

Differences in Matriarchal/Patriarchal Principles, Interpersonal Relationships, and Their Implications For Psychopathology and Psychotherapy Between the Western and Japanese Cultures

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Aims of the Article

In this article, I will present Japanese culture while contrasting it to the Western way. The topics include: what are the fundamental differences between the Western and Japanese cultures in relation to the world? What are their unique manifestations of psychopathology? What are their implications for psychotherapy? My aim is to help Western and Japanese readers to increase awareness into their own underlying cultural assumptions.

Matriarchal Culture and Patriarchal Culture

As I have reviewed in my previous article in Osaka Keidai Ronshu (Komiya, 2016), Japanese culture is characterized by its group-orientation, and the high acceptance of dependency needs coupled with highly gratifying attitudes of individuals' dependency needs. There is an argument that these characteristics are manifestations of the "matriarchal principle" operative in Asian cultures in contrast to the "patriarchal principle" which is more salient in the West. I believe that this way of thinking is helpful in understanding cultural differences.

Kawai (2002, p. 26), a Japanese psychotherapist trained in Jungian analytical psychology, contends that Asian cultures have predominant "matriarchal consciousness," while Western cultures can be understood to hold "patriarchal consciousness" as its foremost mode of psychological makeup.

It is important to note here that the principles of patriarchy and matriarchy have nothing to do with people of one sex being valued or given greater privilege over the other in a given society. For example, Japan used to be a highly male-dominated society, especially until the end of World War II, where women were often seen secondary to men, and their rights were unfairly restricted and disrespected. However, as I will show later, the interpersonal relationships, customs, and world views that the domineering men had were highly matriarchal in their principle.

The hallmark of the "matriarchal principle" is its central function of "enclosing," whereas the foremost faculty of the "patriarchal principle" is to "sever" and "separate."

For example, Western medicine which is based on Western science has made a tremendous success with its underlying assumption of "separatedness" of the subject matter; mind and

body, cause and effect, the observer and the observed, diseased body parts and the normal body parts, etc. In contrast, the basic approach of traditional Asian medicine is based on the holistic view of the human body. The Asian doctor sees the entire body of the patient, including his/her emotional life. He conceives symptoms as part of the diseased condition, and thus, will not attempt to remove them without treating the cause.

The difference between matriarchy and patriarchy is also evident in religion, to which we will now turn.

Different Principles Demonstrated in Religion

The Christian God is a father figure. Contrary, in the Japanese polytheistic religion of Shinto, the central deity figure is goddess. In Old Testament, it is Eve, a female, who broke the command that had been given from male God. But in *Kojiki*, a collection of Japanese myths, Izanami, the goddess who created Japan with her husband god of *Izanaki*, gives a command to *Izanaki*, and he is the one who breaks the order. Thus, a female gives an order and a male breaks it in *Kojiki*, a reversal from the Bible (Kawai, 2013, p. 124). These facts may be reflections of the centrality of femininity in Japanese culture.

The Western basic attitudes to people and the world at large might be described as, “I love good children.” Christianity makes it clear that only good people will be saved. Jesus said, “the angels will come forth and separate the evil from the midst of the righteous and throw them into the furnace of fire. Weeping and grinding of teeth will be there” (Matthew 13: 49–50). He also stated “whoever does the will of my Father in heaven – he/she is my brother and sister and mother” (Mathew 12: 50), thus teaching that only those who followed the teachings of God were his family.

On the other hand, the Japanese consciousness on people can be expressed as, “I love my children.” Lovability and family membership are not based on goodness or badness but are granted, which can be considered typically a maternal attitude.

Some of the elucidating examples of the matriarchal feature in religion are the teachings by Shinran (1173–1263). Shinran is one of the most influential Buddhist monks in Japanese history who founded a major denomination of Japanese Buddhism. One night, he was visited in the form of a dream by a holy spiritual being. In the dream, the holy being said to Shinran “if you ever break the taboo of having sex with a woman (monks were prohibited from having sex at that time), I will appear to you as a woman with whom you will have sex, then I will serve you for life, and when you die, I will lead you to heaven.” The holy being was willing to offer herself to him and promised heaven even if he would have broken a rule. Also, a very well-known teaching by Shinran goes, in his holy scripture, “even good people will be saved. Why not villains?” Such an idea is antithetical to Christian thinking.

