

The Changing Self Concept

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ABSTRACT

The literature review of the changing sense of self among postmodern Japanese people was discussed from several aspects such as historical, social, familial, cross-cultural, and psychoanalytical ones. The rapid modernization and internationalization would have been forcing Japanese people to redefine their intrasubjective as well as interpersonal self.

KEY WORDS

Postmodern Japanese, Self, Modernization

Introduction

There have been several severe societal collapses in Japanese culture. Once there was a centralized, coordinated nation, balancing the needs of political constituencies, industries, and citizens¹⁾, with the government serving as the protector of the Japanese people, and located at the top of the hierarchy. However, this relationship between protector and protected has changed. There have been several scandals in government and banking systems, for example. The unlawful action of the Japanese government regarding the Daiwa Bank's New York office scandal was one of these²⁾. After concealing it for 64 days, the American authorities were finally informed. Additionally, several city banks have gone bankrupt in Japan. Recently, after 7 years of confrontations between AIDS and AIDS-related diseases victims and their families, and the Ministry of Health and Welfare and pharmaceutical companies who allowed the use of contaminated blood after such products were banned in the US and Europe³⁾, a settlement has been finally reached. The government and the companies have publicly apologized and accepted responsibility for their mistakes, a rare thing in Japan. Many

victims and other people accepted this settlement with feelings of disappointment, betrayal, and rage. In addition, since the bubble economy began to break down in the beginning of the 1990s, lifetime employment has been shaken. Sender³⁾ wrote that Japan's citizens have been victimized by their own system.

These social problems point out the Japanese people's blind dependency, which was, and is still, a prominent Japanese characteristic. There is mutual dependency; the subordinate is expected to be loyal to the superior, while the superior is expected to nurture, take responsibility, and have concern for the subordinate⁴⁾. These dynamics can be observed in social and corporate settings as well as among family members: a paternalistic practice. The philosophy of Confucius emphasizes the obligations and responsibilities to one's own groups such as family, company, school, and country, and role behavior is a means of self-actualization for Japanese people⁵⁾. DeVos⁶⁾ stated that Japan has traditionally been an "other-oriented" culture (p. 145). Takahashi⁷⁾ stated that the Japanese tend to think of each group, including professional groups, in family terms and their relationships in any group become

very special and emotionally invested. However, the aforementioned social incidents demonstrate the collapse of mutually dependent relationships. People are facing the loss of firm structure and containment.

In addition, there has been increasing internationalism in Japan, which used to be a highly homogenous country. In contrast, there are numerous examples of conflicting phenomena in postmodern Japanese culture such as social, political, child-rearing, family relationships, and the culture itself. How the postmodern Japanese people, who have been facing the loss of a container/protector, deal with an unexpected, unreliable social condition, and how these conditions affect their psyche, are important topics in understanding the postmodern Japanese people.

Characteristics of Japanese Culture

Japanese culture is frequently called a "shame culture" in contrast to Western culture's "guilt culture"⁸⁾ for both positive (e.g., praise in the public space) and negative (e.g., wrongs done in the public space) situations, since in both situations an individual is exposed to an audience⁹⁾. Kimura¹⁰⁾ pointed out that Japanese have a tendency to express guilt as a feeling of shame at the horizontal interpersonal space, which is different from Westerners' experience of guilt at the vertical interpersonal space. Kinston¹¹⁾ summarized the psychoanalytical theories of shame compared to guilt, and stated that "moves in the direction of self-to-object-narcissism are associated with shame, while moves in the other direction result in an awareness of the destruction produced whilst in the object-narcissistic state and consequent guilt" (p. 220). According to Kinston^{11) 12) 13)}, who focused on the duality of narcissism, "self-narcissism refers to the self-representation,"¹²⁾ (p. 384) which integrates both good and bad parts of self-images, and gives continuity and positive self value. In contrast, object-narcissism refers to "a primitive object relationship in which separateness is denied, the object is

destroyed and the emotional dependent needy part of the person is deprived of support and nourishment"¹²⁾ (p. 253).

