

Differences in Child Rearing Practice, Mother-Child Relationships, Education, Fundamental Behavioral Codes and Interpersonal Relationships Between the Western and Japanese Cultures

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Aim of the Article

As the proverb says, “a fish is the last to discover water,” we can only understand our implicit assumptions and world views when presented with something different. In this chapter, I will present Japanese culture while contrasting it to the Western way. My aim is to help Western and Japanese readers to increase awareness into their own underlying cultural assumptions.

Differences in Child Rearing Practice Between the West and Japan

A Japanese woman who had raised her child in New Zealand told me the following experience:

“I joined a community group for mothers with newborn babies. We would meet weekly to exchange information and chat. The group was lead by an expert in baby care, and she taught us that when it was time for babies to go to bed, we were to put them in a private bedroom, turn the lights off, and shut the door. We were not to respond if babies cried because they had to learn to sleep by themselves. We were told to put on some music if necessary so we won’t hear babies crying. I tried to follow that teaching, but I couldn’t resist the temptation at times to going into my boy’s room, picking him up and cuddling him to sleep.

Also in the mothers’ group, I wanted to hold my baby on my lap while talking, but everybody else placed her baby in the pram. New Zealand mothers didn’t seem to cuddle their babies much.”

In the West, most child rearing experts no longer advocate shutting the door on a crying baby but instead they now advise mothers to soothe and comfort babies when needed (Bendey, 2012, p. 171; Leach, 2010, p. 112 and p.133). However, it used to be a common recommendation for mothers to leave their infants cry and not “giving in. (Leach, 2010, p. 133)” in order to train them to sleep alone. In Japan, it would have been inconceivable to teach

mothers not to respond infants' crying. In fact, a Japanese mothers' guide instructs mothers never to leave their babies crying and "don't worry about spoiling your baby by allowing him/her to fall into the habit of being held (Boshi Aikukai, 1992, p. 54)." Another Japanese guide also advises mothers to cuddle or hug babies until they sleep (Bosi Eisei Kenkyuu Kai, 2013). This is in clear contrast to an author in the United Kingdom who recommends in her 2012 book that mothers go to the infant's room when he starts to cry at night only to pat him but not to cuddle, because "he should learn to go to sleep...with you out of the room (Bendey, 2012, p. 353)".

Japanese mothers tend to be more accepting of infants' dependency needs than Western mothers, which is shown also in their practice of milk feeding and weaning.

Breastfeeding

Studies have found that mothers in Japan are more inclined to make frequent and prolonged physical contacts with their babies than their counterparts in the West. For example, when breastfeeding, Japanese mothers were observed to have a longer skin contact with infants after feeding was over. They often let infants fall asleep while having a nipple in mouth. Also, they were observed while breastfeeding to enjoy staring at and talking to infants more often than most Western mothers would (Pavenstedt, 1965 cited in Johnson, 1993). Western mothers tended to be more brisk with breastfeeding, and they usually left after the infants fell asleep (Weis, et. al., 1984, p. 958).

There are differences about weaning as well. In the United Kingdom, twenty-five percent of mothers are estimated to breastfeed when their babies are six month old, even though the World Health Organisation recommends breastfeeding at least for the first two years of a child life (Bendey, 2012, p. 361). A mothers' guidebook published in Britain in 2009 recommends that mothers should start the weaning process when they, not the babies, are ready, and it lists nine reasons why breastfeeding after the babies' first year may not be a good idea (Murkoff, 2009). In contract, seventy four percent of Japanese mothers continued breastfeeding after their babies' first birthday, according to a survey in 2014 (Benesse, 2014). Another Japanese survey found similar results that only 15 percent of mothers had stopped breastfeeding before the babies were eight months old (Mikihouse Child & Family Research and Marketing Institute, 2011). The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (2007) of Japanese government advises mothers to complete weaning between the twelfth to eighteenth months of the children's age.

Physical Contact

Co-sleeping is a common practice in Japan. children are generally placed in the same bed with parents until they are five or six years old or older (Johnson, 1993, p. 111). After they have grown out of parents' bed, they often sleep with siblings. Furthermore, Japanese fathers and mothers often take a bath with their babies and children (Johnson, 1993, p. 11; Rothbaum, et. al., 2000, p. 1127).

These customs again make a clear contrast to the West. Dr. Spock once maintained "not to take a child into the parents' bed for any reason" (Spock, 1968, p. 169). Even though most Western experts nowadays no longer take such a definitive stand against co-sleeping, and more

American parents in recent years are choosing co-sleeping (Baby Center, 1997-2015), some authors discourage co-sleeping on the ground that as babies grow larger, they will move, kick and make a noise at night (Bendey, 2012, p. 353). Similarly, the American Academy of Pediatrics advises against co-sleeping with a baby younger than two years old for safety reasons. (The American Academy of Pediatrics, 2014). In sum, there is much controversy over the matter in the West (Bendey, 2012, p. 30).

However, arguments for or against co-sleeping are unheard of in Japan, and there are only experts recommendations on how to protect children's safety in co-sleeping from suffocating them, pushing them down from the bed, etc. Infants are usually kept in their mothers' very close proximity (Johnson, 1993, pp. 290-291). Therefore, they are in less need of transitional objects (Roland, 1984, p. 587).

