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This article was first published in Portuguese in the volume 44 of *Estudos Japoneses*, Universidade de São Paulo, Brazil as “*Amae*, uma emoção para compreender a psique japonesa”³.

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Abstract: This article’s main goal is to present an overview of the Japanese concept of *amae* from the perspective of cultural psychology. Scientific literature on the topic is presented and discussed, beginning with the first published book on the subject in the West in the 1970s, Takeo Doi’s “The Anatomy of Dependence,” to current cross-cultural research. The article begins with a brief presentation of cultural psychology and its importance, then goes through the history of research on *amae*, discusses possible cultural functions of *amae*, its influence within clinical psychology, the differences between *amae* and attachment, studies that have investigated *amae* in non-Japanese cultures, and ends with a discussion on the concept.

Key-words: *Amae*; Japan; Psychology; Emotion; Interdependence

要旨：本論文の主な目的は、文化心理学の観点から日本の「甘え」の概念を概観することであった。「甘え」というテーマに関連した実証研究には、これまでの甘えについての最初の出版物である1970年代の土居健郎の『「甘え」の構造』から、比較文化心理学の日本文化論の研究まであり、多くが議論されてきている。この甘えという概念は、日本文化を論じる上で重要な議論のひとつであることが論じられた。本論文は文化と心理学の関連性や社会事象を説明するための重要性にまず触れ、甘えに関する研究の歴史を経て、甘えの文化的機能や臨床心理学におけるその影響、甘えと愛着の違い、そして対人関係における甘えを調査した研究についてそれぞれ概観を行った。また、日本文化・日本語文化圏以外の文脈（例：同様の感情体験が、北米などの文化圏でみられるか）における甘えの概念についても検討を行った。

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Resumo: Este artigo tem como objetivo apresentar um panorama do conceito japonês de *amae* sob a perspectiva da psicologia cultural. São apresentadas e discutidas diversas publicações científicas desde a publicação do primeiro livro sobre o assunto no ocidente nos anos 1970 (DOI,1973), até as pesquisas atuais, de teor intercultural. O artigo tem início com uma breve apresentação da psicologia cultural e sua importância, passa por um histórico das pesquisas sobre *amae*, discute as possíveis funções culturais do *amae*, sua influência dentro da psicologia clínica, as diferenças entre *amae* e apego, estudos que investigaram *amae* em outras culturas que não a japonesa, e termina com uma reflexão sobre o conceito.

Palavras-chave: *Amae*; Japão; Psicologia; Emoção; Interdependência

Introduction: Psychology and Japanese studies

Psychology has taken into account cultural aspects of human beings since the studies of Wilhelm Wundt at the beginning of the 20th century. However, cultural aspects were generally considered details or, at best, secondary in psychological studies. During the 1990s, the publication of several influential books and articles (BRUNER, 1990; MARKUS; KITAYAMA, 1991) showed that culture has a fundamental influence on the development and psychological functioning of people, and that it is of great importance that cultural aspects are considered in studies on human psychology. Since then, many studies have been conducted within the sub-area of Cultural Psychology, which aims to study how cultural characteristics affect people's psychological aspects, such as cognition, attention, emotion, etc. (HEINE; RUBY, 2010).

The main objective of this article is to present the concept of *amae* and its consequences, which are intrinsically linked to Japanese psychological development and functioning, based on cultural psychology. The scope of this article on *amae* is: the presentation and definition of the concept; a review of important publications about the concept; its cultural functions and influences on the Japanese psyche; and the possible presence of *amae* in other cultures.

Despite the obvious methodological bias arising from psychology, researchers and other professionals from different fields with an interest in Japanese studies can benefit from the content presented in this article.

What is *amae*?

Around 1950, the Japanese psychiatrist Takeo Doi went to the United States as an exchange student. During his stay, Doi realized that, in many ways, American interpersonal relationships differed substantially from Japanese personal relationships; the Japanese showed more codependent, or interdependent, relationships than the Americans. He then realized that the *amae* phenomenon profoundly influenced Japanese interpersonal relationships, thus being the key concept to understanding the Japanese psyche; while in the USA and possibly other Western countries, *amae* wasn't as important, to the point that there is not even a word dedicated to the concept in European languages. Doi presented his theory in a series of congresses, articles and essays, until he published the book *甘えの構造* (*Amae no Kôzô*) in 1971, which was translated into English two years later under the title "The Anatomy of Dependence" (DOI, 1973). After this initial publication, Doi and other researchers published many articles and books on the same topic, in addition to topics related to or influenced by the concept

of *amae*.

