

# ASIA-PACIFIC PERSPECTIVES ON INTERCULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY

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## CHAPTER 3

### THE PSYCHOLOGY OF CULTURE IN JAPAN

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# 3

## THE PSYCHOLOGY OF CULTURE IN JAPAN

*Reina Takamatsu and Jiro Takai*

### Introduction

Of late, the psychology of culture has been receiving much fanfare in Japan. This was evidenced by the record attendance of 1,180 participants at the 2016 Conference of the International Association of Cross-Cultural Psychology in Nagoya, Japan. That record attendance was largely due to the high number of domestic attendees. This chapter outlines how the psychology of culture has been developed in Japan, beginning with the introduction of psychology as a Western discipline in parallel with industrial, political, and cultural modernisation as the result of the Meiji reform. During the Meiji era of 1868–1912, dramatic changes pertaining to the government of the nation resulted in rapid industrialisation and economic development, opening up Japan's doors for foreign influence. At the same time militarisation was accelerated, which gave impetus for colonisation of neighbouring lands. This reform began after the end of *sakokushugi*, the self-induced isolationism of the island nation, which awakened Japanese citizens to their uniqueness relative to foreign people and cultures.

### History of the Psychology of Culture in Japan

Psychology as a discipline had been recognised after the Meiji Restoration of 1868, at which point Japan was no longer isolated from the rest of the world. Until then, Japan had shut itself out from outer influence, but upon the Restoration, it opened its doors to the proliferation of Western political, economic, and educational systems and philosophies. The Westernisation of the country brought with it the new academic discipline of psychology. One of the first classes was offered on the subject in 1877 at Tokyo Imperial University (University of Tokyo), which was the first Western-style post-secondary institution (for details, see

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Azuma & Imada, 1994). During the introductory phase, psychology in Japan had emulated theories and knowledge that had been formulated by psychologists in the Western world (Azuma, 1984). Japanese scholars were enthusiastic about importing new knowledge from the West, and they rarely doubted the relevancy of Western psychology as applied to the Japanese psyche.

The inchoate form of the psychology of culture in Japan was interdisciplinary, and originated with anthropology, philosophy, and notably the culture and personality movement (Benedict, 1946; Watsuji, 1935) which gained momentum from the needs of the United States, who were at war with Japan at the time. The culture and personality school of thought was built on the premise that culture determined the national character and vice versa in the socialisation process, and sought to explain the process through which specific patterns of personality traits emerge in a given culture. This paradigm was based on the anthropological theory of cultural relativism, which based itself on the central tenet that culture, not biology, influenced human character development (Boas, 1940). It offered insights into the role of culture in shaping an individual's personality through shared values, norms, practices, and beliefs. Based on this paradigm, Ruth Benedict's *Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946) was perhaps the first English account of Japanese culture and psyche, and this monograph had since shaped the image of Japanese people as viewed by the rest of the world. Meanwhile, on the domestic front, a classic culture and personality work was produced by the renowned philosopher, Tetsuro Watsuji. Watsuji's (1935) *fudoron* (風土論, climate theory) associated climatic environment to personality development, and was a precursor for the currently popular evolutionary psychology.

### ***Research trends in the 1960s and 1970s: psychology of the Japanese***

In parallel with the anthropological work, indigenous studies of the Japanese mind by domestic scholars had blossomed (Wagatsuma, 1960). As cultural anthropology had contributed to the establishment of culture and psychology, Japanese psychologists and anthropologists teamed up to expand on indigenous studies of the Japanese (Sofue, Suye, & Murakami, 1958; Suye, 1958). These efforts eventually led to the rise of *nihonjinron*, or *Japanology*, which was aimed at studying the unique psyche of the Japanese people. This trend brought about culture-specific concepts, such as *amae* (interpersonal dependence emotion) (Doi, 1973), *tateshakai* (vertical society) (Nakane, 1970), and *kanjin-shugiron* (theory of interpersonal between-ness) (Hamaguchi, 1977, 1982). *Nihonjinron* received much attention from the Japanese people, often glorifying Japanese-ness as the reason for Japan's magnificent economic recovery and success from the ashes of The Second World War. It served as the impetus for national pride, and even brought about arrogance, as evidenced in Akio Morita and Shintaro Ishihara's book (1989), entitled *The Japan That Can Say No: Why Japan Will Be First Among Equals*. This book proclaimed Japanese superiority to Western cultures (especially

American culture), to the point that it could be considered to be anti-American rhetoric. It brought about harsh international criticism over Japanese vanity and superciliousness, although it did not necessarily represent the general opinions and attitudes of the Japanese people as a whole, or the Japanese government.