In the Bible, God of the authoritative father figure gives orders to humans and, if not abided by, gives eternal the punishment of damnation. Clear separations are implied between God and human beings, and between good and bad. However, in *Kojiki*, separations are not often clear. As we have just seen, in *Kojiki*, orders are not given from God to humans but they are given to gods from goddesses, and gods will later break the orders. Also, instead of being punished by the ever-lasting damnation for breaking commands, the gods make amends, or gods and

goddesses negotiate (Kawai, 2013, p. 124). Also, there are gods in Kojiki who act destructively at one time but later become very helping.

Furthermore in Shinto, deity is believed to reside in each person, or rather, the very core of human nature is considered divine, thereby the segregation between a deity and human is null. Moreover, Shinto is an inclusive religion in that any individual who has a religious faith other than Shinto is allowed a membership in a Shinto shrine supporters' group, thereby claim affiliation.

The attitudes of Japanese people about religious practice are also inclusive, which can be seen "unfaithful" from people of many religious persuasions. Japanese persons enjoy a Christmas party, and then they go to a Shinto shrine for the New Year's Day to pray. Many women adore the beautiful Western wedding dress, so many couples marry in the Christian way and say "I do." When their children reach certain ages, they take them to Shinto shrines for special prayers prescribed for children of specific ages. When they die, the funeral will likely be done in the Buddhism fashion by a monk. These practices cause no internal conflict for the typical Japanese person.

Even though different religions have existed nearby with each other in Japan, religious wars have seldom occurred in its history. Historians have discovered evidence of ancient domestic wars in Japan, but many of these wars seem more political than religious in nature.

In Kojiki, gods and goddesses are depicted to be highly humane in the sense that they become angry, scared, violent, laugh, make mistakes, and so and so forth. Thus, the distinction is again nebulous between gods and human beings. However, this feature is also shared by the classical Greek and Roman myths and the Celtic religion, and therefore, one cannot claim that it is an Asian characteristic. But more evidence for Japanese matriarchal principle can be seen in children's stories, to which we will now move on.

Children's Stories Showing Cultural Difference

In Western children's stories, villains stay vicious throughout the story and they are killed at the end by the hero. Thus, there is a clear distinction between good and bad. However, in Japanese stories, villains often apologise at the end and are forgiven, or they promise never to return to the human world and are let go. So, there is not necessarily a clear division between good people and evil ones.

One such example is a well-known children's story, "The Crying Red Devil." In the story, the Blue Devil finds his friend Red Devil crying in his secluded house. The Red Devil is sad because human beings in the village are afraid of him and stay distant. So he is lonely. The Blue Devil contrives a plan that he is going to attack children in the village and the Red Devil will show up and rescue them. The villagers will find the Red Devil a good devil and become friends with him. The Blue Devil carries out the plan, and the Red Devil, although initially reluctant, rescues the children and drives the Blue Devil away. The village people are very thankful of the Red Devil and become friends with him. He is very happy. But the Blue Devil goes away from the region because if villagers witnessed the Red Devil befriend with the Blue Devil, they would again leave him. Learning of the Blue Devil's departure, the Red Devil cries again.

In this popular story, there is nothing devilish about these devils. In Japanese children's stories, devils are sometimes depicted to possess human vulnerabilities and compassion. In this sense, the Western "The Beauty and the Beast" story is an exception and it shares the feature of no definite differentiation between a good one and a bad one. In the story, the selfish prince becomes a beast but at the end, he turns to be a desirable prince.

The feature of Japanese culture that dividing lines tend not to be clearly delineated also exists in their view of nature. We will next look at that aspect of Japanese mentality.

The Japanese View of Nature

There was no word for or the concept of nature in Japanese, until English was introduced and having a word for nature became necessary (Kawai, 2013, p. 19). That fact attests to no separation between nature and human for ancient Japanese people. Shinto is pantheistic, seeing divinity in the sun, stars, mountains, oceans, rivers, trees, rocks and other objects in nature, and in human beings. Inhabitants of Japan have developed the sense that they are part of nature and therefore, not being able to control it but that they are at the mercy of it. This attitude is a clear divergence from the West. In the Bible, God explicitly states that human are to control nature by commanding Adam and Eve to "have many children, so that your descendants will live all over the earth and bring it under their control (American Bible Society, 1976, Genesis 1: 28).

Japan has distinctive four seasons. It also has many beaches, rivers, mountains and rich vegetation due to abundant precipitation, all nearby. These natural features of land and weather must have induced Japanese people to be quite sensitive to climate and seasonal changes. Japanese people look upon seasonal transitions with special emotions. Japanese style hotels change decorations according to seasons, and they also express seasons on dishes by the shapes, colours and arrangements of food items.