The word *amae*⁵ is the noun form of the intransitive verb *amaeru* and the transitive verb *amayakasu*. It is usually used to describe episodes in which the actions described by the verbs occur; as an emotion, *amae* refers to the feeling of connection derived from the actions described by the verbs.

The prototypical episode of *amae* occurs in the behavior of a child making an apparently unnecessary request to his parents. For example, a 10-year-old boy asks his mother to tie his shoelaces, and she complies. In this case, the mother '*amayakasu*' the boy; the boy was '*amaeru*' by his mother; and both mother and son experienced '*amae*'.

Although this prototypical example of *amae* happens between a child and their parent, episodes of *amae* can also occur between adults. Adults asking for favors from other adults, or someone showing dependence and emotionally manipulating their romantic partner to do something can be considered episodes of *amae*.

Yamaguchi (2004) proposed two essential characteristics of *amae*. First, the request must be inappropriate for the requester's age, social status or physical condition in usual situations (for example, a 10-year-old boy should be able to tie his own shoes). Second, the requester must believe that his request will be accepted by his counterpart (for example, the 10-year-old boy knows that he can make this request to his mother, but probably not to a stranger). Consequently, if the request is not considered inappropriate (for example, if the boy had broken his arm and was unable to tie his own shoes), even if the

mother accepted the request, the episode would not be classified as *amae*. Additionally, if the request is made to someone he doesn't know or believes would accept it, the request would probably not be accepted; and even if accepted, it would not be considered *amae* due to the lack of presumption of acceptance.

Due to the situations in which it occurs, the word *amae* is often translated as "pampering", "whining", "flattering" or "pouting". However, while these words usually have a negative connotation, *amae* generally has a positive connotation, which makes it an important and prominent piece of Japanese culture (NIIYA; ELLSWORTH; YAMAGUCHI, 2006).

Behrens (2004) analyzed a series of studies in which Japanese participants described episodes of *amae*. Based on this analysis, five categories of *amae* were proposed, according to the context in which they occur and their objectives: affective, manipulative, reciprocal, obligatory, and presumptive (see Table 1).

Affective *amae* arises from the desire for physical and affective proximity, it is the category most discussed by Doi (1973). This type of *amae* occurs from infancy, in the interaction between the baby and the mother, until adulthood, in playful or seductive behaviors between couples. Affective *amae* is the only category of *amae* that occurs in infancy, having no instrumental objectives. Manipulative *amae* is motivated to achieve specific goals through emotional manipulation. It occurs from childhood, when a child acts out in order to gain attention from their mother, until adulthood, when members of a couple manipulate each other to obtain favors. Reciprocal *amae* represents conscious and mutually accepted behaviors that

5 Despite having the same semantic basis, *amayakasu* is often used in negative contexts, with a meaning close to the verbs "to pamper" or "to spoil". *Amae* and *amaeru* are used in various contexts.

There is also the adjective *amai*, whose common meaning is "sweet", when referring to the taste of food; but when related to a person it can mean "generous" or "lenient". According to Doi (1973), this adjective shares etymological roots with the word *amae* and its use is also related to *amae*.

primarily serve instrumental purposes among close friends or couples. It occurs from early childhood, but is more common in adulthood. Obligatory *amae* usually occurs between people who are not intimate, within unequal power relationships, such as between a salesperson and customer or between a boss and subordinate. Finally, presumptive *amae* has no affective charge and does not involve a hierarchical relationship between those involved. This type of *amae* occurs when an individual gives clues to what he

needs through his behavior, and his counterpart, due to the circumstance, tends to meet the needs of the other individual.