Perhaps the most widely known *nihonjinron* theory is that of *amae*, which will be discussed later in this chapter. Another such theory is that of *tateshakai*, forwarded by Chie Nakane (1970), who subsequently became the esteemed University of Tokyo's first female full professor. According to her theory, the Japanese adhere strongly to seniority and rank. One good example of this is the *senpai-kohai* custom in which senior members of an organisation hold authority over junior members, who must show respect and humility. In such a relationship, the (male) subordinate will refer to oneself as *boku* (僕), the self-reference reserved for conversations with someone of higher status. This *senpai-kohai* ritual can be clearly seen in contemporary times as well, among students. Perhaps regardless of having had years of work experience before admission to university, an older freshman would show subservience towards a 19-year old sophomore. Among many other theories, one worthy of mention is Eshun Hamaguchi's (1983) *kanjin-shugiron* (間人主義). Hamaguchi argues that when a subordinate and superior are intimate, the rigid *senpai-kohai* ritual need not be adhered to, and in fact abiding by such rules would deny the intimate relationship between the two. Interpersonal between-ness can be construed as contextualism, in that Japanese behaviour is highly context dependent. Rules and rituals are strongly observed when persons are not intimate, but such overly considerateness undermines the casual and comfortable atmosphere of two people enjoying a close relationship. Therefore, the Japanese are most *Japanese* (being polite and courteous) when faced with a stranger, or someone with whom they are in a formal relationship.

While these *nihonjinron* theories generated much research, and their books became best-sellers, there was also a movement to refute the treatment of the Japanese as being superior and unique. This will be discussed in a subsequent section of this chapter.

### ***Research trends in the 1980s: cross-cultural studies in educational psychology***

The 1980s was the era when Japanese psychologists were most intrigued about the academic achievements of Japanese children. This interest was motivated by the release of *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (The National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), a presidential report on American educational reform. It was actually the Americans who started this trend, in their reflection of why their children were underachieving when compared to Japanese children who performed well academically. In order to probe into this matter, developmental and educational psychologists set their sights on Japanese children, comparing them to their American counterparts.

This focus on the development of Japanese children started a trend in Japan-US studies conducted from the perspective of developmental and educational psychology. Such studies covered areas like parenting, learning, and motivation. While there are universally observed purposes for parenting behaviours, developmental psychologists found that cultural variations in parental attitudes, values, and practices emerge in the early socialisation process, particularly within mother-child dyadic interactions. For example, Caudill and Weinstein (1969) found that Japanese mothers spent more time soothing and quieting their babies, compared to American mothers who interacted with their babies in ways that encouraged bubbly vocalisation. The mothers' interaction style matched with important child qualities in each cultural context where self-restraint mattered. Japanese reticence, self-restraint, mutual dependence, and passive communication style contrasted with American assertiveness, explicit emotional display, quest for uniqueness, and goal-oriented communication, were transmitted through the medium of social agents (Azuma, 1984, 1994; Kojima, 1986).

School textbooks have also been the targets of observation. Imai (1990) conducted a content analysis of primary school textbooks, discovering that Japanese children were subjected to more content pertaining to interpersonal harmony, rule compliance, and self-sacrifice when compared with their American counterparts, who were more likely to be exposed to equality, freedom, independence, self-assertion, and strong will. In 1985, Stevenson and his colleagues observed teaching and learning activities in classrooms to explore how Japanese children differed in their learning perceptions and behaviours, compared to American children. Stevenson and his colleagues discovered that Japanese children were apt to attribute their success or failure on mathematics tests to their effort. Meanwhile, Americans attributed success or failure to their ability, perhaps implying that the Japanese perceived success in mathematics tests as a measure of self-worth. Other studies on the academic achievements of Japanese children associated their task persistence, internalisation of the authority figure's expectations, beliefs in the value of hard work, and motivation for self-improvement as being the key ingredients for their high standards of academic performance (Blinco, 1992; Cummings, 1980; DeVos, 1973; Hamilton, Blumenfeld, Akoh, & Miura, 1989; Karasawa, Little, Miyashita, Mashima, & Azuma, 1997).

Comparisons of classroom practices have suggested that Japanese teachers, combined with school rules, transmit the value of persistence towards achievement, hence effort, whereas for North Americans, inducing confidence in the child's ability is emphasised more so (Bandura, 1997). Thus, for Japanese children, academic success is seen as a product of persistence and effort rather than ability (Karasawa et al., 1997). Therefore, underachievement is not attributable to intellectual abilities, but to the amount of effort. In Japanese schools, group and individual *hanseikai* (self-reflection) occur after special events and tests, in which students reflect upon their performance. Through *hanseikai*, students discuss what could have been done better, and what needs to be done in subsequent

sessions. As the proverb, ‘failure is a stepping stone to success’ attests, Japanese are motivated to learn from their mistakes and failures for self-improvement (Heine et al., 2001). They have a propensity to attribute academic success to hard work, and internalise the belief that hard work will eventually pay off (Karasawa et al., 1997). In Japan, education is not all about teaching, but also motivating students for learning (Hayamizu, 1995).