Also, Japanese mothers do not use formal and informal child care services nearly as much as many Western mothers do. Baby-sitting and infant day-care are quite unpopular in Japan (Johnson, 1993, pp. 290-291). A study found that Japanese infants would receive about two hours of non-maternal care a week, compared to twenty-three hours that U.S. infants received (Rothbaum, et. al., 2000, p. 1127).

In sum, Japanese mothers give children more physical gratification than Western mothers through the following practices; protracted breastfeeding in which breasts are experienced by infants as tactile objects as well as nutritional objects, co-bathing, co-sleeping and frequent cuddling and hugging (Johnson, 1993, p. 131 and p. 284). Thus, separation and aloneness are avoided at all costs for children in Japan (Roland, 1984, p. 587).

Emotional Closeness

The prolonged and more frequent mother-child physical contact in Japan is accompanied by greater emotional indulgence of children's needs, heightened dependence and more intense emotional bonding. Japanese mothers are more accepting and even encouraging than their Western counterparts of children's dependence.

Mothers in Japan tend to form a closer symbiotic union with their babies in which individual separation is de-emphasised. They see babies' indulgence and dependence as healthy and also as fostering of emotional security (Shwalb, et. al., 1998, p. 183). Whereas Western mothers tend to expect children to be able to communicate their needs and negotiate with others (Rothbaum, et. al., 2000, p. 1130), Japanese mothers often meet infants' needs before they are expressed. Thus, they in fact convey to the infants the message, "I am one with you ... we are of the same kind" (Kagitcibasi, 1994, p. 62, as cited in Rothbaum, et. al., 2000, p. 1126), which leads to infants' presumption that their mothers will meet all their needs (Rothbaum, et. al., 2000, p. 1128). In many Western countries, this kind of symbiotic union might not be seen as healthy, since infants tend to be regarded as individuals from birth (p. 1126).

Japanese mothers make heavily use of babyish and meaningless vocal expressions with infants, including onomatopoeia, greetings, and recitations of the sounds that the babies just made. In comparison, Western mothers tend to make direct statements and questions more. Hence, mothers in the West facilitate infants to become individuals capable of meaningful self-expression. In contrast, Japanese mothers reinforce the notion that infants are still merged

with them, needing comfort and protection (Rothbaum, et. al., 2000, pp. 1126-1127).

In a similar vein, mothers in Japan are found to be more supportive and encouraging of children's dependent behaviours, and accordingly, Japanese children display more of these behaviours (Johnson, 1993, pp. 288-289). On the other hand, Western mothers are more facilitative of greater independent activity through encouraging verbalisations and exploratory behaviours of the environment (p. 289). Therefore, Western children are verbally demanding of mothers, but they are less willing to comply with another's demands, and they emphasise their personal possessions, all to greater degrees than do Japanese children (p. 289). Also, Western preschoolers were observed to show more assertion, anger, and aggressive behaviours and language than Japanese counterparts did (Rothbaum, et. al., 2000, p. 1129).

Since Japanese children are raised with a greater proximity to their mothers, they are more afraid of separation. They insist that mothers stay close to them and that their needs are promptly met. Mothers, accordingly, do not usually leave children to play by themselves (Johnson, 1993, p. 113). Research using the Strange Situation has revealed that Japanese babies resist separation more strenuously, and they get more disturbed by separation, as indicated by crying and the lack of exploration. In fact, their distress was so severe that experimenters often had to either curtail or even terminate the experiment (Rothbaum, et. al., 2000, p. 1127).

Frank Johnson, a U.S. psychoanalyst who has done extensive research into the psychology of Japanese people, makes the following statement about the mother-child relationship in Japan:

Ethnographic information about Japanese childrearing demonstrates a close and continuing physical attachment between mothers and infants, a nonscheduled feeding routine and continued contact during various times of the day, evening, and nighttime. The physical architecture as well as the emotional nature of close interpersonal nexus extends this intimacy, including the customs of sleeping and bathing together. Japan is characterized by the protracted attachment of infants and mothers in the context of a highly developed postindustrial society. ... the evidence for temporal protraction of an intimate connection between mothers and children is prominent in Japanese childrearing compared to modal North American practices. This documents that the infant-mother relationship is both more intense and more persistent; it also suggests that both physical and psychological separation take place more gradually and less completely (Johnson, 1993, p. 286).

Mutual Dependence in We-Self-Esteem

The highly attached mother-child union in Japan extends into the child's young-adult, and often even into the adult, life. Therefore, Japanese mothers gain greater self-esteem by their children's achievements than most Western mothers do. Consequently, Japanese children have stronger needs to live up to parental expectations.

An experimental study done by a social psychologist Sheena Iyengar is illuminating in this respect (Iyengar, 2013, pp. 47-48). Two ethnic groups of children living in Japantown,

California participated in the experiment; Anglo-Americans, and the children of Japanese and Chinese immigrants who were raised in their Asian home environments. They were presented with six anagram problems. For the first group of children, the experimenter who identified herself as “Ms. Smith” told that they were free to choose any one of the anagram problems to solve. For the second group, “Ms. Smith” instructed them to solve the problems that she had chosen for them. For the third group, “Ms. Smith” communicated that their mothers had filled out a form in which they indicated which anagrams to solve. In reality, all children in the second and third conditions solved the same problems that the children in the first group had freely selected.

