

Experimental Psi Research in Asia and Australia

This article gives an overview of the history and relative contributions in the field of psi research by labs and individuals in Australia, Japan, China and India.

Australia

1930 to 1960

Parapsychologists in the years between 1930 and 1960 were mainly concerned with collecting cases of apparent psychic phenomena, notably from aboriginal 'medicine men'. Examples of putative long-distance telepathy, psychic surgery and communion with animals were collected. Psi abilities were tested under semi-controlled conditions using pictures of Australian native animals as targets; the results were not significant. Subsequent research¹ employing standard Zener cards tested ESP ability of aborigines where adequate controls were employed, such as separating senders and receivers in different rooms, and good randomization of targets. Results were independently significant for seven of twelve subjects, and overall scoring was highly significant. Additionally, important relationships were found between psi scoring and psychological traits.

Jürgen Keil

[Jürgen Keil](#), based at the University of Tasmania, investigated poltergeist cases, especially in the United States in collaboration with others. He critically investigated the Russian psychic [Ninel Kulagina](#), with particular regard to fraudulent methods she might have used to manufacture apparent instances of [psychokinesis](#).²

Maurice Marsh

Maurice Marsh gained a PhDs in parapsychology for research at South Africa's Rhodes University on ESP. He has subsequently researched the relationship between recipients and agents in ESP tests, finding significant correlations, also psychological factors favouring poltergeist activity.³

Peter Delin

Clinical psychologist Peter Delin began his career as a university lecturer in psychology at the University of Adelaide in 1963. He is best-known for his collaboration with Michael Thalbourne, leading to the development of the Australian Sheep-Goat Scale and to the concept of transliminality, a term that describes the transition of psychological perceptions and emotions in and out of consciousness.⁴

Harvey Irwin

Harvey Irwin (University of New England) is a prodigious contributor to the field of parapsychology. His principle contribution is in the domain of anomalous psychology – the study of paranormal experiences from a psychological viewpoint. He has collaborated with Caroline Watt, the current chair of the Koestler Parapsychology Unit, on the seminal text *An Introduction to Parapsychology*.⁵

Irwin has contributed significantly in the area of understanding paranormal belief, forming key hypotheses.⁶

Michael Thalborne

[Michael Thalborne](#) (1955-2010) dedicated more than 20 years to parapsychology. Educated at the University of Adelaide, he obtained a PhD in parapsychology at Edinburgh University in 1981, and was research fellow in Psychology at the University of Adelaide from 1992 to 2007. With graduate student [Lance Storm](#), he established the Anomalistic Psychology Research Unit in 2002, which lasted until 2008.

Thalborne's major experimental contribution concerns the ancient Chinese divination text I-Ching, in which passages relevant to the user's concerns are identified by a number, typically obtained by coin throws. In early studies, Thalborne found significant differences between control and participant-based readings. In later experiments, the distribution of coin tosses (resulting in line changes in the hexagram) was found to differ significantly between control and actual readings. An overview found overall significant evidence.⁷

Thalborne's main theoretical contribution is the theory of psychopraxia,⁸ which posits that ESP and PK originate from a common source. According to the theory, a deficit in one sense will be compensated by increased psychic functioning. His graduate student Lance Storm devoted much of his PhD thesis to finding confirmatory evidence.

Thalbourne and Storm collaborated on experiments. In one study, vision-impaired subjects were tested for an ability to detect hidden images inside envelopes. The overall results were not significant in this first experiment, while a follow-up study yielded surprising results: both vision-impaired and sighted groups scored significantly below chance: 21% instead of the expected 25%.⁹ The experimenters then investigated whether those who disbelieve in psi (who tend to score below chance), might be coaxed into producing above-chance results by a change of outlook. This attitude change was achieved by having the implications of significance testing explained to them. The hypothesis was supported comfortably in the psi task, where disbelievers shifted from chance scoring (20%, where MCE = 20%), to psi-hitting (30%, $p = .047$).¹⁰

Thalborne has also investigated Kundalini, a sensation of pulsating energy which he has frequently experienced.