One other research trend during the 1980s focused on returnees, or third culture children, whom the Japanese refer to as *kikokushijo*. The rapid expansion of exports from Japan in the 1970s led to harsh criticism from Japan’s trading partners, who suffered from large trade deficits against Japan. Japanese corporations were forced to set up factories overseas to alleviate tensions, and this resulted in many Japanese workers being dispatched overseas, often taking along their families. Hence, a new breed of Japanese children was being raised overseas. Consequently, studies dealing with their issues were aggressively generated during this period. Initial research in this area indicated that *kikokushijo* faced a harsh task in readjusting to their home country upon their return. In one particular journalistic report, Ohsawa (1986) interviewed returnee children, and reported case studies of the returnee children being bullied back in Japan, not just by classmates, but also by teachers who were forced to make extra efforts in helping these children to adopt their lives in schools. This report brought much attention to the *kikokushijos*’ plight, and as a result, research regarding *kikokushijos*’ adjustment (Ebuchi, 1988), readjustment after return (Minoura, 1988), peer relations at school (Kajita, 1997), educational issues (Sato, 1995), and developmental (identity) issues (Hoshino, 1980; Minoura, 1994) became popular in the late 1980s and the 1990s (for comprehensive review, see Hoshino, 2010). Notably, Ebuchi (1988) criticised the Japanese education system for ignoring the returnee children’s potential by not taking account of their strengths (superior foreign language skills, diversity, and globalisation awareness), but by purely focusing on their weaknesses (lack of social skills in group conformity and Japanese ways of communication, in schools and society).

In parallel, some Japanese educational psychologists focussed on Japanese children living abroad and the process through which they acquired the second language and host culture. For example, Kajita (1997) created an acculturation model of Japanese children living in the United States in terms of linguistic ability, academic performance, and identity. He found that there are five patterns in which children acquire a new culture relative to the native one, and showed how a dual identity can be achieved successfully. Acquisition of the second language is indispensable as a base not only for taking regular academic courses in school, but also for communication with peers, and adapting the US cultural values to behave accordingly in social situations. Adoption of these factors helps Japanese children stand on their own feet in a new country. This approach to elucidating a process of acculturation gives insights into how Japanese come to adjust themselves in a society where autonomy and assertiveness are valued, while still embracing Japanese cultural values in heart.

### **Research trends in the 1990s: culture and self**

The sense of Japanese cultural self has been popular since the onset of *nihonjinron*, but it was not until Markus' and Kitayama's (1991) conception of independent and interdependent self-construals that there was an onslaught of studies in this area. Initial interest in the Japanese self had generally been seen among psycho-cultural anthropologists such as Benedict (1946), Kondo (1992), and Sugiyama-Lebra (1976, 2005). Sugiyama-Lebra (1976), for example, noted that Japanese people possess four facets of self: *omote* (表 = front), *ura* (裏 = back), *uchi* (内 = inner), and *soto* (外 = outer). The *omote* refers to the public self that is presented to others, whereas *ura* is the private self hidden from public view. The *uchi* is the self in the presence of in-group or intimate others, whereas the *soto* is reserved for out-groups or strangers.

Psychologists, on the other hand, had not directly focused on the Japanese self. Perhaps as a by-product of their research in testing the individualism-collectivism theory, research was mainly based on USA-Japan comparisons (e.g. Hofstede, 1990; Triandis, 1989). This changed drastically upon the presentation of Markus and Kitayama's (1991) theory of cultural self, which placed the focus on the self. Their review specifically gave the Japanese example of an interdependent self-construal in which the self is embedded in relationships. Their theory shed light on the reason why Japanese have less of a consistent, stable self-concept, but one which fluctuates with relational and situational contexts (e.g. Cousins, 1989). In a similar vein, research on identity formation in adolescence has been greatly influenced by Western culture. With such research, the individual is expected to make a commitment to develop a coherent sense of self by looking at the future in terms of career, personal goals, relationships, families, and so forth (Côté & Levine, 2002). Building on the theory of cultural self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), Takata (1993) provided interesting findings that Japanese college students were more likely than US student samples to undergo the process of identity formation through comparing themselves with peers, especially when their interdependent selves are salient.