The children of the two ethnic backgrounds responded differently. The Anglo children achieved highest when they were given the free choice. On the other hand, Asian children in Japantown did best when their mothers purportedly had chosen the problems for them. An Anglo girl in the mother-choice-condition said to the experimenter, appearing appalled, “you asked my *mother*?” This reaction is a clear contrast to that of a Japanese American girl who came to Ms. Smith after the experiment and said to her, “Could you please tell my mommy that I did just like she said?” For an Anglo child, his/her mother’s choosing was an undue restriction on individuality; whereas for an Asian youngster, it was an act of caring. For an Anglo child, when he/she performed well, it meant “my achievement” and “I did well.” For an Asian child, it denoted “our achievement” and “we did well.” The Asian children and their mothers were “practically one and the same (Iyengar, 2003, p. 49). Hence, Asian children possess a greater desire to please their mother, because she gains greater self-esteem from their high achievements than an Anglo mother does from her children’s high performance. Attesting to this, many Japanese mothers have a strong desire to “put their child in a good school,” and one of the most popular gossip topics is about which children are going to which schools.

Disciplining of Children

Observational studies have discovered that Western mothers are more likely to verbally explain to children what they did wrong and why it was wrong. Their explanations tend to elicit vocal defense from the children. Therefore, children are socialised to become verbally adroit (Johnson, 1993, p. 121). Western mothers also tend to directly oppose children’s control, show anger, use more command, coercion and authority. Their directness, in return, leads to children’s assertive behaviours (Rothbaum, et. al., 2000, p. 1131), as well as expressions of emotion. These behaviours of mothers and children create tension. Their child rearing practice is a reflection of Euro-American values on the abilities to verbally express one’s wishes, show appropriate emotions, and negotiate with others, as important personal capabilities to form close human relationships.

Compared to Western mothers, Japanese mothers rely less on authoritative and argumentative means when dealing with children’s misbehaviour. They are more likely to utilise emotionally-oriented and others-related modes of behaviour control, which is designed to show children how their actions affect others (Schneider and Asakawa, 1995, p. 1120). For example, at the scene where a Western mother would be likely to scold a child, a Japanese mother might say “if you don’t stop doing that, I will suffer” (Weis et. al. 1984, p. 959).

Furthermore, mothers in Japan tend to use indirect ways to express negativity, such as using silence, taking up a toy or food (Rothbaum, et. al., 2000, p. 1129), and frowning. The use of these non-verbal expressions of negativity, without an open display of emotion, facilitates the development of sensitivity to subtle nonverbal communication (Roland, 1996, p. 465). It also compels children to infer mothers' pain, deduce what happened and realise that they should avoid repeating the same actions from now on, instead of arguing back (Johnson, 1993, p. 122). In fact, Japanese two-year olds were observed to make fewer demands of parents, give fewer orders, were less expressive of emotions and less likely to assert that they would not obey, than Western children.

Moreover, when the relatively subtle strategies that Japanese mothers often use have failed, they frequently resort to threats of humiliation and embarrassment (Johnson, 1993, p. 294). The very common expressions that mothers use are that the specific undesirable behaviour is "embarrassing," "unseemly" and "unsightly." These statements connote outsiders' rejecting eyes, as opposed to the violation of the independent internal moral codes of right and wrong. Thus, the moral codes of the Japanese have the proclivity of being other- and situationally-dependent, instead of being seen in absolute terms. I will further discuss this point later, on the Japanese view about nature and human beings.

In sum, the Western mother tends to emphasise for her children the importance of self assertion, expressiveness and social initiative. She encourages her youngsters to stand up for themselves and say what they want. In contrast, the Japanese mother is more inclined to value empathic and harmonious relationships with her children, and compliance from them. She facilitates the development of children's ability to nonverbally sense her emotional state and to conform to her wishes, which will later become their sensitivity to and consideration of other's needs (Rothbaum, et. al., 2000, p. 129). Therefore, Japanese children are induced to be attentive to verbal and nonverbal cues of others' intentions and feelings (Johnson, 1993, p. 293).

Japanese individuals carry the early mother-child intimate symbiotic union into adult relationships, and thus, Japanese society tends to be lenient toward adult dependency needs. There are three main characteristics to Japanese socialisation: (a) the sense of self is formed in relation to others; (b) they place a high value on harmonious relationships where individual boundaries tend to be obscure and people are expected to sense other's needs without verbalisation and accommodate them, and; (c) they are more accepting and gratifying of dependency needs with each other.

We will now go on to the discussion of each of these characteristics, starting with the selfhood that is relationally determined.

Relationships as "Fabric"

The close connection of a mother-child union in Japan translates itself to the notion of self in terms of relationships with others (Johnson, 1993, p. 311). When I personally look back on my experience as a person who grew up in Japan and who has lived in the United States and New Zealand, people in these nations seem to view relationships as self-contained individuals making connections with one another. Individual uniqueness and the expression of it, as well as creativity, are valued. For Japanese people, in contrast, human relationships exist more

like as fabric. In the fabric, personal boundaries are less clearly differentiated, and each person exists in the totality of relatedness. We will further explore these differences in the next section.