It is important to note that affective *amae*, manipulative *amae* and reciprocal *amae* are generally considered positive, since they strengthen social relationships, those involved tend to enjoy the relationship, and the consequences in general are not harmful to anyone. However, obligatory and

Table: The classification of *amae* from BEHRENS (2004)

	<i>Non-instrumental Amae I - Affective</i>	<i>Instrumental Amae II - Manipulative</i>	<i>Amae III - Reciprocal</i>	<i>Amae IV - Obligatory</i>	<i>Amae V - Presumptive</i>
<i>Infancy</i>					
Motivation	desire for physical and emotional closeness, oneness				
Behavior	snuggling, seeking to be held	-	-	-	-
Relationship	intimate, affective, close				
Interactant (s)	parents (mothers)				
<i>Childhood</i>					
Motivation	desire for physical and emotional closeness, fun	get their way, benign manipulation	desire for emotional closeness, to reciprocate favors		
Behavior	snuggling, seeking to sit on lap	clingy, act helplessly, temper tantrum	act desperate, deal making	-	-
Relationship	intimate, affective, close	intimate, close	close, trusting		
Interactant (s)	parents (mothers)	parents (mothers)	school peers, friends		
<i>Adulthood</i>					
Motivation	desire for physical and emotional closeness, fun	get their way, benign manipulation	desire for emotional closeness, to reciprocate favors	take advantage of/ abuse power/control situations	presume upon one's good will
Behavior	playful, childish, coquettish	act helplessly, selfishly, with little cues	act desperate, deal making	excessive, unreasonable demands	socially inappropriate, no <i>enryo</i> ⁶
Relationship	intimate, affective, close	intimate, close	close, trusting	nonintimate, unequal status	nonintimate, non-hierarchical
Interactant (s)	romantic partners	married couples	peers, friends	boss, client, subordinate	distant acquaintance

6 *Enryo* is a Japanese concept meaning "deference", "self-containment" or "ritualistic hesitation"

presumptive *amae* are generally considered negative, since it makes those involved feel distant from each other and often derives from an individual's desire for power assertion (BEHRENS, 2004).

***Self* and cultural function in Japan**

The concept of self is very important in psychology and refers to the image that an individual has of themselves as a human being. Historically, the self is considered to be an individual's perception of themselves as an independent and autonomous entity, with a unique configuration of internal characteristics (i.e., skills, motivations and values), and whose behaviors are a consequence of these internal attributes. Considering that these characteristics describe the self in Western cultures, but not in other cultures, Markus and Kitayama (1991) proposed a different classification of the concept, with two possibilities of self: the self described above as "independent self", and a second type called "interdependent self," which is typical of East Asian cultures, such as Japan, and other non-Western cultures. This interdependent self was described as being connected with others, relational, and contextual. In short, individuals with an independent self tend to define themselves as autonomous, self-motivated, with a separate identity and independent from other individuals or contexts; while individuals with an interdependent self tend to define themselves based on their relationships with individuals around them, seeing themselves as an inseparable part of their social context, acting and motivating themselves contextually.

Due to its relational nature, *amae* is a fundamental component to understanding the Japanese interdependent self. As interpersonal relationships are the basis for defining self in this culture, *amae* greatly influences the formation of the Japanese self from an early age. Markus and Kitayama (1991, p. 237) affirm that "experiencing *amae* in respect to

another person may be inherent in the formation and maintenance of a mutually reciprocal, interdependent relationship with another person. If the other person accepts one's *amae*, the reciprocal relationship is symbolically completed, leading to a significant form of self-validation. If, however, the other person rejects one's *amae*, the relationship will be in jeopardy." From this perspective, the acceptance or rejection of *amae* can determine whether the future of a relationship will be positive or negative, with direct consequences for the self.

Positive feelings that connect people and strengthen relationships are important for the formation and maintenance of the interdependent self. In the case of Japanese people, *amae* is considered to be one of those positive feelings. In an intercultural study, Uchida and Kitayama (2009) analyzed descriptions of happiness produced by American and Japanese participants. In general, American participants associated happiness with achievements in general, while Japanese people associated happiness with social harmony. The authors argue that *amae* can influence people's happiness, given that this concept is important in social relationships within Japanese society. Kitayama, Mesquita and Karasawa (2006) carried out an intercultural study in which participants described how often and what kinds of emotions were experienced in a series of social situations. American participants tended to cite non-engaging emotions (e.g., pride, feeling of superiority), while Japanese participants tended to cite engaging emotions (e.g., friendly feeling, *amae*).