Interdependent and independent self-construals account for a variety of cultural differences in cognition, affect, and behaviour. Some examples include self-concept (Cousins, 1989; Triandis, 1989); motivations for self-enhancement and self-criticism (Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999; Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, & Norasakkunkit, 1997; Muramoto, 2003); emotion regulation (Matsumoto, Yoo, & Nakagawa, 2008); holistic and analytic styles of perception (Masuda et al., 2008); and manifestation of psychopathology (Kanai, Sasagawa, Chen, Shimada, & Sakano, 2007). This theory instigated the development of other theories that addressed both Eastern and Western modes of self, including generalised trust (Yamagishi & Yamagishi, 1994), affect valuation theory (Tsai, Knutson, & Fung, 2006), and relational mobility (Yuki & Schug, 2012). Thus, the theory questioned the generalisability of existing theories and challenged social psychology to encompass not only the individual self but also

the interdependent self to formulate ‘universal’ theories. A decade later, Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan (2010) recapitulated the critical issue that psychological theories have been solely based on the White, industrialised, liberal, upper-middle class student population.

### **Research trends in the new millennium: Japanese scholar-led research**

The rapid economic downturn, after the bursting of the so-called *bubble economy* of the late 1980s through early 1990s, dampened the mood of the Japanese people, swiftly reminding them that they were not special, nor were they superior to other cultures. Consequently, the period around the turn of the 20th century opened up a new trend for the reconsideration of *nihonjinron*. This was also a time when the psychology of culture in Japan had matured, with laboratories dedicated to culture and psychology being established. Some examples are Toshio Yamagishi’s social psychology lab at Hokkaido University, and Susumu Yamaguchi’s social psychology lab at the University of Tokyo. Young potential scholars no longer had to move their studies abroad to specialise in cross-cultural and other culture related psychology, and this resulted in research that was much more diverse in scope than ever before. It is therefore difficult to categorise research from the millennium onwards in one simple, dominant theme, as had been done in the past.

The emergence of a domestic community of cultural psychology scholars has arisen in three major movements in research: developments in indigenous theory, reconsideration of *nihonjinron*, and extension of existing theories. In the following sections, each of these topics will be discussed.

#### ***Developments in indigenous theories***

While much work on theory building has been allotted to testing of existing theories in a Japanese context, theories regarding indigenous behavioural patterns of the Japanese have been offered as offshoots from *nihonjinron*. Arguably the most prominent indigenous concept, *amae*, is an emotion supposedly experienced only by Japanese people, and is associated with a unique form of interpersonal dependence. Since Doi (1973) introduced *amae* as a key to understanding the Japanese mentality at individual and group levels, this culture-specific interpersonal emotion has drawn attention from scholars across disciplines. Aside from *amae*, value studies have focussed on man versus nature, a particularly important value dimension given Japan’s monsoonal climate, and her susceptibility to natural forces, including earthquakes and tidal waves. We will discuss these two indigenous topics hereon.

#### ***Amae***

The conceptualisation of *amae* has been refined over the decades as Japanese and non-Japanese scholars realised that *amae* is not a simple or unitary phenomenon, nor is fully explained by related concepts, such as dependence and attachment

(Yamaguchi & Ariizumi, 2006). Many scholars developed their own versions of *amae*, and the concept remains broad and somewhat vague. Yamaguchi (1999) highlights the dependent and indulgent nature of *amae* as ‘presumed acceptance of one’s inappropriate behaviour or request’. *Amae* may be used for verifying an intimate relationship (Yamaguchi & Ariizumi, 2006). In parallel, non-Japanese scholars endeavoured to operationalise *amae* from their own perspectives, often leading to confusions or misinterpretations. However, some have sought to understand *amae* from a Japanese perspective (Behrens, 2004; Johnson, 1993). The researchers emphasised the multifaceted nature of *amae* as being not simply limited to mother and child interactions, but also observable throughout the lifespan (Rothbaum, Weisz, Pott, Miyake, & Morelli, 2000) with several interpersonal functions (Johnson, 1993).

Although there are no English words that convey the complex semantics of *amae*, Americans react similarly in *amae* situations, suggesting the emotion also exists in cultures that value autonomy and independence (Niiya, Ellsworth, & Yamaguchi, 2006). In contrast to the original concept of *amae* as a form of dependence, Niiya et al. (2006) found that the person making a request has more control over the situation than the person being requested for help. As the reciprocal nature of *amae* indicates (Behrens, 2004), people in equal status (e.g. friends) enjoy the mutual dependence that cultivates intimacy. Although many Japanese scholars tended to focus on features of *amae* that are unique to the Japanese culture, non-Japanese scholars have searched for cultural commonalities in expression and function of *amae*. Taken together, an indigenous emotion may be found in other cultures, even if it is less salient and no equivalent word that fully expresses the phenomenon exists.