Inter-related Selfhood as Reflected in Titles

Japanese language reflects the other-dependent concept of selfhood. One manifestation of other-dependence of Japanese self is the use of honourific titles, “Mr.,” “Ms.,” “Miss,” “Mrs.,” and “Dr.” In English, the differential use of these titles is dependent on the personal characteristics of the addressee. “Mr.” is used for a male, “Ms.” is for a female, and “Dr.” is for someone with a doctorate. However, in Japan, the use of title does not rely on the personal characteristics of the addressee, but it is dependent on the quality of the relationship between the speaker and the person spoken to. For example, the title most generally used is “*san*” at the end of a person’s name, such as “Honda *san*.” It is used when the speaker wishes to be respectful with the person he/she is referring to. “*Sama*” is a more formal and respectful title. A typical situation in which it is used is when a company representative is talking to a customer, where a very high degree of courteousness is expected. On the other hand, “*chan*” is used typically when an adult is talking to a child, connoting a casual and protective relationship, with some sweetness being nuanced. “*Chan*” is also used between intimate adults and friends when they are showing closeness in a regressive manner. The leniency of Japanese society toward regressive dependence of adults and their reciprocal gratifications of dependency needs will be discussed later in this chapter.

The First- and Second Person Pronouns

Another manifestation of the other-dependent nature of Japanese selfhood in language is the use of first- and second-person pronouns. There are many ways to denote “I” and “you” in Japanese, and people use several “I’s” and “you’s” differentially in their relation to the addressee and the situation in which the utterance is made. For example, one of the first-person pronouns “*watasi*,” is used in a formal relationship, and it gives others the impression of politeness and formality. “*Boku*” which is another form of the first-person pronoun is used by a male in a somewhat self-effacing way. Therefore, it is generally used when talking to a person superior in age, or when the speaker takes a humble posture in public. “*Ore*” is another first-person pronoun used only by males, but this pronoun is used in a casual situation where the speaker is not being modest or bashful. This pronoun also tends to give the impression that the speaker is a somewhat aggressive young man.

Similarly, there are many second-person pronouns in Japanese. But, before explaining these pronouns, I wish to state that second-person pronouns tend not to be used in Japan at all, probably to avoid directness. In the closely-woven fabric of Japanese interpersonal relationships, individuals tend to detour from being direct with each other. In fact, Japanese people are less likely to make eye contacts than the Westerns.

With regard to the use of second-person pronouns, Japanese language often does not require to specify “I” or “you” in constructing a sentence. Let’s take an example of a conversation: “Are you a student?” “Yes, I’m going to ABC high school. Do you know it?” A word-

for-word Japanese translation of this conversation would be, “Are student?” “Yes, ABC high school. Know?” Unless one needs to specifically note “I” and “you,” personal pronouns are omitted from sentences, which is especially salient with the use of second-person pronouns. When a speaker has to specify that he/she is talking about “you,” he/she is more likely to call the addressee’s name, instead of saying “you”; “Is *Matsuda san* a student?” in which “Matsuda” is the family name of the addressee and “san” is a title indicating politeness as reviewed previously. Or, instead of using the addressee’s name, the speaker may use a hand gesture to indicate that he/she is talking about “you.”

When a person does use a second-person pronoun, “*anata*” is a polite way of addressing “you.” However, in its ancient original form, “*anata*” meant “that direction.” Since it was impolite to directly point to the person one is talking to, Japanese people would refer to the person by the direction. Therefore, instead of directly asking “how are you?” the ancient Japanese people would say “how is that direction?” to avoid straightforwardness. That custom gave birth to the second-person pronoun that is most frequently used now. Compared to “*anata*,” a second-person pronoun “*omae*” has a very direct connotation with no politeness to it. It is often used between young boys. Some men address their girlfriend or wife by “*omae*,” and it has a bossy connotation.

As is revealed in the discussion above, Japanese people cannot even say “I” or “you” without taking into consideration the relationship between themselves and the person they are talking to, as well as the social situation in which the communication is taking place.

Next, I am proceeding to one another characteristic of Japanese socialisation, which is placing a high value on harmonious relationships.

Keeping the Harmony of the “Fabric” by Not Causing Trouble to Others

As Japanese people see themselves living in a tightly woven relationships of “fabric,” a very high value is placed not to disturb the fabric but to keep the harmony of it. Therefore, the temperaments often considered ideal in Japan are harmonious, gentle, humble and cooperative (Johnson, 1993, p. 236). Whereas it is important to “do what you believe is right” for the Westerners, “to do what brings harmony to everyone” is often considered a virtue for the Japanese.

Accordingly, “causing others trouble” is a major factor of prohibition and inhibition for Japanese people. Thus, the perception of one’s actions having caused others trouble is a strong cause of guilty feeling. In Western culture, individuals are encouraged not to let other people’s opinions prevent them from what they should or want to do. Therefore, a most important behavioural code is often to follow one’s own internal sense of absolute right or wrong. However, the Japanese behavioural code is other- and situational-dependent. A Japanese person once said to me, “when I am visiting someone with friends and the host asks me what I want to drink, I go with what someone has chosen unless I have a strong preference otherwise. It is because if I request something different, the host will have to make an extra kind of drink.” In fact, when a group of Japanese people are at someone’s house and offered a drink, they often go, “me too,” to follow the first person’s request.

Showing Respect as an Important Cultural Value

Japanese people's high value on keeping the harmony of the inter-relational fabric has generated highly complex systems of social etiquette and mannerism. For one, Japanese language has "honourary systems," in which verbs and some other words change forms to convey politeness, respect, self-effacement, and formality. It is part of everyday discourse among people.

