreng' as an emotion term to express 'worry' are also found in other literature during Ayutthaya period such as *Lilit Phra Lo*, or *The Collection of Old Poems*.

I) *Wang Rat Cha Rue Ma Paen/Pen Pa*  
*Kreng Cha Paen Chai Chao/Huang Laeo Luem Riam*

(The Collection of Old Poems)

= ... Even the old palace has changed to a forest. So I **fear** that your heart will also change and I will be forgotten.

4 There are currently a variety of 'kreng' used in modern Thai. Most of them can be tracked down from its historical usage since Sukhothai period.

4.1 to be reluctant to do something (out of discretion)

J) *Ayu Hang Kan Tang Yoe/Thueng Cha Sanitsanom Kan Yangngai / Banda Run Nong*  
*Ko Khong Rusuek Kreng Kreng Phuak Phi Phi Yu Bang*

= There are many year of age difference between them. No matter how close they are, the juniors must be, more or less, **reluctant to offend or make trouble toward** to their seniors.

4.2 to be frightened (either out of respect or fear)

K) *Prachachon Tong Mai Kreng Kap Itthiphon*  
= People must not **be frightened of** the power of authorities.

4.3 to worry (that something bad may happen)

L) *Khao Pai Thakthuang Ik / Phro Kreng Wa Khao Cha Luem*

= ...She went to remind him again because she **was worried** that he might forget

### 'Fear' and 'Respect': Development of Conceptual Domains across Time and Culture in the Japanese and Thai Lexicons

According to the above lexical investigation in Japanese and Thai, emotional domain of "Fear" and "Respect" is overlapping across culture as well as across time in the same culture. The historical approach conducted in this research gives a vertical perspective how the meaning is developed across time in the same culture, while the comparative approach significantly shows the conceptual similarities or differences across two cultures.

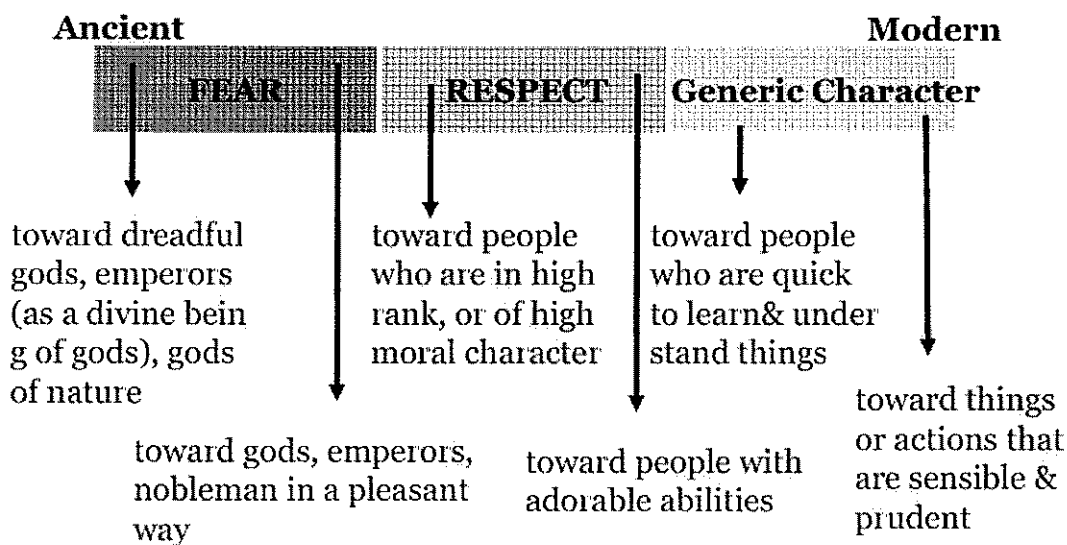
Ancient Japanese employed the word 'kashikoshi' to express a sense of fear which is accompanied by a sense of respect toward transcendental existences such as divinities and emperors. It was originally found in *Kojiki* (Records of Ancient Matters), the oldest Japanese chronicle, and *Manyo u shuu* (Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves), a collection of Japanese poetry, compiled in the 8<sup>th</sup> century. A sense of fear in the word 'kashikoshi' faded slightly

when the word passed through medieval times, and it was gradually replaced by a sense of respect or a sense of gratitude. In modern times, the word ‘kashikoi’, which is derived from ‘kashikoshi’, has been used to describe a state of excellence or superiority, particularly the quality of being clever and sensible that usually brings a feeling of admiration from others.

On the other hand, in Thai, the word ‘kreng’ has come to be used for the expression of respect or deference as well as a fear or worry. Originally, it was used to express a respectful feeling toward a ruling king from the divine spirits, as found in *Silajaruek Pho Khun Ramkamhaeng* (Stone Inscription of King Ramkamhaeng), the earliest known inscribed stone of Siamese in Sukhothai period (13<sup>th</sup> -15<sup>th</sup> century). The significant implication of the word began to emphasize on a stronger sense of fear toward the divine right of the Kings when absolute monarchy was introduced into the kingdom during the Ayuthaya period (14<sup>th</sup> - 18<sup>th</sup> century). Later, the extended meaning of the word came to include a sense of worry, while the most current popular usage can be found in the compound word “kreng chai” (to be considerate, to be afraid of offending or making a trouble on others), which is regarded as the most distinctive Thai cultural value.

In conclusion, the development of conceptual domains - ‘Fear’ and ‘Respect’ across time and culture in Japanese and Thai can be summarized in the following chart.