## 15ページ

While it had been widely accepted that *amae* was distinctly Japanese, the recent trend in this research contests this myth, finding evidence of such attachment behaviours in various cultures, across a broad range of social relationships, such as mother–infant dyadic interactions, negotiations between friends, and quality time in romantic relationships (Behrens, 2004; Lewis & Ozaki, 2009; Marshall, Chuong, & Aikawa, 2011; Nakayama, 2015; Niiya & Harihara, 2012). *Amae* is observed not only in Japanese culture, but similar interpersonal dependencies can be confirmed in other cultures in Asia as well (for review see Umemura & Traphagan, 2015), refuting the premise that it is unique to the Japanese. The father of the concept, Takeo Doi, concedes that *amae* is a multifaceted construct, which takes various forms at different ages, and some of its facets renders it to be strikingly similar to the Western theory of interpersonal attachment by Bowlby (1969). In particular, both *amae* and attachment facilitate formation and maintenance of affectional bonds, beginning from infancy and lasting for a lifetime.

From the developmental perspective, *amae* crying has been mentioned as a communication tool to help an infant and her mother to form affective bonds, regardless of culture (Nakayama, 2015). In romantic relationships, *amae* maintains and deepens intimacy, as the partner feels secure and accepted after showing

*amae* emotion (Marshall et al., 2011), hence when the lovers' mutual bond becomes sufficiently strong, they need not be Japanese to feel the same type of interdependence. Reflecting the fall of *nihonjinron*, the popularity of *amae* as a research topic of Japanese psychologists has significantly diminished during the last decade.

### *Values regarding man versus nature*

From ancient times, the Japanese have cherished a sense of special relationship with nature. From season to season, there are traditional customs to celebrate nature, and appreciation of nature is also evident in arts and literature. To illustrate an example, *haiku* is a Japanese short 3-verse poem, which consists of only 17 syllables in the form of 5–7–5 syllables. In principle, a haiku contains a *kigo* (seasonal word), which allows the reader to have a vivid picture of the landscape, flower, sky, rivers, and ultimately the beauty of nature that the poet experienced in her mind (Ohwa, 1998). As the Japanese characters (*kanji*) for nature represent the unity of nature and human beings, nature has been a part of daily lives for the Japanese since ancient times (Saito, 1985).

The appreciation of nature also reflects the Japanese attitude towards religion and supernatural entities. A multinational survey shows that 20.9% of Japanese respondents identified themselves religious while 49.9% identified themselves as not religious (World Value Survey, 2015). Inconsistent with the data, over 90 million Japanese visit temples or shrines for a New Year's prayer. That figure is unexpectedly large, considering that annually approximately 6.6 million people visit the Vatican, and 2 million visit Mekkah annually (as cited by Hirabayashi, 2015). Also, it may surprise and confuse a devout Christian to learn that Japanese people celebrate Christmas without knowing its religious origin, and many Japanese couples marry in church, serviced by a White man who is temporarily hired as a priest. For most Japanese people, modern religion is not a part of their social identity, because they worship nature and supernatural spirits as a form of primitive religion, which has been derived from ancient *shinto* (神道, traditional religion of Japan) (Ama, 1996). In spring, the cherry blossoms enliven the Japanese people with a sense of awe and national pride. Thus, the Japanese national identity does not pertain to the country, but it is inseparable from culture (Karasawa, 2002).

### *Reconsidering Nihonjinron*

As discussed previously, since the end of the Second World War, Japanology gained enormous popularity, and by now more than two thousand books about the theme have been published. On the other hand, some critics have taken a step back and pointed out that there is no other country that shows such intense interest in analysing its own national identity (Befu, 1987). There have been several streams of the Japanology movement in Japan: raising theoretical, conceptual, and methodological issues about Japanology research (Dale, 1986; Sugimoto & Mouer, 1995);

treating Japanology prepositions as ideologies (Befu, 1987); and attempting to test Japanology prepositions by field research and survey methods (Koike & Watanabe, 1979). Some have criticised the Japanese are not being as unique as Japanology contends, endorsing a preposition that Japanology is a myth (Dale, 1986; Sugimoto, 1997). In parallel to the criticism, some theorists argue that one of the central tenets of *Japanology*, that the Japanese are collectivistic, is misleading or incorrect (Hamaguchi & Kumon, 1982; Takano, 2008; Yamagishi, 2010).