Lance Storm

Reactance According to reactance theory, when an individual's perceived freedom is threatened in some way, a reactance to that perception is precipitated (reactance is defined as a 'motivational state aimed at restoring the threatened freedom'). To probe the theory, Storm borrowed a methodology adopted by [Suitbert Ertel](#), the Ball Selection Test, in which subjects use psi to identify numbered ping-pong balls picked from a pouch. Storm hypothesized that psi non-believers (goats) are more reactant than believers (sheep) in psi tests because they are predisposed to disproving the psi hypothesis, perceiving it as ego threatening.

Under laboratory conditions, participants completed up to four runs of sixty trials, each trying to predict the numbers on ping pong balls. The hit rate for the whole sample (N = 82) was significant at 21.06% ($p = .002$, where MCE = 20%). Participants were then randomly assigned to a control condition (n = 42) or treatment condition (n = 40) requiring them to read a statement that induced reactance. A significant reactance effect was found with goats scoring significantly lower than sheep, as expected, but, importantly, also lower than control goats who didn't read a statement (although not to a significant degree).¹¹ Such work is continuing.

Imagery Cultivation Model Storm's second major theoretical contribution to parapsychology is the Imagery Cultivation Model. This posits that certain high energy spiritual rituals, such as shamanic drumming or religious ecstasy, encourage an active cognitive process that is psi conducive. In particular, the IC model is hypothesized to grant access to hidden archetypes in the subconscious realm, where psi experiences are thought to occur.

In a test, subjects were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: sitting quietly with eyes open (control) or an intervention condition that induced a shamanic level of consciousness through drumming. Subjects were asked to describe a target (a line drawing), where the chance hit rate would be 25%. The direct hit rate was significant at 34.5%; the control group scored a little below chance at 23%.¹²

Rock, Storm, Harris, and Friedman replicated the above experimental conditions, also tracking what aspects of experience correlated with direct hitting. They found that the direct hit rate significantly correlated with altered experience, altered time sense, and altered perception. They concluded: 'our findings suggest that phenomenology can be changed using a shamanic-like journeying treatment, and these changes are conducive to the generation of source material that can be an aid to psi processes.'¹³

Storm reports preliminary results from a [Bial Foundation](#) funded study combining both the imagery cultivation and reactance models. Half the [precognition](#) trials occur after an imagery cultivation treatment, the other half without. Additionally, half the participants read a reactance prime, the other half do not. All conditions are randomized, thus there are four conditions; Imagery cultivation (with and without a reactance prime) and non-imagery cultivation (with and without a prime). In early results, Storm reports subjects in the imagery cultivation non-prime group score higher than non-IC reactance prime subjects – as the models predict.¹⁴

Meta-Analysis Storm has been active in meta-analysing several important databases in parapsychology. (See [Meta-Analysis in Parapsychology](#).)

Free-response Storm et al reported on three types of free-response experiment; the [ganzfeld](#) (a psi-conductive procedure), non-ganzfeld altered states (dreams, hypnosis, meditation, relaxation) and normal consciousness free-response experiments for the period 1997–2008. A set of 29 ganzfeld studies yielded a mean effect size of 0.142 (Stouffer Z of 5.48, P value 10^{-8}). A non-ganzfeld altered states data set of sixteen studies yielded a mean effect size of 0.110 (Stouffer Z of 3.35, P value of 104), and a homogeneous data set of fourteen standard free-response studies produced a weak negative mean effect size of 0.029 (Stouffer Z of 2.29, P value 0.01). Thus it can be seen that altered states (both ganzfeld and non-ganzfeld) are superior in eliciting psi than ordinary waking consciousness testing.¹⁵ (See Ganzfeld)

Dream ESP In a comprehensive examination of the psi-conductive aspects of dreaming, Storm and colleagues meta-analysed the dream-ESP literature. They reported results on experimental dream-ESP studies for the period 1966 to 2016. Studies fell into two categories: the [Maimonides Dream Lab studies](#) (n = 14), and independent (non-MDL) studies (n = 36). The Maimonides dataset yielded an effect size of .33, the non-MDL studies yielded mean ES = .14. A combined dataset of 50 studies yielded a Stouffer Z of 5.32, $p = 5.19 \times 10^{-8}$. This is strong evidence for the view that dreams are psi-facilitating. Importantly, there was no relationship between study quality and effect size, although the authors noted a general decline in effect size over the years, which they attribute to the high success rate of the initial Maimonides work and its use of a dedicated sleep laboratory that later studies did not have access to.¹⁶