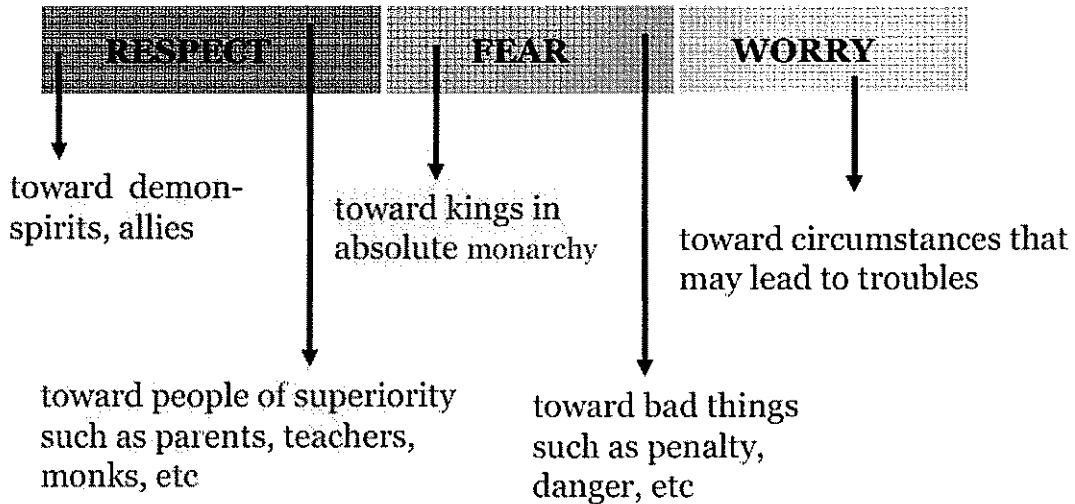
## ‘Kashikoshi’





# ‘Kreng’

===A wide range of uses from Ancient to Modern ===



## References

- Bradley, Cornelius Beach. "The Oldest Known Writing in Siamese" *The Journal of the Siam Society* (1909): 6
- Coedes, George. *Recueil des Inscriptions du Siam I: Inscriptions de Sukhodaya*, Bangkok Times Press, 1924.
- Coedes, George. "The Origin of the Sukhodaya Dynasty." *The Journal of the Siam Society* (1924): 14-1.
- Goddard, Cliff. *Ethnopragmatics: Understanding Discourse in Cultural Context*, Applications of Cognitive Linguistics. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2006.
- Griswold, A. B. and Prasert na Nagara. "The Inscription of King Rama Gamhen of Sukhodaya (1292 A. D.), Epigraphic and Historical Studies No. 9" *The Journal of the Siam Society* (1971): 59-2.
- Harkins, Jean, and Anna Wierzbicka. *Emotions in Crosslinguistic Perspective*, Cognitive Linguistics Research. Berlin ; New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2001
- Kawabata, Yumi. "Kodaigo ni okeru ikei goi ni tsuiteno kousatsu" *Kokugo bungaku kenkyuu* (1990): 26.
- Klausner, William. *Reflections on Thai Culture*. Amarin Printing Group, 1987.
- Nichio, Toraya. *Keiyoushi no imi – youhou no kijutsuteki kenkyuu*, Shuuei shuppan, 1972.
- Reynolds, Frank and Reynolds, Mani. *Three Worlds According to King Ruang: A Thai Buddhist Cosmology*, Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of California, 1982
- Sakakura, Atsuyoshi. "Nihongo no keitou to rekishi." In *Iwanami kouza nihongo 12*, Iwanami shoten, 1978.
- Svetanant, Chavalin. "A Comparative Study of Words Expressing Emotive Connotation and Mentality in Japanese and Thai." Ph.D. diss., Kyoto University, 2003.
- Syamananda, Rong. *A History of Thailand*. Thai Watana Panich, 1981
- Tsunoda, Bunei. *Heianjidaishijiten*, Kadogawa, 1994.
- Tyler, Royall. *The Tale of Genji*, Penguin Group, 2001.
- Uchida, Masanori. *Manyou no chi: Seiritsu to izen*, Hanawasensho, 1992.

Wierzbicka, Anna. "The Semantics of Emotion: Fear and its relatives in English." *Australian Journal of Linguistics* (1990): 10-2.

Wierzbicka, Anna. *Semantics, Culture, and Cognition: Universal Human Concepts in Culture-Specific Configurations*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.

### **About the Author**

*Dr. Chavalin Svetanant*

Dr. Chavalin Svetanant is a full-time lecturer at the Department of International Studies, Faculty of Arts, Macquarie University. She was awarded PhD in Cultural and Regional Studies (Japanese Linguistics) from Kyoto University in 2003. Her research concerns "Language", "Thought" and "Culture" in comparative semantic system and cultural contexts. Her major publications include "A Comparative Study of Heart and Mind-related Words in Thai and Japanese" (2001), "Yasashi: An Adjective with Emotive Connotation" (2002), "Word History of 'kreng'" (2003), "Ancient Japanese Literature in Thailand and Introduction of Ancient Thai Literature" (2005), "Good or Evil?: Perspectives from Japanese Proverbs and Expression" (2006), "Cultural Conception of 'Ki' and 'Kokoro': Linguistic Perspectives on Japanese and Thai Mentality" (2007), *A Half-Century in Thai Studies*, Book Translation from *Michi wa Hirakeru: Tai Kenkyu no Goju Nen* written by Yoneo Ishii (2007), "The State of Japanese Studies in Thailand" (2007), "Tertiary Education of Japanese Language Study: Case Study of Australia and Thailand" (2008), 'Revealing Linguistic Power: Discourse Practice toward "Youth" in Japanese and Thai Newspapers' (2009).