Furthermore, besides using the "honour systems" of the language, Japanese people often use polite words in business and formal personal interactions. For example, when I receive email messages from readers of my books and they tell me they had read my book, the message says, "I have read the noble book." In reply, I would write, "thank you for reading the ignoble book." In this discourse, "the noble book" means "your book," and "the ignoble book" means "my book." Similarly in business, the expressions of "the noble company" and "the ignoble company" are usually used to mean "your company," and "our company," respectively.

Furthermore in English, the first-person pronoun "I" is capitalised, but "you" is not. It may be a reflection of the needs of some European ascendants to assert themselves. If Japanese had a capitalisation and lower-case alphabet usage, the people might capitalise "you" but never "I".

Japanese people's strong allegiance "not to disturb the fabric" is, I believe, one of the major reasons why they were able to keep peace at the time of the huge earthquake and the subsequent tsunami disasters in 2011 which devastated large areas of Japan. Tokyo was completely incapacitated by the earthquake. Trains all stopped, the cars could not move in the traffic jam, and food and drink were quickly exhausted and disappeared from grocery and convenient stores. The city lost its functions. But no riot or robbery occurred. Thousands of people were quietly sitting, and later lying down, in a highly orderly manner on the floors of buildings and train stations, patiently waiting for tens of hours until transportation resumed operation.

Inhibition of Anger and Aggression

The high necessity of Japanese people for not disturbing the fabric of interpersonal relationship makes it very difficult for them to directly express opposition and anger. In fact, Japanese people often say "good" when they mean "no." As an example, a person asks, "would you like something to drink?" and the other person replies "good," meaning "no." It is extremely confusing for foreigners. However, Japanese people almost never confuse the "good" meaning yes, and the "good" meaning "no," since they can differentiate the two by the way the speaker utters the word.

For Western individuals, direct verbal communication is a hallmark of a close and honest relationship, and the avoidance of conflict is often seen to be destructive (Rothbaum, et. al., 2000, p. 1135). In Japan, the same belief does exist, but at the same time, people also tend to believe that having to verbalise one's emotions, wishes and needs is an indication of a distant relationship. In this respect, Japanese people expect in adult relationships the quality of a close mother-infant union in which one's needs and emotions are non-verbally sensed and accommodated.

Johnson (1993) contends that the ritualised demonstration of courtesy, respect, self-abasement and humility is a shield from inner conflictual states of anger and aggression which would be sanctioned if expressed (p. 309). His observation leads to the psychopathology that is characteristic to Japanese individuals. I will examine it later in this chapter. Before going into that area, we will next study how children are socialised to be keenly aware of the importance of not disturbing the interpersonal fabric.

Uniformity in Education

Japanese schools emphasise conformity from early years of students' development, often unknowingly, by being uniform in many aspects.

For example, almost all schools from primary school to high school have uniforms. Moreover, schools even set a specific time period twice a year during which pupils switch between the winter uniform and the summer uniform in accordance with the seasonal change. Most students in the entire nation start each school year on the same day. Throughout Japan, with few exceptions, the number of years that pupils spend in school is standardised; primary schools are six years, junior high schools are three years, high schools are three years, and universities are four years. Students who start school together are expected to graduate together, even in post-graduate school, so there is no accelerated advancement, by which high achievers can skip a school year, or virtually no retention by which students repeat the same school year. Under-achieving students still proceed to the next year, with a small number of exceptions in high school and universities where retention can occur. But students try to avoid it at all costs.

During the final year of high school and university, students are expected to secure full-time employment which they can start upon completion of their school education. Each year, one sees in town many university students in their final year dressed in the same dark suits and black shoes called "recruit suits," with undyed black hair. They are visiting companies for job interviews. Companies tend to be reluctant to hire young people who are not fresh out of school, since they are often seen as "losers." Therefore, Japanese students are under enormous pressure not to delay in education and employment.

In schools, from primary to of high school, students of the same starting year are divided in groups called "classes." The size of a class generally ranges from thirty to forty pupils. Students including high school youths stay in the same class assigned to them for the year. Teachers of different subjects come to their classroom to teach, and thus, students of the same class receive lessons together every day for the entire year. Also, schools provide their youngsters with opportunities to facilitate cohesion of a class. For example, sport matches are organised as part of formal educational activity, and the students in each class make up a team and compete against other classes. Cultural activities are also carried out, in which students might sing in chorus as a class, or perform a play, which may or may not take the form of competition.

These fixed membership experiences of a "class" give students the opportunity for shared problem-solving, conflict resolution, and the joy of group achievements and cohesion (Johnson, 1993, p. 143).

The Japanese socialisation of high group-orientation prepares students to become adults

who emphasise the importance of group affiliation and cohesiveness. We will now look at that aspect.

Group Orientation

Self-esteem of Japanese people is highly tied up with the group honour and reputation (Roland, 1996, p. 467), and thus, Japanese workers possess a strong dedication to the advancement of their company (Weis et. al. 1984, p. 963). When individuals in Japan introduce themselves, they frequently state their group affiliation as part of the introduction. That is, before telling their names, Japanese people would often place the name of their company, as in, "I am from ABC company, and Kurosawa," in which Kurosawa is the surname of the self-introducing person.