Sheep-Goat Effect The sheep-goat effect is described in detail [here](#). Storm and Tressoldi meta-analysed studies from 1994 to 2015, thus continuing the earlier meta-analytic period of Lawrence. They retrieved 49 studies reported by 43 investigators. The mean trial-based SGE was 0.034 resulting in a Stouffer Z = 1.67 ($p = .047$). Therefore, the earlier findings of Lawrence (effect size of 0.029) were supported. Reassuringly there was no relationship between study quality and effect size, although Tressoldi and Storm noted a significant incline in effect size over the 21 year period.¹⁷

Adam Rock

Adam Rock is a close collaborator of Lance Storm, based at the University of New England in New South Wales. Rock has conducted research in shamanism (described above) and in the following areas:

[Sense of Being Stared At](#) A study was carried out to test the impact of the ganzfeld state, on subjects who had been administered a questionnaire on a personality trait referred to as mental boundaries. Forty subjects were randomly assigned to either a ganzfeld or non-ganzfeld condition, and administered twenty randomized staring/non-staring trials. There was no significant main effect for the ganzfeld condition with regards to hit rate, but there was a significant main effect

for staring/non-staring. The correlation between mental boundaries and staring hit rate approached significance.[18](#)

Distant Healing Rock tested an energy healing technique known as Quantum BioEnergetics (QBE) on subjects' reported mood scores, using a randomized expectancy-enhanced placebo-controlled design. The results indicated the QBE condition was associated with (1) significantly less tension-anxiety compared with the placebo and control condition; and (2) significantly less anger-hostility and total mood disturbance compared with the control condition.[19](#)

Mediumship In collaboration with the [Windbridge Research Center](#), Rock experimentally investigated the experiential aspects of [mediumship](#) by having half the readings performed on deceased (discarnate) individuals and half on living agents. The experiences associated with the discarnate reading condition were found to be significantly different from those associated with the control condition. In later developments, Rock and [Julie Beischel](#) investigated the question of whether the information comes from living agents or from discarnates.[20](#)

An initial meta-analysis of forced-choice mediumship studies reported a small average effect size of 0.15, not statistically significant; however, given the limited number of experiments, it is premature to draw conclusions.[21](#)

Hannah Jenkins

Hannah Jenkins, based at the University of Tasmania, has set up [Quality Investigative Psi Projects \(QIPP\)](#), which undertakes interdisciplinary science-based investigations into psi and related paranormal phenomena to discover how to apply and explain what are currently anomalous events. QIPP treats psi phenomena as little understood natural phenomena amenable to scientific examination. It has investigated whether plants can respond retrocausally to emotional stimulation, combining research from presentiment research with work in the 1960s and 1970s by [Cleve Backster](#) on plant consciousness. Another project aims to show how remote viewing and dowsing can be used together with less controversial sources of information such as forensics and historical documentation, for instance to recover lost artifacts.

Vladimir Dubaj

Vladimir Dubaj founded his own research institute the Australian Parapsychological Research Association (APRA), mainly focused on post-mortem survival. It combines investigations of historically renowned hauntings with educational activities, including a short course, Principles of Scientific Ghost Research, at Monash University.

George Van Doorn, Alexander De Foe, and Mark Symmonds

George Van Doorn, Alexander De Foe, and Mark Symmonds, based at Monash University, Melbourne, have carried out research to understand the out of body experience (OBE). An initial study found that a history of auditory hallucinations can predict whether an individual has experienced an OBE.[22](#) De Foe and

colleagues have found a strong relationship between a sensation of leaving the body and autonomously induced out of body experiences.[23](#)

The Australian Institute of Parapsychology

The [Australian Institute of Parapsychological Research](#) was founded in Sydney, New South Wales in 1977, and has a worldwide membership. It aims to promote scientific study of psychic phenomena, publishing research articles by Australian and other researchers in its bi-annual *Australian Journal of Parapsychology*. In common with other similar organizations, it also collects and assesses factual information about paranormal phenomena, and provides support to people who are suffering as a result of a possible paranormal experience.