In Western scenic gardens, flowers and plants are placed to form straight lines, squares and circles. But Japanese people attempt to recreate the ingenuous beauty of nature in the gardens, and therefore, there are no straight lines or circles. Trees, plants and flowers are often placed seemingly in random orders to imitate natural woods, rivers and ponds, although they are intricately calculated to express beauty. Also, in concert with their emotional quietness, the Japanese art tends to be reserved with the display of beauty. Gaudiness and ostentatiousness are generally to be avoided.

As I have discussed, people in Tokyo displayed amazing orderliness in the aftermath of the huge earthquake and tsunami in 2011. The reason why it was possible may be their implicit belief that human beings are part of nature, that they cannot control it, but that they have to accept its changes and upheavals.

The concepts of primary and secondary control (Schneider and Asakawa, 1995) may be helpful in understanding West-Japan differences. Primary control means attempting to change external realities. On the other hand, in the secondary control modality, one adapts to the reality not by changing the externals but by changing his/her perceptions and attitudes about them.

Primary control is predominant in the West, and secondary control is more highly valued and anticipated in Japan (Schneider and Asakawa, 1995, p. 1121). The strong belief of the West in primary control is demonstrated by the following order which Jesus gave to his disciples: "All

authority has in heaven and on earth has been given to me. On going, therefore, disciple all nations by baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and by teaching them to keep (= obey) all things, as many as they are, that I've commanded you" (Matthew 28: 18-20).

In contrast, an important objective in Zen Buddhism, which has been developed in Japan, is to achieve a state of bliss, enlightenment, or "transcendental awareness." Buddhists change their orientation toward realities (Weis et. al. 1984, p. 961). Their orientation to secondary control may be a derivative of Japanese people's fundamental view that they are one with nature.

I have maintained so far that Japanese people tend to have less distinct personal boundaries between individuals, as well as between themselves and nature, and further that they are inclined to be more accepting and indulgent on others' dependency needs. However, at the same time, they are in higher need to be clear about on whom they can depend and on whom they cannot. Therefore, in compensation for their vague individual boundaries within a group, Japanese people tend to have well-defined group divisions that mark insiders and outsiders. We will next examine this aspect of Japanese psychology.

Insider-Outsider Distinction in Education

The intimate mother-child union is accompanied by exclusivity from outsiders. The mother and her child have pronounced necessity of protecting their emotional closeness from outside intrusion. In Japanese adults, resembling mentality exists. They are keen on maintaining sharp awareness as to on whom they can depend and on whom they cannot. Therefore, they tend to make sharp insider-outsider distinctions.

In Japanese schools, the "entrance ceremony," a ritualistic gathering that punctuates the beginning of school affiliation for students, is a major event along with the graduation ceremony. The entrance ceremony and the graduation ceremony pronounce insider-outsider transitions. The use of school uniforms also makes group affiliation conspicuous. I have stated that, in Japanese schools from kindergarten to high school, students are grouped to form "classes," in which they stay for the whole school year and study together in the same room all day long, while engaging in periodic "class" activities that are designed to enhance cohesiveness. But the increase of group cohesion produces a sharper in-group and out-group distinction.

Extra-curricular activities in school also have highly clear dividing lines of group membership, which is especially true for competitive athletic teams. Once a student joins one of the teams in school, he/she is expected to stay on the same team for the duration of the school affiliation. If he/she leaves the team, it is often seen as a failure, not being able to stick to until the end. Thus, pupils, especially highly aspiring ones, tend to concentrate on one kind of sport or cultural practice while they are in school, instead of engaging in different kinds of activities. Therefore, Japanese high school and university sport teams are often quite competitive in international tournaments and matches.

A Japanese mother living in New Zealand told me with surprise that the school bus her son would take let people in the community on board with a fee who were not the students of his school. In Japan, the thoughts probably never occur to school authorities to allow community people to use the bus, due to the clear segregation between "our people" and "other people."

I wish to note here that the sense of “my-group-ness” can be determined by a myriad of factors, with varying degrees of closeness and affiliation. For example, a Japanese student may feel that other students in the same school belong to him/her. But he/she would feel a greater sense of fellowship to peers in his/her “class.” In his/her “class,” he/she would have even closer feelings toward students in his/her “clique” which is based on friendship and personal affinity.

The clear sense of insider and outsider differentiation which Japanese children acquire in school extends to adult socialisation. We will next proceed to that aspect.