Furthermore, Japanese workers tend to form cohesive and highly structured organisations. My experience in New Zealand is that the quality of customer service varies greatly from one representative to another. Each worker is allowed much greater autonomy than is a Japanese worker. Japanese people living in New Zealand have told me that it was much less common in New Zealand than Japan that a customer service person asked for guidance from his/her boss before answering a customer's question or making a decision. In Japan, the quality of service which customer service persons deliver is highly equalised among them, since they receive very meticulous and rigorous training. Also, lower-level employees are allowed a very limited amount of autonomy in decision making.

Since Japanese people are socialised to be highly dependent on the group they affiliate with, and to aspire to fit in, they are quite afraid of being ostracised, which is our next discussion.

Fear of Being Ostracised

For Western persons, "distinguishing oneself" is an admirable achievement. By contrast, Japanese people do not want to be "distinguished" from the crowd. There is a Japanese expression which clearly demonstrates their attitudes for conformity; "the nail that stands out will be hammered in."

In Japan, the ability to "read the air" is regarded highly important. It points to one's ability to sense how he/she should act in a way that is perceived to be appropriate in the current situation. Those who are seen not to be able to "read the air" are disliked and avoided. Whereas group skills in the West mean individuals' ability to become salient in groups and make unique contributions, group skills for the Japanese indicate their ability to fit in the group, be liked by others, avoid being ostracised, and make contributions without an ostensive demonstration (Weis, et. al, 1984, p. 960).

Another heightened fear of the Japanese arising from their group orientation is the fear of embarrassment, which I believe operates as a major behaviour code in Japanese society. We will now investigate that important factor.

Fear of Embarrassment as a Major Behavioural Code in Japan

I have stated that when Japanese children misbehave, their mothers often reprimand

them by telling them that their behaviour is “embarrassing,” “unseemly,” or “unsightly.” These expressions allude to the existence of outside eyes. An important deterrent of behaviour for Japanese individuals is the fear of embarrassment. Japanese culture has the custom of frequent apology and exhibition of personal modesty, and these are attempts to starve off ridicule and embarrassment (Johnson, 1993, p. 307).

Relatedly, Japanese people tend to be self-effacing (Johnson, 1993, p. 90). For example, when they join a new group, such as starting a new job or joining a hobby circle, they are quite modest in communicating to group members about their knowledge and skills. Such modesty is a precautionary measure against receiving poor evaluations and reputations later on. The newcomers may be secretly hoping that others will later find them competent or knowledgeable and thus that they will receive respect. A Japanese chef who owned a restaurant in New Zealand told me that, in a job interview, Japanese applicants would only tell him about their past experiences and objective qualifications without much exaggeration. However, New Zealand applicants would often “puff themselves up.” Therefore, he could not trust them until he test-hired to see with his own eyes how much new employees could actually perform. The chef told me of a New Zealand applicant who claimed that he could cook, but it turned out that all he could do was making scrambled eggs. In Japan, if a person says he can cook, he must be quite a good cook.

Reflecting on their high sensitivity toward external eyes, Japanese people are quite conscious of the way they dress. They are keen on dressing nicely and appropriately to the situation. A number of fashion magazines are published in Japan for both women and men, even though women magazines far outnumber men’s.

The high consciousness of Japanese individuals about embarrassment is demonstrated in mythology as well. We will next look into that sphere.

Emphasis on Embarrassment in Mythologies

Mythologies reveal the fundamental world views of the people. In Japan, one of the most authoritative ancient collections of myths is “*Kojiki*,” which was produced in the seventh or eighth century. *Kojiki* tells that all the islands of Japan were created by the god Izanaki and the goddess Izanami. In the myth, the goddess ordered the god not to see her in the pitch dark room they both were in. But the god could not resist the temptation and lit a torch, and he discovered the goddess in extremely terrifying and filthy appearance. The god was horrified and immediately ran away. The goddess was tremendously embarrassed and enraged for being witnessed of her disgracing appearance and ran after him (Ito, 2010).

By this Japanese myth, one may be reminded of the story of Adam and Eve, in which the breach of a command is also done. However, whereas the guilt and the eternal grave punishment are emphasised in Genesis, the emphasis in *Kojiki* is on embarrassment. This variance may be a demonstration of fundamental difference in the moral codes of the West and Japan (Kawai, 2013, p. 125), in that the pervasive moral codes are guilt in the West and embarrassment in Japan. Even “*harakisi*,” an old act of suicide which samurais committed by disembowling with a sword, was practiced in order to avoid embarrassment. It was more important for samurais not to be looked down on as the loser or a coward than losing life even

after their death.

A caveat is in order at this point. I realise that the terminology of “shame-based culture” for Asian culture, in contrast to Western “guilt-based culture,” is usually used by scholars. However, I am more inclined to use the term “embarrassment” to denote the basal principle of Japanese behaviour code. One reason is that guilt and shame are often closely intertwined. It has been argued that guilt is associated with internal sanctions, and shame is associated with external sanctions. However, both guilt and shame are originally reactions to the danger of loss of love, and further, guilt and shame are at times activated simultaneously within an individual from the perception of failing to meet one’s own expectations (Johnson, 1993, p. 306). Moreover, my personal communications with a few Caucasian post-graduate students in psychotherapy revealed poor consensus as to what each of guilt and shame indicates, at least in the daily usage of the terms. Therefore, I will continue to use the term embarrassment in the subsequent portrayal of Japanese psychology.