Japan

Hideyuki Kokubo

A major contributor to Japanese psi research is [Hideyuki Kokubo](#), currently head of the International Research Institute. Kokubo is best known for his work on bio-psychokinesis (bio-PK), a term which describes such phenomena as non-contact healing and energy therapies such as reiki and Johrei.

Cucumbers as Biosensors Since 2006, Kokubo has investigated bio-PK using pieces of 'white spine type' cucumber (*cucumis sativus*) as a bio-sensor.[24](#) In the experimental set-up, samples are stored in sealed chambers and the amount of hexanol-2-ol released into the enclosed space is measured following a healing session. When fifteen healers were tested in 83 trials the results revealed statistically significant evidence of a bio-PK effect. Surprisingly, dummy trials performed thirty minutes before and after the healing trials showed comparable effects, while blank trials on other days gave no effect. Kokubo hypothesized that a residual healing energy permeates the nearby temporal as well as local testing environment. Kokubo has replicated these anomalous healing effects in similar experiments, building up a solid database.

Long-trends in Random Number Generator Data Kokubo has carried out a study in the synchronization of group consciousness, in which random event generators are used to pick up any fluctuations that may occur in the vicinity of religious activity. Most of these are short term: by contrast, Kokubo and colleagues ran a study for 22 months. A significant difference was found between Saturday and Monday ($p = 0.029$),[25](#) but the effect was small, leading him to conclude that even longer study periods were needed.

Macro-PK Kokubo has also investigated large scale effects of psychokinesis on metal samples. Tests of 'spoon-bending', including electron microscopic observations of affected materials, revealed anomalous effects. In experiments with super-elastic Ni-Ti alloys, Kokubo found that when these were successfully subjected to psychokinetic bending influence the resulting deformations were permanent, a phenomenon that does not occur when such metals are bent by normal means.[26](#)

The International Society for Life Information Science

Founded in 1995, the International Society for Life Information Science offers a platform for (mainly Japanese) academics to explore ideas shunned by mainstream science, notably those related to Japanese cultural practices. Its bi-annual journal covers psi research topics, alternative healing methods, and studies of external qigong, a form of healing bio-PK. Article subjects include:

Mikio Yamamoto at the National Institute of Radiological Sciences in Chiba, Japan, tested the ability of a qigong master to send Ki energy to a student in a separate shielded room. The time difference between the master's acting time and the pupil's response time was less than a second in six times out of sixteen trials. This result indicates that all these abilities do not depend on the master's suggestion, implying an unknown transmission mechanism. The probability of such a result was 0.0058 (around 1 in 200) – fairly strong statistical evidence for an effect. Yamamoto has successfully replicated this experiment several times.[27](#)

Kimiko Kawano and colleagues reported a study in which three qigong masters participated in a remote qi emission experiment. The receivers assigned to the respective qigong masters were at a distance of 2 to 4 km. Levels of their Natural Killer (NK) cell activity, Interleukin (IL)-2, and CD4/CD8 in venous blood were simultaneously measured for any changes. After forty minutes of remote qi emission the following changes were detected: the NK cell activity increased to a significant level, IL-2 showed a tendency to increase, and the CD4/CD8 ratio decreased. These results suggested that external qi has the same effect as localized qigong therapy on immune function.[28](#)

Mami Kido from the University Tohoku-Gakuin performed a battery of measurements of receivers in distant healing by Reiki and Clear Sight Healing, over a distance of 300 km between Tokyo and Sendai. Near infrared topography were used for simultaneous measurements, which revealed significant changes of blood flow in the brain of the receivers when the healer performed certain healing techniques.[29](#)

Hideo Youchi and colleagues from the National Institute of Radiological Sciences tested whether groups of people who congregate for special occasions can unconsciously influence the output of a random number generator placed nearby (similar field RNG studies have been conducted in the West). The authors carried out experiments measuring the accumulated deviation of anomalous output from a random number generator during an international scientific conference about spiritual healing held in Hawaii, 2001 and at the New Year's holiday in Japan, 2002. The experimental data were statistically significant: $Z=2.32$, $p=0.02$ at the meeting and $Z=2.11$, $p=0.035$ for the New Year's holiday, while controls gave chance results.[30](#)

China

The impetus behind psi research in China has been to gain a scientific understanding of ancient Chinese wisdom traditions. Investigations began in earnest in the early 1980s.