To this effect, a younger generation of Japanese researchers proclaim that the Japanese people have become individualistic, since the increasing number of Japanese corporations and educational institutions have adopted Western models, such as *seikasyugi* (performance-based evaluation in the workplace) and *zettaihyouka* (grading on an absolute scale in school) during the last couple of decades (Hamamura, 2012). Japanese university students hold individualistic values, but behave interdependently in the belief that interdependent ways of thinking and behaviour are socially desirable (Hashimoto, 2011). Some have argued that individual orientation is not adaptive in Japan and that individualistic people are more likely than collectivistic people to report lower levels of subjective happiness and fewer close friends, suggesting that individual orientation conflicts with the traditional value of Japanese society (Ogihara & Uchida, 2014).

Despite the increasing individualistic values of the Japanese, the essence of cultural value in Japanese society is still the relationship, not the individual (Hamaguchi, 1982). That being said, from the indigenous perspective Japanese collectivism is not equivalent to the original conceptualisation of collectivism (Brewer & Chen, 2007; Yuki, 2003). The integration of indigenous concepts into the mainstream theories not only explains why some research findings cannot be replicated in non-Western countries, but also helps the researcher build more elaborate theories of human behaviour. Following is a discussion pertaining to the warrant of adapting theories.

### ***Extension of existing theories of the psychology of culture***

A popular dichotic categorisation of culture has been the division of individualism and collectivism (Triandis, 1989). Contrary to the popular view of individualism and collectivism, Oyserman, Coon, and Kimmelmeier (2002) found that both East Asians and North Americans contexts are collectivistic. The value of group membership is similar, but it is the type of group membership that differs (Oyserman et al., 2002; Yuki, 2003; Yuki & Takemura, 2013). There are two modes of collectivism: collectivists' collectivism and individualists' collectivism (Brewer & Chen, 2007; Oyserman et al., 2002; Yuki, 2003). Previous studies have shown that the East Asian mode of collectivism empathises intragroup harmony, conformity, and hierarchical group structure. In comparison, the Western mode of collectivism is built on the identity salience, a sense of belonging to a group, and active group comparisons (Brewer & Chen, 2007). Accordingly, people in East Asian contexts place greater importance in relational harmony within

the group, and people in North American contexts place greater importance in positive distinction of in-group and out-group (Yuki, 2003; Yuki & Takemura, 2013). Group behaviour in collectivistic cultures is intragroup oriented; that is, maintaining harmonious relationships and understanding the complex intragroup structure are more important concerns than intergroup comparison (Yamagishi & Kosugi, 1999). In collectivists' collectivism, in-group members watch one another to prevent free-riding and promote altruistic behaviour (Mifune, Hashimoto, & Yamagishi, 2010; Yamagishi, Jin, & Miller, 1998).

Similarly, cross-cultural tests of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) have yielded mixed results, perhaps due to the application of Western tenets to the Japanese context without considering the nature of Japanese group dynamics. Social identity theory is built on the premise that people cultivate self-esteem from category-based group membership, and real or imagined out-group threat begets intergroup conflicts (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Accumulating evidence shows that this is geared towards Western contexts, and people in East Asian contexts show less in-group bias, compared to people in Western contexts (Brewer & Chen, 2007; Buchan, Johnson, & Croson, 2006; Falk, Heine, & Takemura, 2013; Snibbe, Kitayama, Markus, & Suzuki, 2003; Yuki, 2003). In-group similarity is less important for people in the East Asian contexts, compared to people in North America (Kashima et al., 1995). Taken together, unlike Western collectivism, Japanese collectivism is intragroup oriented, which denotes that members should understand the complex intragroup structure to maintain good member status rather than preoccupying themselves surrounding intergroup relations. As seen from the above, by taking account of the nature of Japanese group dynamics, the task has been established for Japanese psychologists to adapt intergroup theories to meet the specific characteristics of Japanese culture.

## **Methodological issues in Japanese research**

Aside from theory, the process of conducting research on the Japanese people has uncovered several methodological issues, especially among studies comparing Japanese culture to another by survey data. In fact, these issues are not exclusive to cross-cultural research in Japan. In this section, the intention is to describe how and why these methodological issues arise in the Japanese context by focusing on psychological and behavioural patterns that are specific to the Japanese. Understanding a psychological construct in investigation requires understanding of culture as well. This implies that a researcher must take into account how people in two or more cultures respond to survey items or experimental stimuli before s/he attempts to uncover cultural variations in interest.

### ***Response artefacts***

The field of cross-cultural psychology has progressed with self-report methodology. However, scholars point out that caution should be exercised when

interpreting cross-cultural research findings obtained solely from survey data (Hamamura, Heine, & Paulhus, 2008). The scholars warn that a researcher must discern genuine cultural differences from response artefacts when interpreting mean scores of multinational samples. East Asian participants, as well as the Japanese, have distinct response patterns that mirror their preference for moderate or ambivalent responses (Zax & Takahashi, 1967), namely response artefacts (Oishi et al., 2005) that are caused by response styles (Chen, Lee, & Stevenson, 1995), reference group effects (Hamamura et al., 2008; Heine, Lehman, Peng, & Greenholtz, 2002) and conceptual relevance (Cohen, 2007; Iwawaki, 1994). These response biases reduce the data quality, leading to an erroneous interpretation of research findings.