The Japanese socialisation of extended mother-child intimacy is manifested in their high responsiveness to other’s emotions, needs and wants, and their consequent low needs of verbal expression. Next, we will examine this aspect of Japanese relatedness.

Emotional Mildness

Mothers with an infant in any culture need to sense his/her emotions without verbalisation, and they need to accommodate his/her needs without being requested to do so. In Japan, children develop a finely tuned sensitivity to the feelings of their mothers’, and later in development, to others’ (Johnson, 1993, p. 245). The close union of the mother-child relationship in Japan extends into adult relationships, in the way that nonverbal and subtle exchange of emotion are frequent, and also that the ability to sense others’ emotional states without verbalisation is valued (Roland, 1996, p. 466). Japanese people attach importance to the act of kindness and consideration by providing support to others, without their needs and feelings being voiced and without being asked to do so (Johnson, 1993, p. 245). Thus, treating others before oneself is seen as a virtue. Therefore, individuals in Japan are relatively in low need for verbalizing how they feel.

Accordingly, whereas the open expression of thankfulness is highly appreciated in the West, having to vocally convey one’s appreciation can often be regarded as a sign of non-closeness in Japan. Therefore, if someone articulates his/her thankfulness to a person, the reply could be “oh, don’t act so distantly. We are buddies.”

An illuminating example would be the dramatised award-giving ceremonies for professional actors and singers on TV. In the United States, the winner on the stage often tell each person’s name of whom she is thankful for the victory. But in Japan, the winner might only repeat in sobbing tears, “thank you, this is because of everyone’s support, thank you.” As another example, Western scholars often write lengthy acknowledgements in their books where names of many people who contributed to the production of the books are mentioned. However, Japanese writers rarely do so. For Western individuals, publicly naming each person is a way to show respect. For Japanese people, the ostensive display of names is unnecessary, or it might even be undesirable. The appreciation is assumed, or it is to be conveyed privately by

way of doing something in return or giving a gift, or writing a thank you letter.

The relatively low necessity of vocal communication of one's emotions in order for them to be understood and gratified by others is coupled with a greater indulgence of people's dependency needs in Japanese society. We will examine that next.

Amae, Emotional Dependence

The Japanese word and concept of "*amae*" have particular significance in understanding Japanese attitudes toward dependence. "*Amae*" means emotional dependence, and the concept received international attention in the psychoanalytic community due to the work of Takeo Doi, a Japanese psychiatrist who received training in psychoanalysis in the United States. Doi noticed, in his psychotherapy sessions with a woman who was bilingual of English and Japanese, that she would use the Japanese noun "*amae*" when talking about her child, even though she was speaking English with him in the sessions. He realised that there was no word for "*amae*" in English vocabulary even though the word is quite commonly used in Japan.

"*Amae*" denotes, in Doi's explanation, 'the feeling that all normal infants at the breast harbour towards the mother-dependence, the desire to be passively loved, the unwillingness to be separated from the warm mother-child circle and cast into a world of objective "reality" (Doi, 1973, p. 7).' It is "the dependency based on the desire and craving for closeness, security, and cherishment" that is not restricted to the mother-infant relationship but it exists in every culture "throughout the life span, in relations with other family members, closest friends, and specified superiors, such as teachers or supervisors" (Johnson, 1993, p. 64).

The English corresponding words to "*amae*" would be the desire "to be babied," and the behaviour of acting like a child, and the corresponding words to the verbal form "*amaeru*" would be "to depend," "to wheedle," or "to dote" (Johnson, 1993, p. 156). These English words tend to have negative connotations, which demonstrates the negativity that Western people hold about dependence. Some of the other descriptions concerning the demonstration of dependency desires are needy, spoiled, whining, wheedling, and coaxing. These words connote an immature psychological state of individuals making age-inappropriate demands for assistance or undue attention (pp. 157-158). Doi (1973) points out that "*amae*" motives are often disguised in Western societies because of the adversary values Western people place on dependence.

Contrary to the general dismissive nuance that dependency words have for Western people, "*amae*" and its verbal form "*amaeru*" have an aura of sweetness (Johnson, 1993, pp. 156-157). In Japanese adult relationships, "*amae*" as "the ability and prerogative of an individual to presume or depend upon the benevolence of another" (p. 63) "is seen to promote "the security and cherishment sought through another person" (p. 157). Numerous studies have made clear that Japanese culture consistently supports and extends dependent and interdependent connections with selected persons. In a sense, the emotional intimacy and dependence of the mother-child union is carried into adult relationships in Japan. An American male who had lived in Japan wrote that, the dependence he witnessed in Japan awakened in him the unconscious dependency issues and stimulated repressed dependency longings, which he even found threatening (Tobin, 1982, p. 39, as cited in Johnson, 1993, p. 179).

In the subsequent sections, we will look into how dependency needs are accepted and gratified in Japanese relationships.

Superior-Subordinate Dependence

A Japanese man working in New Zealand told me of an incident with surprise; he learned that a young person who was once hired part-time at a local *café* had quit the job only to start working for another *café* a few doors down on the street, perhaps for a better pay or work hours. The Japanese person was surprised at how “dry” a New Zealand person was for switching between employers who were in competition with each other. His surprise came from the fact that Japanese people tend to develop a strong sense of allegiance to the members of their group, especially to the ones higher in social status. Therefore, changing employments to a competitor would feel like betrayal against the former employer, even for a part-time job.