Psi Abilities in Children In 1983, McConnell reported on research by over 500 academics in more than 100 research centers investigating ESP training in young children. The key finding was that 50% of these children could be successfully trained to manifest ESP ability. McConnell also found reports of children gifted with 'extraocular vision', able to accurately visualize inscriptions on crumpled pieces of paper placed under their arms or behind their ears.[31](#)

Zhang Baosheng Beginning in the mid 1970s, Zhang Baosheng began demonstrating ostensibly paranormal abilities such as movement of objects and telepathy. In 1982, a local group of scientists brought him to the attention of Beijing scientists at the Institute of Space-Medico Engineering (ISME) where he was heavily investigated.

Zhang's main experiment involved moving small objects in and out of glass tubes. In one well-controlled demonstration, specially marked pieces of paper were treated with a chemical and placed inside a tube. The tube was melted in order to constrict it midway. Cotton buds were placed in the top half having been soaked in a chemical that reacts with the chemical on the treated paper. After five minutes of close scrutiny by four investigators, the paper was found to be lying outside the tube, which nevertheless remained intact. There was evidence of a chemical reaction on the cotton buds, suggesting that the papers had passed through the cotton.

In other experiments, Zhang psychokinetically extracted live insects out of the tubes, and on one occasion, a pill was filmed exiting the tube.[32](#)

International Chinese Parapsychology Association

In 2013, the International Chinese Parapsychology Association (ICA), was established in order to integrate Chinese researchers with others in the field. It was founded by professors Leu Ying Jong (National Taiwan University), Albert So (Hong Kong University), and Yi-Fang Chang (Yunnan University) and has been instrumental in making Chinese psi research increasingly known in the West.

Mind-Matter Parapsychology Phenomena and Study Kumming Ltd

The Mind-Matter Parapsychology Phenomena and Study Kumming Ltd, registered in Kumming (capital of Yunnan province) has recently been established. Much of the research output involves training and testing blind children to see with other body parts, (extraocular vision) using blind subjects. Blind children can be taught to telepathically communicate with each other and have even been taught to get together in a 'virtual space' and move objects by virtual PK. Sighted children can be taught to develop their PK abilities to fold strips of paper or break matchsticks held in transparent sealed containers, and even write a few tiny words such as 'Mother I love you' and a figure of 'love' on a sealed match stick by using a mind controlled 'virtual pen'. Recently, Artificial Intelligence expert Ben Goertzel [reported](#) positively on his experiences there. [33](#)

Collaborations with Western Scientists

[Dean Radin](#) of the [Institute of Noetic Sciences](#) in California has collaborated with Yung-Jong Shiah in experiments. In a fully randomized double-blind study, tea treated with focused positive intentions by Buddhist monks was shown to improve mood scores of subjects who consumed it significantly more than non-blessed tea derived from the same source.³⁴ A similar study achieved the same result for chocolate.³⁵

In another study, three Buddhist monks focused their intention on bottled water to try to accelerate the growth of seeds. In multiple experiments, seeds were treated with either intentioned or control water under blinded conditions, then placed in random positions in an incubator. The combined data revealed highly significant changes in a range of measures between untreated and 'healed' seeds. ³⁶

India

Despite its strong tradition of contemplative practices, India is only weakly represented in the history and contemporary profile of parapsychology.

Ramakrishna Rao

Born in 1932, Ramakrishna Rao obtained his PhD from Andhra University and in 1958 moved to the US. He worked at the Institute for Parapsychology under [JB Rhine](#), and later became its director. He returned to Andhra University in 1967 and established a department of parapsychology there, returning frequently to the US to conduct research with Rhine and others. He is currently executive director of GITAM (Gandhi Institute of Technology and Management) University Vishakhapatnam, India.