Insider-Outsider Distinction in the Community

Almost all Japanese houses have secure walls surrounding them. Even some apartment buildings are surrounded by walls marking the border of land ownership. I believe that Japanese people’s needs to have their residence firmly walled come from their psychological desire to have a clear inside-outside division, besides the security purpose of preventing thieves from entering.

Japanese people are highly restrained in dependency needs and asking of help in outsider relationships (Roland, 1996, p. 474). They also make use of quite differential modes of association with insiders and outsiders. With outsiders, they maintain a quite high degree of formality and courtesy, with the corresponding use of ritualistic and complex modes of respectful language and mannerism (Johnson, 1993, p. 219). Elucidating examples are the Japanese word “*tatema*” which means the “exterior façade,” and its opposite word of “*honnne*” that indicates “true feelings” and “honest opinions and thoughts.” These two words are frequently used, which signifies their proclivity to utilise frontal statements to prevent sanctions from others while the contrasting true thoughts and feelings are concealed within. Japanese people pay meticulous care to avoid actions that are seen inappropriate which may result in negative external reactions.

Japanese persons may be known for kindness and courtesy. However, at the same time, they can be cold to others whom they consider “outsiders.” Therefore, even though Japanese people value interpersonal harmony, they can be quite disrespectful toward others who they do not consider belonging to them. I have an impression that Westerners are generally kind to strangers and also that they have more casual and relaxed attitudes toward new people. I have heard concordant impressions from other Japanese persons who have lived in Western countries. Furthermore, Westerners seem to be more active than Asians in volunteer activities and charity which are acts of kindness for outsiders. In the West, taking differential attitudes toward different persons tends to be considered shameful because one is supposed to behave in accordance with his/her internal sense of right and wrong, irrespective of the situation. Hence, consistency is an important ingredient of personal integrity. However, for Japanese people, the sense of right and wrong has a proclivity of situation-dependent, and thus, differential treatments of others based on insider-outsider division are less likely to cause significant internal conflict.

Japan has been maintaining high ethnic homogeneity, even though there have been marginalised small indigenous groups in the nation, and an increasing number of foreign nationals are immigrating in recent years. One reason for its homogeneity is, I believe, a language

barrier. Few people outside Japan speak Japanese, and most Japanese people are not good at speaking English which is virtually the international language, because English is extremely different in grammatical constructions and concepts from Japanese. However, another reason may be the closed attitudes of the Japanese toward people of foreign origin. My observations at both Western and Japanese universities are that students at Japanese universities seem to have much greater difficulty putting down psychological walls when interacting with international students. Even when Japanese students are acting friendly and inclusively toward foreign students, they are still treating them as guests.

Related to the strong needs that Japanese people have to clearly distinguish insiders from outsiders, they possess a highly secretive self inside. This important psychological phenomenon justifies a separate treatment, to which we will now proceed.

The Highly Secret Self in Japanese Individuals

The rather defused individual boundaries of Japanese people and their tendency to define self in a collective context paradoxically promote a highly secret and private sense of self. It can be construed that their elevated sensitivity toward embarrassment and toward self-presentations that is in “sync” with others create strong needs to conceal from anyone the thoughts and feelings that might elicit negative external appraisal (Johnson, 1993, p. 261; Roland, 1996, p. 465). Japanese people practice ritualised humility and courtesy that is highly complex and formal in order to avoid conflict and preserve smooth relationships. This overt denial of egoistic motives leads to strong needs to have non-transparent secretive self (Johnson, 1993, p. 262). Another way of theorizing intense needs for secretive self would be that, in a society where persons are in close connection and ego boundaries are vague, individuality can only be maintained by having a highly private self (Roland, 1983, p. 501; Roland, 1984, p. 582). It can be conceived that Japanese individuals have a protective “shell” which contains very vulnerable self inside.

The Japanese phenomenon of a highly secretive self has important implications in the practice of psychotherapy. Before moving forward in our discussion to psychotherapy, there is another feature that is comparatively idiosyncratic to Japanese individuals; the chasm between their frontal display of propriety and inner conflicting states.

Need for Under-the-Mask Release of Negativity

Japanese humility, courtesy and propriety as a front are counterbalanced by their “under the mask” release of forbidden delights (Johnson, 1993, p. 240). For example, there are so many bars even in small cities that men go to where waitresses in highly revealing dresses talk with them and drink with them. Men get drunk, flirt, speak ill of their wives and people at work including their bosses. In busy commercial areas at night where bars are concentrated, one would often see drunken businessmen in suits staggering and talking loudly. Also, there is a Japanese expression, “doing away with courtesy and propriety” at a gathering for people at a workplace over food and alcoholic beverages. The expression means that disrespectful remarks and acts from drunken subordinates to superiors are forgiven to a great degree. Participants are supposed to forget each other’s improper behaviours after the party is over. Furthermore, sex industries targeting men are huge in Japan, and the ostentatious and gaudy displays of neon

signs of sexual salons are prevalent in many areas in Japanese cities.