Neki¹⁴⁾ focused on a socio-developmental dynamic, the issue of dependence, and pointed out that shame and guilt are two socially induced controlling states employed by societies to ensure employing appropriate means of control. He also pointed out the relationship between the guilt-shame and independence-interdependence dichotomies: "behavior in most primary (societal) groups is shame-conditioned while some secondary-group societies emphasize guilt"¹⁴⁾ (p. 8). Neki defined the primary and secondary societies based on how much a country has been urbanized; for example, during the 1970s, 80 percent of India, which Neki labeled as one of the primary countries, was rural while 90 to 95 percent of the United States and England was urban. Lebra⁹⁾ proposed that "guilt is locked together with introspectiveness or self-reflection for Japanese people" (p. 201). Minami¹⁵⁾ pointed out similar ideas, and stated that "the Japanese use the mixed sense of guilt and shame in order to reduce an unsure sense of self" (p. 47). "Japanese offer an apology very easily for the slightest annoyance to others"⁹⁾ (p. 205) which comes from an other-directed social structure and family-like dependent relationships. Okonogi¹⁶⁾ connected this behavioral tendency to the relationship between Japanese parents and their children, and pointed out that Japanese parents expect their children's spontaneous apology and accept it too easily, without providing clear home training and structure which would teach the children their responsibilities and the consequences of their own behavior while teaching them Japanese mutual dependency on other people. Consequently, this causes children's continuous behavioral problems.

Wagatsuma⁵⁾ pointed out that it is difficult for Japanese to differentiate the ego ideal from the ideal self, since the self-awareness of the Japanese is fused with some concepts of expected role behavior which has been inter-

nalized and idealized. Sandler et al.¹⁷⁾ reviewed theorists' definitions of the ego ideal and the ideal self, and pointed out that the ego ideal contains three concepts: "the ideal object, where the child possesses an admired, idealized, and omnipotent object" (p. 154); the introjection of the good or desirable child from the external world; and the ideal self. The ideal self is "a desired shape of the self-the "self-I-want-to-be" (p. 152-153). Therefore, it would be difficult to separate one's self from one's role in the culture, and they show a strong tendency to take their occupational role as a meaningful and significant one. In contrast, Japanese have a much clearer boundary between the public and private aspects of self as compared to Americans¹⁷⁾.

Problems in Family Dynamics

There is another problem concerning Japanese children and adolescents. Ushijima¹⁸⁾ summarized the changing Japanese adolescents' pathology from the view of object relations theory between 1950s and 1980s. In the 1950s, *Taijin Kyofusho*, social phobia, was frequently observed in clinical settings. The family dynamics system was "ie" system: "the unquestionable authority of the father, patriarchal head of the family." Traditionally and still currently, marriage is not viewed as being for the happiness of two people; continuity of house, family name, and property of the lineage are dominant ideas in Japan⁵⁾.

In the 1960s, there were numerous children who refused to attend school, who developed social and/or school phobia symptoms, and the location of fear was between home and school and/or society¹⁸⁾. The nuclear family, consisting of a father, a mother, and children, rapidly increased. The terms "my family" and "my home" became popular, and also the new term "education-focused mother (*kyoiku-mama*)" was developed. These mothers focused on bringing up more and more academically competent children¹⁹⁾. Kojima²⁰⁾ pointed out that *Ikuji Neurose*, child-rearing neurosis, began to get

attention during the 1960s.

In the 1970s came family/domestic violence, anorexia, and depression. The style of the family, called a "new family," changed, and the father's involvement in child rearing was observed.

In the 1980s, there were "*ijime*," bullies at school, and violence at school. Ushijima¹⁸⁾ described the Japanese family dynamics as *houkai kazoku* (family collapse). There was a change in the mother's position in the family: part-time working mothers, a movement from housewives to career women, and kitchen drinkers. The family, an important environment for children to develop their personality, has been negatively shifting, especially since the 1950s. Kiefer²¹⁾ pointed out that the extended family has been used to serve as a model for cooperative social groups throughout history. In addition, the dependent mother-child relationship has shifted to a teacher-student relationship and an employer-employee relationship, both of which functioned like a family and supported the Japanese bureaucratic structure²¹⁾. The entire society functioned like an extended family to support and take care of each other. In contrast, the nuclear family has provided a very limited number of opportunities to show the child the above model. Not only each individual's changes but also the changes in the culture itself during Japan's rapid modernization have created very complex phenomena.

There is another issue in Japan, which is also related to the above changes. The number of suicides among upper grades of elementary school to junior high-school children, especially relating to "*ijime*" has increased continuously. This socially unhealthy and unproductive phenomenon might be related to the lack of adjustment to rapidly changing cultural and social values. DeVos⁶⁾ emphasized that psychological structure is important to consider as part of culture and socialization.

Consequences of Modernization

Yang²²⁾ reviewed cross-cultural literature in order to clarify possible consequences of modernization, and pointed out that different kinds of psychological characteristics might be differently affected by modernization. Therefore, even if non-Western societies become industrialized and modernized, some cross-cultural differences would exist: cultural-specific characteristics. Yang²²⁾ also cited research on Japanese modernization and pointed out that some psychological characteristics showed stability instead of linear changes due to rapid industrialization, including increased urbanization, the nucleation of families, occupational specialization, and "the emergence of a large, middle class, white-collar population in the cities"²³⁾ (p. 63).