***Amae* and attachment theory**

The attachment theory was first proposed by psychoanalyst John Bowlby in several articles from 1958, and later consolidated into a series of books. This theory suggests that babies have a predisposition and need to develop a relationship with an adult

caregiver, called an attachment figure, for their social and emotional development to occur normally. One of the main characteristics of this process is the child's exploration behavior, where the attachment figure serves as a safe base to which the child can return to whenever something stressful occurs during their exploration of the environment (BOWLBY, 1958 and 1982).

When taking child development into account, although there are similarities, *amae* and attachment are different concepts.

The basic similarities are that both phenomena appear at around nine months of age; there is a desire for closeness and security, especially in children; both are easily identifiable in stressful situations; the manifested behaviors tend to put those involved in close physical contact (e.g., hug); and researchers of these concepts usually distinguish between positive and negative forms of the phenomena.

The main difference between these concepts is that *amae* is a concept related to interdependence and social harmony, whereas attachment is related to exploratory behavior, which is a precursor of autonomy and the independent self. Other basic differences are as follows: positive *amae* manifests itself in situations where the caregiver can respond to the child's request and the child enjoys the love, while positive attachment is related to moments when the child is able to use care as a basis for exploration; *amae* is more evident from the end of early childhood, while attachment is more evident between 12 and 18 months of age; *amae* is associated with the desire to connect and unite, while attachment is associated with the need for protection and basic care; regarding negative emotions, *amae* is more associated with loneliness and sadness, while attachment is more related to fear (BEHRENS, 2004; ROTHBAUM; KAKINUMA, 2004).

In adulthood, there are also similarities and differences between *amae* and attachment. The general motivation of both phenomena usually arises from the desire for security. In *amae*, security is related to the assurance of loyalty and cohesion between the persons involved, this assurance arising from the social structure that affects the lives of those involved and the relationship between them. In attachment, security depends on the kind of relationship already built between the persons involved, and the focus is on the possibility for an individual to deal with uncertainties in social relationships. Both *amae* and attachment are directly related to social intelligence. In *amae*, individuals need to understand the social situation, and respond accordingly; while in attachment, individuals need to assess who can provide the emotional support they need. Finally, *amae* and attachment often occur among intimate persons, but only *amae* can occur between individuals without any degree of intimacy (ROTHBAUM; KAKINUMA, 2004).

***Amae* in the context of Japanese clinical psychology**

Considering that culture has a great influence on how people experience the world, including mental disorders (WATTERS, 2011), mental health providers need to take cultural factors into account when dealing with their clients. In the context of Japanese psychotherapy, therapists should work with the concept of *amae* when dealing with their clients.

The concept of *amae* has influenced the practice of psychotherapy in Japan in regard to the etiology of psychopathology, that is, the possible origins of a mental disorder. Professionals with psychoanalytic training tend to relate psychological maladjustments in Japan with distorted forms of "need for dependence" (i.e., *amae*) and with an inability to build adequate interpersonal relationships based on such dependence (IWAKABE, 2008). For example, based on clinical

case studies, Takatsuka (2005) argued that a lack of *amae* may be the reason behind the *hikikomori* phenomenon among the youth of Japan. Takatsuka argued that youth in question are often obsessed with the idea of independence and self-help, which prevents them from seeking help from others when in need. When the younger people are unable to seek help, they do not know how to act and fall into a situation of impasse, avoiding decision making and social interactions.

Amae has also influenced the Japanese mental health professionals' view on what a successful psychological intervention is. For example, as Doi originally believed, for psychotherapy to be successful with Japanese clients, *amae* or a "need for dependence" must be brought to awareness (IWAKABE, 2008). This is in line with psychoanalytic therapy in general, in that, when talking about experiences, therapists help clients to make the unconscious conscious (COREY, 2009; CORSINI; WEDDING, 2010). In other words, *amae* episodes contain another layer of the unconscious, which is usually worked out in therapy in the Japanese context.

Likewise, from a psychoanalytic theoretical point of view, *amae* can be seen as a passive form of love (DOI, 1973; KUDO, 2016). In this sense, the therapist's job is also to help the client deal with his passivity, and the way that passivity influences his life. That is, instead of being driven unconsciously by the very need for dependence, a client ideally learns how to relate to others so that they can build a sense of trust in the relationship through love and interdependence.