Women of course also have outlets for their “improper” emotions and thoughts. Close female friends often get together in small groups over dinner with alcoholic drinks or lunch, and they talk about their sex lives, partners’ drawbacks, aggravation against their mothers-in-law, irritations at work, etc. These gatherings are planned in advance and are exclusively for women.

People in Japan tend to be more lenient with these “behind-the-scene” acts, perhaps more so than people in many Western countries. Hence, Japanese individuals are probably less likely to feel guilty about having contradictory aspects within themselves between the outward façade of propriety and the behind-the-mask behaviours.

We will now extend our discussion to the downsides of Japanese socialisation and psychopathology. Then, we will go on to psychotherapy.

Drawbacks of Japanese Socialisation

It may be true that, as some psychologists have argued, the strong emphasis of the Western cultures on autonomy, individualisation and assertiveness can lead to alienation, loneliness, and interpersonal discord and violence, and furthermore, it may also result in the exhaustion of common resources because individuals attempt to satisfy their desires with little consideration to the whole (Weis et. al. 1984, p.965). However, Japanese pattern of childrearing and socialisation also has its own downsides. As we have seen, Japanese culture heavily emphasises accommodation to the expectations of others, including parents, teachers and peers in school, people at work, friends, and persons in intimate relationships. Such conformity pressure can be suffocating of individual creativity, expression and freedom. It may also induce individuals to be excessively prone to emotional damage from disapproval.

The downsides lead to the psychopathology which is characteristic to Japanese individuals.

Japanese Psychopathology of Internalisation

As discussed in the sections on childrearing, Japanese parents are inclined to arouse in children anxiety and guilt with their attempts to control misbehaviour. Therefore, Japanese people may have a strong tendency for internalizing problems than the people in many Western cultures (Rothbaum, et. al., 2000, p.1137; Weis, et. al, 1995). Similarly, the stress which Japanese culture places on the significance for interpersonal harmony can lead to suppression and repression of anger, aggression and other negative emotions. Therefore, symptoms associated with somatisation and self-destructive behaviours are prevalent, as indicated by the following facts: there are many clinics in Japan specializing in psychosomatic medicine (Iwakabe, 2008, p. 105); wrist cutting is becoming increasingly widespread (Yamaguchi and Matsumoto, 2005), and; suicide rates have been continually high (The Ministry of Health and Labour of Japan, 2012).

Inability to Attend School

As we have seen, the principle in central operation in Japan is matriarchy, whose main feature is to enclose. In Japanese society, the childrearing practices of the prolonged and intimate

mother-child union that at times discourages independence produce “engulfing” pathology.

Many children suffer from inability to go to school for emotional reasons. Some of these children develop somatisation symptoms in the morning, including stomach ache and fever, and inability to get up from the bed. These symptoms may subside in the afternoon or on weekends, and also during school breaks. These children are often in deep agony for their inability to attend school, feeling gravely guilty and ashamed. Some of them attribute their fear of school to bullying. But others cannot offer any explanation as to why they are unable to go to school. Even when bullying is claimed to be the reason, the hyper-sensitivity of these non-attending children might seem to exist from the perspectives of teachers and psychologists.

Bullying in School

Another salient problem that may have special pertinence to the discussion of Japanese psychopathology is bullying, especially in schools. Bullying is now regarded as one of the most serious problems in Japanese education. Bullying occurs of course in many Western countries, if not all. However, what may make Japanese school bullying unique is the clear contrast of the general agreeableness of Japanese pupils and the insidious and malicious nature of their bullying acts. Bullying is often done by students whose usual attitudes in the classroom are not particularly defiant, and may even be docile, toward teachers. Another unique feature of bullying in Japanese schools is that it involves a relatively large group of students, reflecting the collective nature of Japanese socialisation. Typically, a leader student identifies someone to be victimised, and many others follow the leader. Each of the followers is too afraid not to obey the leader and the majority, because if he/she does not obey, he/she will likely be the next bullying target. The majority may not actively engage in aggression toward the victim, but they participate as audience.