I have had an experience which showed that a similar principle is operating in education. After taking on a teaching position at a Japanese university, I would from time to time find myself disagreeing with Japanese professors about policies on teaching and marking. It took me a year to realise that the disagreements came from the basic difference as to the responsibility of teachers. Having had taught at U.S. universities, I had come to believe, without clear awareness, that my responsibility was to provide students with the best learning opportunities I could provide. It was up to each student whether he/she was willing or capable to learn. However, for many Japanese professors, their responsibility was to carry students through the program and get them to graduate. Thus, in Japanese teacher-student relationships, there is often a quality of “the nurturing superior and the protected subordinate,” which is analogous to the earlier mother-infant union, even in higher education. The superior person gains satisfaction and self-esteem by being able to provide support, and the protected subordinate also receives satisfaction and self-esteem by being cherished by the superior. Thus, Japanese teacher-student relationships are often coloured with an emotional dependency-protectiveness quality of a family, whether they are in formal education, professional training, or hobby and cultural apprenticeship.

This fact applies in the fields of clinical psychology and psychotherapy, as well. When I meet a clinical psychologist in Japan, I often feel like asking who his/her graduate school mentor was. That is not an uncommon reaction in Japan. There are “family trees” of apprenticeship, and professionals feel like knowing to which “families” the newly acquainted individual belong in order to have a better sense of knowing the person.

Japanese universities have adopted a system which utilises apprenticeship relationships. It is called “zemi” in Japanese, where the “ze” is pronounced similarly to the sound of “ze” in “zest,” and “mi” is pronounced close to the first-person pronoun “me.” “Zemi” comes from the German word “seminar,” pronounced in Japanese approximation and shortened. In the “zemi,” system, students select a teacher with whom they form a small learning group that gathers weekly to work on academic projects. The group lasts at least for the entire school year, and in many universities the duration is two years or even longer. “Zemi” is expected to offer students the “nurturing-superior-and-protected-subordinate” relationships, given the facts that the same small number of students and their teacher meet every week for a rather

long period of time, and that the teacher knows the students have chosen him/her out of all the other teaching staff. Many “zemi” groups get together at times to drink after school, and they may also go on trips together for overnight stays. The “zemi” system is based on the belief of many Japanese teachers that growth is maximised in apprenticeship relationships in which students form personal relationships with their mentors.

My personal reaction would be a good example of the Japanese way of teacher-student relationships. I moved to New Zealand to spend my university sabbatical year. During the year, a former “zemi” student of mine happened to come also to New Zealand for a year to gain international experiences. Even though ten years had passed since her graduation and she was a woman in her early thirties, I still felt somewhat responsible over her well-being in a foreign country. I would sometimes email her to check how she was doing, take her out for dinner, introduced her to new people to aid her make friends. This protectiveness of mine as if she had still been my student yet-to-mature was, I believe, not peculiar for a Japanese professor.

As a summary of Japanese people’s attitudes and abilities in relation to dependency, Alan Roland, a psychoanalyst in the United States, makes the following statements:

High levels of empathic attunement to others are universally emphasised in Asian societies, if not always fulfilled, as they live in very close, long lasting family and group intimacy relationships that depend on enormous interpersonal sensitivity. This is in contrast to Americans’ highly mobile and shifting friendships, jobs, marriages, places of residence, and social affiliations. The Asian paradigm is to be highly in tune with others’ needs, wishes, moods, and esteem, but not that much with one’s own; but to fully expect the other to be reciprocally empathic with one’s own needs, feelings, and esteem without having to voice them (Roland, 1996, p. 466; italics in original).

Qualifying Statements

I have investigated a number of aspects of Japanese culture. I would like to make some qualifying remarks here on some of the points made in this article.

First, the umbrella term “the West” encompasses a myriad of cultures and countries. Even though I have used the term throughout this chapter, I realise that a vast amount of diversity exists among Western cultures and also among individuals within a culture. Therefore, the applicability and the validity of my observations need to be considered with caution. Furthermore, many observational and experimental studies are heavily relied upon US participants and scholars.

Second, we have reviewed that the mother-child union in Japan tends to be more intimate and protracted and also that Japanese society has collective nature. However, I am not claiming causality between these two phenomena. It would be possible to construe a two-way causality, in that child rearing practices characterised by intimate parent-child attachment creates the pattern of close interpersonal connectedness in the society, and conversely, the closely woven nature of general relationships in the society induces caregivers to create more inseparable unions with their children. However, I am not asserting any causal direction.

Third, Japan is becoming increasingly Western in some of the people’s beliefs and

behaviour patterns. It appears to me that more and more Japanese individuals, especially with higher education living in urban environments, are placing greater importance in; (a) the establishment of individuality, (b) self-expression and self-assertion, and (c) taking actions according to their own values and internal codes irrespective of others' opinions.

Lastly, a reader might receive the impression that I am depicting Western people and Japanese people to be entirely different from each other. However, it is not my intention. Western individuals are often conscious about how they are seen by others. Many of them at times criticise themselves for not having been able to do what they wanted to do for fearing others' negative reactions. Conversely, any sensible Japanese parent would say that independence is important for his/her children. I see that the differences between Western and Japanese cultures exist in degrees not in fundamental quality.

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