Response styles of a Likert scale are affected by self-construal and dialectical thinking, which is defined as permissive attitudes towards opposing propositions (Peng & Nisbett, 1999). Generally, Japanese people favour a neutral response that blurs their position on the item (Hamamura et al., 2008). Japanese participants who adapt interdependent modes of thinking and behaviour prefer the midpoint, such as 'Neither agree nor disagree'. In sharp contrast, Japanese participants who hold individualistic values show an extreme response pattern, such as 'Strongly agree' and 'Strongly disagree' (Tsujimoto, 2006). People with an independent self-construal have higher levels of self-clarity, which in turn leads to choosing extreme endpoints, especially when items are personally meaningful (Cabooter, Millet, Weijters, & Pandelaere, 2016). Similarly, a dialectical thinker tends to judge that two contradictory positions are compatible with one another because they may be both true, they may be somehow related on a continuum, or they may be defined in relative terms (Peng & Nisbett, 1999). Thus, dialectical thinkers weigh both the positively and negatively keyed items and produce an equitable response that corresponds to the midpoint on a Likert scale.

There are several methods that can be utilised as an antidote to the limitation of Likert scales in cross-cultural studies. Heine et al. (2002) offered several recommendations to this effect. First, they suggested that cross-cultural comparisons should be based on societal level factors, not individual level, i.e. researchers should be concerned on the higher unit of analysis, that of culture, not individual, when cross-cultural investigations are conducted. Another suggestion they made was to ask people to compare themselves to the average person in his/her given culture. For example, participants were asked to envisage a family member, and to estimate the percentage of the population of the same age and gender as their chosen family member that would score higher than him/her on 10 personality traits (Heine & Lehman, 1997). Despite this advantage of avoiding reference-group effects, this strategy is limited to investigation of a discrepancy between one's perception of their attribute and a corresponding standard within a culture. Yet another suggestion is to use behavioural or physiological measures as dependent variables that are relatively free from problems associated with Likert scales in cross-cultural investigations. These measures include facial expressions, the amount of hot sauce used for making a sandwich, cortisol levels, and

heart rate, to name a few (e.g. Lieberman, Solomon, Greenberg, & McGregor, 1999). However, this may not be a viable option because of the difficulty in quantifying some psychological constructs by those measures, along with more time and effort required for data collection.

Furthermore, there are analytic methods that minimise the response bias: standardisation of the response scores by averaging all items for each participant and then computing the mean and standard deviation separately for each cultural group (Seki, Matsumoto, & Imahori, 2002); and a pairwise comparison method that compare a pair of participants from each cultural group (Oishi et al., 2005).

### **Context dependence**

There are several Japanese pronouns, which refer to 'I', and the speaker chooses one that best conveys an impression he or she wishes to make. For example, a Japanese man would likely opt to call himself *boku* (僕) in front of a superior, to express humility, but when facing his subordinates, he will refer to himself as *ore* (俺), a seemingly arrogant self-reference. Other self-pronouns for men include *watashi* (私 = polite self), *jibun* (自分 = masculine self), *shosei* (小生 = self-deprecating), *washi* (わし = reserved for wise, elderly male), and the usage of these depend on who the other person in the conversation is. The switching of pronouns occurs naturally, and the speaker is not conscious of the shift. That there are several pronouns in Japanese language reflect its pragmatic utility, and the Japanese multiple selves in relational contexts (Ono & Thompson, 2003).

Most Japanese respondents find it hard to answer non-contextualised questions about their personal attributes because self-concept is defined by the situation (Cousins, 1989). In response to a question that asks to produce sentences that follow 'I am', Japanese respondents produce more 'I' statements in relation to others (e.g. 'I am a younger brother'), compared to North American respondents who produce more descriptions of their personal attributes (e.g. 'I am creative'). When a question specifies a situation, Japanese respondents produce more 'I' statements with abstract, personality attributes and frequencies than do North American counterparts (e.g. 'I am sometimes lazy at home').