Also, a group of students may intentionally ignore the target student, which has a strong emotional impact on the victim in Japanese society where one is particularly fearful of being ostracised. The bullies may also hide or tarnish the personal belongings of the target's, and may leave or send spiteful written messages for the target to find. Bullying may even involve coercive extortion of money. Furthermore, I know of a woman who used to be forced to perform oral sex to men in front of some girls who received a financial compensation from the men for making her provide the sexual service.

Severe Social Withdrawal

Furthermore, especially in the last decade or two, severe cases of social withdrawal have been reported and, they are now considered a major problem in the mental health fields of Japan. Individuals in this condition would be diagnosed with Social Anxiety Disorder or Avoidant Personality Disorder in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). The Cabinet Office of the Government of Japan (2015) estimates that as many as seven hundred thousand individuals are suffering from this condition, but the exact number can never be known due to its highly secretive nature. In fact, a psychiatrist who specialises in helping these individuals states that his hunch is well over a million (Nihon Housou Kyoukai, 2012). The majority of them are men, and a national survey

found out that 81% of its sample was men (Zenkoku Hikikomori KHJ Oyano Kai, 2010).

Individuals in this condition cannot go to school or work due to their incapacitating fear of people and an intense sense of personal inadequacy. Some of them are in their teens, but others are in their forties and even older (Nihon Housou Kyokai, 2012). They often stay home all day long every day, but I have known a withdrawing man in his twenties who was able to venture onto lonely long distance excursions by bicycle. Some of the people under this condition may go out to neighborhood convenience stores late at night when they can stay unseen from acquaintances. They have an intense desire for people, and thus, many of them interact incognito with others through internet social networking systems. Many of them stay in their parents' home, and they may spend most of the time in their private rooms. A Japanese media reports that "shut-ins" exist in many countries but what surprises people in other nations is that Japanese withdrawn people are in their high age range and that they are still under parental care. (Zappallas, 2015).

A further disturbing fact is that some of them commit violence verbally or physically toward their parents on whom they are disparately dependent financially and emotionally. They are in deep turmoil about their socially incapacitated conditions and they also suffer from the intense sense of inferiority. Their parents are also in excruciating emotional pain and grave anxiety over the future of their children, or rather, adult children. The parents are intensely concerned about them in the prospect of their own deaths. The parents are also generally very secretive about the psychologically ailed states of their children even to their extended families. Some lay people argue that the parents should drive their children out of home and cut all the financial supply. However, I do not believe that such a simplistic thinking leads to solution.

As to the etiology of severe social anxiety which underlies Japanese withdrawal and school nonattendance, I believe that repression of anger and aggression constitutes its main pathogenicity. It has been my contention that the fear of others is often created by anger and aggression that are repressed and then projected onto individuals external (Komiya, 2011; Komiya, 2014). The projected aggression results in perceived threats from others, thus creating the belief, "I am not aggressive, but other people are trying to attack me."

Many experts in psychology, education and their related fields are making effort to rectify the situation. I am next going to explore the implications that Japanese childrearing and socialisation, and the resultant psychopathology, have on the practice of psychotherapy. I would like to note here that our subsequent discussions will be limited to psychotherapies that are exploratory in nature, as opposed to cognitive, behavioural or solution-focused approaches that tend to be more incisive.

Psychotherapy in Japan

The attitudes of Japanese people against expression of strong emotions are at odds with the fundamental tenets of many forms of psychotherapy where free-associative disclosure of socially prohibited thoughts and intensive emotions is expected (Johnson, 1993, p. 251). A Japanese psychotherapist who went to a region which had been devastated by a huge natural disaster noted that the survivors there seldom expressed grief in front of therapists. They would reply "everyone is suffering equally," and they were not willing to divulge their thoughts

and emotions. The psychologist states that they seemed to be supported by the collective sense of community where a gradual cure was taking place in the feeling that they shared the common experience and emotion (Oyama, 2012, p. 15).

As another example of the difficulty Japanese people generally have with self-disclosure, I remember meeting with a Japanese female client for the intake interview at a university student counselling centre in the US. She was perplexed in my office about the situation, stating that she had not expected having to talk extensively about herself in a private room. Consequently, she had great difficulty discussing her concerns. That made a clear contrast with a Caucasian student who was the next client, who came in, sat down and immediately started talking about herself.

I have practiced psychotherapy in the United States and Japan, and it is my experience that Japanese clients have much stronger hesitation in discussing themselves in the early stages of psychotherapy. It tends to take longer for them to develop trust. Therefore, psychotherapy practice in Japan requires a gentle and empathic approach to clients.