***Amae* in other cultures**

As mentioned before, there is no word in English or Portuguese that represents *amae* in its entirety. However, it is not accurate to state categorically that *amae* only happens among Japanese people or that no

other language has a word to express it. When Doi (1973) discussed the concept with other Japanese people, some were surprised that Americans do not have a word for expressing *amae*, although their episodes are not uncommon. In a more recent edition of his book, Doi (1973, p. 172) relates *amae* to the psychoanalytic concept of identification. Developed by Sigmund Freud, identification is a child's unconscious process of incorporating the characteristics of their caregivers, such as appearance, posture and behavior. Children tend to identify with people they feel emotionally connected to (ETCHEGOYEN, 1985). In addition, Behrens (2004) discussed several studies in which Japanese people use the word *amae* to describe situations that happen outside of Japan, often with non-Japanese people.

Studies of *amae* with non-Japanese individuals or even outside of the Japanese context are uncommon, but they do exist.

In order to investigate whether *amae* occurs outside of Japanese culture, Niiya, Ellsworth and Yamaguchi (2006) tested whether the *amae* emotion occurs in American individuals. In this study, Japanese and American participants read scenarios in which either a close friend asks them for help (*amae* condition), or asks others for help (other condition). For example, a friend contacts you late at night, and asks you / another individual to help fix their broken computer. Participants from both cultures described the *amae* scenarios as requests that would be considered inappropriate under normal conditions, but which were accepted - fitting the definition of *amae*. In addition, their emotional responses to these scenarios showed similarities: a request for help from a friend directly to the participant (*amae* condition) elicited more positive emotions, more closeness and less negative emotions than a request for help from a friend directed at other people. However, the assessment of the situation was different according to the participant's

culture: Americans reported having more control of the situation with the amae condition than with the other condition, which was not the case with Japanese participants. It is possible to conclude that amae situations can be recognized and experienced in similar ways in the United States and Japan. However, the role that it plays in each culture is fundamentally different. While in Japan amae is part of interdependent relationships, in the USA it brings a feeling of control of the situation, contrary to dependence, which can be related to the independent self.

A study conducted by Guérin (2018) compared Japanese speakers, mostly Japanese people residing in Japan, and non-Japanese speakers from different backgrounds. Participants from both groups answered a questionnaire containing 28 items referring to four types of amae: playful amae; “do something for me” amae; touchy amae; and materialistic amae. With the exception of materialistic amae, non-Japanese speakers reported significantly higher averages for items referring to the types of amae, contrary to expectations. The results of this study provide more evidence that amae is present in other cultures, although there is no specific word in the languages of those cultures.

In a study on the concept of love in general and love within romantic relationships, Ponce-Sakuray (2014) interviewed Bolivian couples in which one member was of Japanese descent and one member identified as non-Japanese descendant. Both Japanese descendants and non-Japanese descendants considered intimacy, passion and commitment as important components of the concept of general love; however, participants of Japanese descent also identified amae as an important component, which was not the case among non-Japanese descendant participants. Yet, within romantic relationships, both groups considered amae to be an important component; unexpectedly, non-Japanese descendants considered amae as a predominant component in this case. Interestingly,

these results corroborate a previous study which demonstrated that amae is a fundamental factor for increasing the intimacy and quality of romantic relationships in Japan (MARSHALL; CHUONG; AIKAWA, 2011).

Conclusion

In short, amae is a common word in Japanese culture that refers to specific situations, as well as the feelings and social consequences of those situations. From the perspective of cultural psychology, amae is closely related to interdependent relationships in Japanese culture.

Given the previous studies presented above, it is undeniable that amae, or something very similar, is present in other cultures. However, published studies of the phenomenon in non-Japanese cultures do not contemplate amae in its entirety. Thus, it is not possible to conclude whether amae occurs with the same frequency in different cultures, what the consequences of amae episodes are, and why a word that is commonly used in everyday Japanese does not exist in Western languages.

Although there is already vast literature on the concept, there is still a diverse range of possibilities for future studies on amae, especially when it comes to academic research in Brazil, where such a concept is still rarely explored.

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