The issue of context dependence arises from the malleability of Japanese self-conceptualisation. Japanese people feel and behave differently, depending on the relational closeness and social hierarchy of the other(s) in a given situation because the self shifts from one to another easily (Kanagawa, Cross, & Markus, 2001; Oishi, Diener, Scollon, & Biswas-Diener, 2004). For East Asians as well as the Japanese, the other in a given situation defines who they are (English & Chen, 2007). This is evident in how Japanese people describe others: they are less likely than Italians to use trait adjectives that are context-free (Maass, Karasawa, Politi, & Suga, 2006). The Japanese self-concept is susceptible to social cues as shown by weaker motivations for consistency across situations (Kanagawa et al., 2001). In a survey, Japanese participants would pick up situational cues and respond to items accordingly.

As briefly reviewed, the Japanese participants show context-dependent thinking styles that may make research findings confound with an unexpected variable; thus it is difficult to interpret it as a genuine cultural variation. One way to minimise the cultural bias is to ask people to recall specific psychological or behavioural phenomena and discuss the experience in an open-ended format. Kitayama et al. (1997) developed a 'situation sampling method' in which the respondent is asked to generate as many situations (e.g. situations in which one's self-esteem fluctuates) as possible. This allows the researcher to elucidate situations in which multinational respondents experience and interpret the psychological phenomenon in question and compare situations that trigger it.

More recently, the 'experiential sampling method' has become widely used, which asks the respondent to provide self-reports or jot down responses on random occasions during the waking hours (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 2014). Using the experiential sampling method, Oishi et al. (2004) identified a wide array of situations in which respondents from four different cultural backgrounds experience emotions in daily lives, within-person cross-situational variation in affective experiences, and the role of culture in shaping consistency for affective experiences.

## Empirical integration

Reductionism has been described as 'the tendency in interdisciplinary debate to reduce the phenomena of one discipline to the level of explanation commonly employed in the next 'more basic' discipline' (Berry, Poortinga, Segall, & Dasen, 2002, p. 5). To tackle reductionism, cross-cultural psychology, in collaboration with indigenous psychology and other disciplines, is expected to advance the scholars understanding of the interplay between culture and human behaviour. The immediate environments have impacts on culture (Kitayama, Ishii, Imada, Takemura, & Ramaswamy, 2006; Watsuji, 1935). In every culture, there are words that cannot be translated into another language. The Japanese language is rich in onomatopoeia and mimetic words, which resonates with appreciation for nature in Japanese culture. For example, *soyo* is used for breeze, *hyuu* for draft, *zawa* for the wind blowing trees, and *byuu* is the term applied to strong wind.

The socio-ecological approach in psychology is a relatively new way of studying cultural variations, and assumes that the environment shapes who we are. In the last decades, cultural psychologists renewed interest in societal factors to explain cultural differences in psychological and behavioural patterns. Socio-ecological approaches analyse the effect of immediate physical, societal, and interpersonal contexts on the individual's psychological tendencies and behavioural patterns, which in turn shape the surrounding environments (Oishi & Graham, 2010; Yuki & Schug, 2012). Taking into account the sociological factors, the social-ecological approach differs from cultural psychology in that it emphasises the power of macro-environments from climate to political, religious and economic systems on mind and behaviour. In contrast, cultural psychology

pays little attention to the distal macro-factors (Oishi & Graham, 2010). Thus, the socio-ecological approach is expected to corroborate cultural psychology by offering explanations for what drives the observed cultural variations under investigation (Oishi & Graham, 2010).

In summary, Western methodology does not translate well to the Japanese psyche, and adaptation is required to accurately assess it. When comparisons are to be made, the social context needs to be accounted for, and cross-cultural comparisons hoping to extract the *Japanese-ness* of their samples must specify the relational and situational contexts under which respondents anchor self-reports of their behaviours.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, it has been shown that psychology of culture in Japan has witnessed major changes in its rather short history, and it still is evolving rapidly. From its start as a mainly anthropological research theme of culture and personality, the field has developed into a genuine area of psychology in Japan, with an increasing number of scholars and laboratories in universities that offer a major in this particular field. Currently, universities offering a doctorate in psychology under the guidance of a psychologist who identifies him or herself as either a cultural or cross-cultural psychologist include Hokkaido University, University of Tokyo, Nagoya University, Kobe University, and Okayama University. These institutions are surely nurturing an increasing number of scholars in the area.

The developmental phases of research have been traced in this chapter. The transition from Western-based, replication-centred research to studies that are more or less culture-specific has been discussed, and it has been shown that the latest development even challenges Western conceived methodologies that are widely accepted as being universal. Perhaps this reflects the independence of Japanese scholars from their Western mentors, now that the scholars do not need to seek education in this field at universities abroad. Unlike past decades, when Japanese researchers served to collect data for their collaborators, they now have become principle investigators who plan and execute their own research, under their own conceptions of human behaviour. The psychology of culture in Japan is indeed a vibrant and exciting field which certainly shows great potential for development.

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