I see it poor practice of therapists working with Japanese clients to inquire by saying “how did you feel then?” or “how do you feel about that?” I have seen young therapists making these remarks. But in these occasions in Japan, the clients either had already expressed how they were feeling even if slightly in passing, or they were too threatened to express and experience emotions. The young therapists either failed to notice and empathically comprehend the clients’ emotional expressions, or they failed to understand and accept that the clients were not able to feel and voice emotions. Each time clients express something important but were not understood and accepted, or each time they are pushed beyond readiness, they become closed even so slightly. The clients were now more self-protective from therapists who were not astute enough to understand their emotional states. The therapists, being oblivious to these psychological movements occurring within the clients, ask them to verbalise emotions. Clients are often compliant to therapists, so they try to answer therapists’ interrogating questioning, but their answering only builds a defensive question-and-answer discourse which does not lead to therapeutic change.

I perceive it quite important for a therapist working with Japanese clients to be highly responsive to their subtle expression of emotion but not intrusive. Let’s say a Japanese client states in a reserved manner, “I don’t understand why my boss said I was insensitive.” It may be a restrained expression of anger. Then it is important for the therapist not to overlook the expression but to respond it with the same affective intensity with the client. The therapist might say in a similarly quiet manner, while imagining viscerally how the client seems to be feeling, “you are wondering why he said you were insensitive.” It would be inappropriate for the therapist to comment “you are REALLY ANGRY at him” without understanding and respecting his need to avoid the vividness of anger, or to ask him how he felt at that time, without first acknowledging and responding his emotional expression, albeit how restricted it might be.

As we have reviewed, Japanese clients are in strong need of for gentle and empathic approaches. It is a major reason for which the Person-Centered approach has been quite popular in Japan. I will discuss it next.

Person-Centered Therapy in Japan

Japanese clients expect a high degree of empathy and emotional nurturance from psychotherapists, which is concordant with the non-verbal empathic attunement that often exists in Japanese relationships with “insiders.” (Roland, 1996, p. 469). They also tend to be aversive to explicating and confrontational verbal communication. Therefore, the tender and compassionate approach of Person-Centered therapy is amicable to Japanese individuals, and it has prevailing influence in the field of psychotherapy in Japan. Person-Centered therapy was introduced to Japan shortly after the World War II, and it was enthusiastically welcomed by many Japanese mental health practitioners and educators (Oyama, 2012, pp. 11-12), even though the nation that brought in Person-Centered therapy was the United States which had devastated Japan and conquered her. Currently, even though cognitive-behavioural approaches are gaining eminence, Japan is still a leading country in Person-Centered practices and research (Shimizu, 2010, p. 19). Also, I have an impression that successful cognitive-behavioural therapists in Japan tend to be gentler and less confrontative than their counterparts in many Western nations.

We will next examine the unique qualities of Japanese therapeutic relationships in close details.

Shaded Boundary Between the Client and the Therapist in Japan

It would be common for an English speaking helper in the West to start a session by saying, “how may I help you?” However, for most Japanese clients, it would have an adverse feel to it, sounding too distant, business-like and even demanding of verbal explanation. It is because the phrase implies “I-you” separation, and further because the phrase suggests that “unless you articulate how I can help you, I cannot help you.” In Japan, a typical opening phrase would be, spoken in a highly gentle tone of voice, “what happened?” or “how did you decide to come here?” But when the latter sentence is stated, “you” would not be mentioned since the second-person pronoun is usually omitted in Japanese. So the closest approximation in English would be “how decided to come here?” without any first-person or second-person pronoun in the sentence. Within the Japanese therapist-client unit, the individual boundary is not so much a line but as it is shades.

Safeguarding of Personal Space

Another feature of psychotherapeutic discourse in Japan is the avoidance of confrontational interventions. As I have discussed, Japanese people have highly secretive selves, and therefore, they easily feel intruded. Hence, in order to accommodate to their heightened need for the protection from transgression, a low table is often placed between a therapist and a client (Roland, 1983, p. 501). It is a symbolic marking of a personal boundary which otherwise tends to be vague, thus safeguarding the client from invasion. Furthermore, therapists need to use gentle and less confrontational interventions. In psychoanalysis, the interpretation is a crux of its repertoire of technique (Greenson, 1967). However, we need to be aware that interpretations are intrinsically intrusive and threatening, as Nancy McWilliams, a psychoanalytic

psychotherapist in New York, argues: “all of us suffer at least a wince when someone tells us something about ourselves that we did not already know. ... it feels humiliating to be taught. Every psychoanalytic interpretation is thus a narcissistic injury” (McWilliams, 1999, p. 170). Therefore, interpretations, as well as investigations, are less used in Japan compared to European and American professionals, or not used at all even by therapists who consider themselves as psychoanalytic (Roland, 1983, p. 500). In a similar vein, confrontations are used only rarely or not used at all in Japan.