Abraham²⁴⁾ pointed out that "the experience of Japan, which modernized itself while maintaining and utilizing premodern traditional institutions --- not only questions the notion of the antithesis between tradition and modernity --- but also rejects the unilinear assumption underlying various models of modernization" (p. 249-250). Marsella and Choi²⁵⁾ proposed a concept of "Easternization" to describe cultural transitions: an alternative pathway to modernization and economic, historical, and political development in Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan. They pointed out problems with using the term "Westernization" and "Modernization" based on the Western countries' development for these Eastern countries' changes during the modern to postmodern periods. "Modernization does not coincide with Westernization, and paths toward modernization involve both uniqueness and diversity among different countries according to their socio-cultural tradition and their governmental and business plans for modernization"²⁵⁾ (p. 206).

The Concept of the Self

Historically, the idea of self has been a bugbear for the discipline of psychology, and

there has been a disintegration of the concept of self²⁶⁾. Hogan and Briggs²⁷⁾ approached the understanding of self from socioanalytic theory. They divided the self into the public and the private self based on both biological and environmental factors. The public self has two aspects: the public reputation and the public self-image, and the private self has at least two meanings: the self-concept and the latent self which includes the full range of talents and tendencies including unconsciousness, beliefs, attitudes, and unexpressed emotions.

Freud²⁸⁾ pointed out the similarity between the process of civilization and the libidinal development of the individual, and stated that "sublimation of instinct is an especially conspicuous feature of cultural development; it is what makes it possible for higher psychical activities, scientific, artistic or ideological, to play such an important part in civilized life" (p. 49). Freud's notion of civilization is based on a biological point of view and ignores a complex social process. Horney²⁹⁾ integrated anthropological findings into psychoanalysis and stated that "attitudes are to an amazingly high degree molded by the conditions under which we live, both cultural and individual, in-separately interwoven. If we know the cultural conditions under which we live we have a good chance of gaining a much deeper understanding of the special character of normal feelings and attitudes" (p. 19).

Fromm³⁰⁾ also objected to Freud's dichotomous belief about man and society and Freud's theory of sublimation from suppression to civilized behavior. He emphasized that the individual remains virtually the same and becomes changed only in so far as society exercises greater pressure on his natural drives (and thus enforces more sublimation) or allows more satisfaction (and thus sacrifices culture).

Stern³¹⁾ wrote:

an overriding human need develops for human-group-psychic-membership, that is, inclusion in the human group as a

member with potentially sharable subjective experiences, in contrast to a non-member whose subjective experiences are wholly unique, idiosyncratic, and nonsharable. One end of the pole is the sense of cosmic psychic isolation, alienation, and aloneness, and at the other end is the feeling of total psychic transparency, in which no single corner of potentially sharable experience can be kept private (p. 136).

He continued that different societies could minimize or maximize the need for intersubjectivity. "If a society were socially structured so that it was assumed that all members had essentially identical, inner subjective experiences, and if homogeneity of this aspect of felt life were stressed, there would be little need, and no societal pressure, to enhance the development of intersubjectivity. On the other hand, if a society highly valued the existence and the sharing of individual differences at this level of experience, then their development would be facilitated by that society"³¹⁾ (p. 137).

It appears that Japanese people stand between the above two stances, and are seeking their own comfortable and appropriate place. However, if the culture has been providing the safety and stability for the people and it becomes endangered, the containing and processing functions collapse and it will be difficult to restore them⁷⁾. In particular, people recognize their own sense of self when they face "nonself"¹⁰⁾. Kimura¹⁰⁾ emphasizes that the "nonself" is not only other people, but also other people's nonself areas, which he called "between an individual and an individual" (p. 76). In addition, the nonself exists in the self, and the self and the nonself are always coexisting¹⁰⁾.

Conclusion

This article holistically focused on postmodern Japanese people's several struggling situation: social, historical, cross-cultural, familial, and psychoanalytical. It is not a simple task to understand their sense of self, especially the society itself has been shaking. Not only

consequences of modernization and internationalization but also the process of cultural changes could force people to seek redefinition of the self which would require to have a holistic as well as phenomenological approach in order to more fully achieve this task.

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変化する自己概念

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要 旨

21世紀を目前としたポストモダン期に生きる日本人の変化しているセルフ概念について文献レビューを行なった。歴史的、社会的、家族関係的、比較文化のおよび精神分析的側面から討議している。急速な近代化 (Modernization) と国際化 (Internationalization) はイントラ・サブジェクティブ (Intrasubjective Self : 内的・主観的自己) およびインター・パーソナル・セルフ (Interpersonal Self : 対人関係的自己) の再定義化を強いてきていると考えられる。