Rao has contributed significantly to understanding the relationship between psi and meditation. In a well-regarded study, he tested participants for both subliminal perception and ESP before and after they had practised Transcendental Meditation (TM) for a week. In both respects they showed significantly greater success in the post-meditation phase, indicating greater sensitivity to incoming information, which tends to confirm the lore of ancient yogic practice.³⁷

Harendra Nath Banerjee

Harendra Banerjee is best-known for his collaboration with [Ian Stevenson](#)³⁸ on cases of the reincarnation type in children. He established the department of parapsychology at the University of Rajasthan, concerned mainly with researching spontaneous psi cases. He died in 1985.

Sonali Bhatt Marwaha

Sonali Bhatt Marwaha holds a BSc from University of Mumbai, a MA in clinical psychology and MPhil in psychology from SNDT Women's University, Mumbai. She was awarded a PhD by the department of psychology and parapsychology, Andhra University, for a theoretical analysis of belief systems, self, and emotions, for which she won the JB Rhine Biennial Research Award. Presently she is a research associate with the Laboratories for Fundamental Research. She is active in collating past

research into large bodies of work, notably the remote viewing program known as Star Gate.³⁹ She has developed a theory of precognition in collaboration with the former program director, physicist and parapsychologist Edwin May.

Dayalbagh Educational Institute, Agra

The Dayalbagh Educational Institute in Agra, although not a dedicated centre for psi research, has associates who have conducted research in this area. This is especially true since the establishment of the Quantum Nano and Consciousness centre with which it is affiliated, psi research providing a bridge between consciousness and quantum physics research. Successful projects have been carried out that reveal a significant improvement in ESP scores through the use of yogic techniques. Other research found evidence of a biofield associated with a variety of mainstream techniques.⁴⁰

Table 1: Summary of research in Asia and Australia

Country	Individual / Institute	Type of Research
India\US	Ramakrishna Rao / GITAM (Gandhi Institute of Technology and Management)	Subliminal perception and ESP
India	Harendra Nath Banerjee / Department of Parapsychology – University of Rajasthan	Reincarnation cases in small children
India	Sonali Bhatt Marwaha / Laboratories for Fundamental Research (LFR)	Collating large bodies of remote viewing data. Precognition theory development
India	Dayalbagh Educational Institute	Consciousness and physics. Biofield research
Australia	Ronald and Lyndon Rose	ESP Testing of aborigines

Australia	Jürgen Keil / University of Tasmania	Poltergeist cases. Reincarnation cases in children.
Australia	Maurice Marsh / Rhodes University	Psychological correlates of poltergeist activity
Australia	Peter Delin / University of Adelaide	Australian sheep-goat scale
Australia	Harvey Irwin / University of New South Wales	Belief formation. Landmark books in parapsychology
Australia	Michael Thalborne / University of Adelaide	I-Ching. Theory of Psychopraxia. Kundalini and RNGs
Australia	Lance Storm / University of Adelaide	Theory of reactance. Imagery cultivation model. Various meta-analyses
Australia	Adam Rock / University of New South Wales	Distant healing. The sense of being stared at. Meta-analysis. Collaborative mediumship research
Australia	Hannah Jenkins. Quality Investigative Psi Projects (QIPP)	Presentiment in plants
Australia	Australian Parapsychological Research Association (APRA). Vladimir Dubaj	Case study investigations
Australia	Monash University. George Van Doorn, Alexander De Foe, and Mark Symmonds	Out of Body Experiences (OBEs)
Australia	The Australian Institute of Parapsychology	Supports psi research in Australia. Published biannual journal

Japan	Internal Research Institute. Hideyuki Kokubo	Standardized measures of energy healing
Japan	Institute for Informatics of Consciousness, Meiji University	Field RNG, NDE, anomalous experiences, etc
Japan	The International Society for Life Information Science (ISLIS)	Supports psi research in Japan. Publishes a biannual journal
China	Institute of Space-Medico Engineering. (ISME)	Macro-PK research in the 1980s. – Zhang Baosheng
China		Documented research from many researchers in the 1980s
China	International Chinese Parapsychology Association (ICPA)	Supports psi research in China. Promotes ties with the West
China	The Mind-Matter Parapsychology Phenomena and Study Kuming Ltd	Large program with psi gifted children, including training programs
China	Yung-Jong Shiah	An example of increasing collaboration with Western scientists. (Dean Radin)

Michael Duggan

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Endnotes

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