Maintenance of Hierarchy

Moreover, the hierarchical nature of Japanese interpersonal relationships has to be carefully safeguarded in therapy. Japanese has a word “sensei.” It is often used to mean a teacher, and thus, a teacher is called “Miyazaki sensei” with his surname or simply “sensei.” Sensei has a respectful connotation with overtones of a protective superior, and some other professionals in the position of giving advice and care are also called “sensei,” such as physicians and lawyers. In Japan, psychotherapists are often called “sensei,” too. This fact indicates that clients have implicit expectations toward therapists to be the superior, nurturing and protective parents who understand the feelings and needs of children (Oyama, 2012, p. 14). Furthermore, the fine empathic tuning with clients’ feelings is expected to occur without much verbal expression (Roland, 1983, p. 501).

Expression of Negativity

The open expression of anger is prohibited in Japan, especially toward individuals in superior positions. Hence, it is very difficult for most clients to directly voice their anger and dissatisfaction toward psychotherapists. Japanese clients perceive an overt expression of anger to be seriously damaging of the nurturing therapeutic relationship on which they are dependent (Roland, 1996, p. 471). For that reason, I regard it extremely important for a therapist working with Japanese clients to be especially perceptive of their subtle and indirect expressions of negativity about therapy and the therapist. The therapist needs to pick up on negativity cues in clients’ verbal and non-verbal expressions and gently intervene to facilitate the open communication of anger and aggression toward him/her.

For example, let’s say that a female client enters my office and says, “the weather is so bad today.” I would suspect that the remark may be an expression of her depressive and agonising affect, or it may be an expression of reluctance to come to therapy. If I hunch it to be the latter, I might respond to her hidden anxiety over seeing me by saying, “it was difficult to come today?” with an empathic tone of voice and facial expressions while trying to viscerally imagine what it might be like for her now to be with me. Please note that I would not say, “were you afraid to come to me today?” “you didn’t want to come today?” or “were you angry at me that you didn’t feel like coming today?” unless I sense that such direct interventions would be warranted given her high awareness of negativity toward me and the willingness to voice it.

The Frequent Use of Empathy Statements

If Japanese psychotherapies do not make a frequent use of interpretation or confrontation,

what interventions do they use? In Japanese family and social relationships, mirroring and idealizing selfobject relationships are more intense and pervasive than they are in the West (Roland, 1996, p. 465). Consequently, Japanese psychotherapists make a frequent use of empathic mirroring, as well as short verbal utterances produced with an accepting tone of voice, “u-huh,” “I see,” “is that so?” Such practice would be considered Rogerian, but some Western psychoanalytic theorists advocate the importance of empathic and non-intrusive therapeutic relationships. For example, Kohut denied the use of confrontation which he believed could even damage clients (Kohut, 1984, pp. 241-242; Kohut, 1977, p. 173). He also asserted that empathy occupied the central place in the practice of psychoanalysis (Kohut, 1984, p. 243; Strozier, 2011, p. 419).

Involvement of Mothers for Children’s Problems

Lastly, a frequent practice in Japanese psychotherapeutic scenes is the involvement of mothers for children’s problems. When a child or adolescent is referred for psychotherapy, many psychologists attempt to include his/her mother in therapy, even when their orientation is geared toward individual psychotherapy as opposed to the family system approach. Hence, the referring mother and her child may each receive individual therapy concurrently, or only the mother may start psychotherapy. In the occasions when the mother is not open to receive her own help, only the child will be seen. Even though it may not be rare that Western psychotherapists attempt to involve mothers for children’s problems, the frequent practice of mother inclusion in Japan attests to the importance which Japanese psychotherapists place on the mother-child relationship (Iwakabe, p. 113).

Qualifying Statements

I have investigated a number of aspects of Japanese culture, psychopathology and psychotherapy. 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 article, 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, 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.

As the final remark, I hope that more people on the globe will have enhanced understanding into their own culture and into different cultures, with will lead to increased acceptance of one another. That is desperately needed in our today's world of frequent contacts and interactions among peoples on the globe so much more so than ever before.

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