

PIONEERING A  
NON-WESTERN PSYCHOLOGY

Recent research in Japan challenges some fundamental assumptions of Western psychological theory and practice

BY JOHN H. DOUGLAS

*Suddenly I saw Japanese men in a new light. "They have no chance," I thought, a little bitterly. "An American man can show his feelings without shame, but convention chains a Japanese man. It pulls a mask over his face, closes his lips, and numbs his actions. . . . The only time a man of dignity dares betray his heart is when he is with a little child — either his own or another's. Then he has the only outlet that etiquette allows; and even then he must guide his actions by rule."*

—Etsu Inagaki Sugimoto, in  
*A Daughter of the Samurai* (1925)

Could any childhood be as happily secure as that of the Japanese? At night the children sleep with their parents, the youngest with the nursing mother; by day they follow their mother constantly, the youngest strapped to her back. And on Sunday, the father — who has been almost completely absent for a week — may take the children to the park for games in which he participates with utter childlike abandon.

This constant care and indulgence soon takes its effect. Already by the age of four months some differences appear between the personalities of Japanese and American children: An American mother stimulates her child, who becomes more active and vocal; the Japanese mother tends to soothe and pacify her child, who emerges more passive and quiet. Even at a tender age, both children are being well trained to fit into their respective societies.

So constant is the physical contact of Japanese children with their parents that the relationship between them is sometimes called "skinship." And so complete is the sustained dependence of the child upon the mother that it results in a lifelong search for belonging, a primary identification as a member of a group rather than as an independent person.

Not surprisingly, Western-oriented psychology has not adequately explained the

*(One of a series of articles on Japan's science and technology by contributing editor John H. Douglas, a Fulbright Research Journalist in Tokyo.)*

*"Maple Viewing at Mount Takao," detail from a six-fold screen painted in the late sixteenth century by Kano Hideyori*



personality development that takes place under these circumstances, nor has it provided optimal therapeutic techniques for handling the emotional disturbances that sometimes arise. Now, pioneering research in Japan by a variety of international scientists promises to provide not only a better understanding of the Japanese personality, but also to make new, fundamental contributions to psychology itself.

The most widely discussed ideas to emerge from this research are those surrounding the concept of dependency — in Japanese, *amae*. Originally the word referred to the initial, passive dependence of Japanese children upon their ever-present mothers, but psychiatrist Takeo Doi has developed a theory of *amae* that presents the longing for dependency as a critical motivating factor in adult Japanese life. He also believes that the suppression of

*amae* in the West—with the aim of fostering individualism—may have equally important consequences. A summary of Doi's work has recently been translated into English under the title, *The Anatomy of Dependence* (Kodansha, 1973).

According to Doi, *amae* represents a seeking after the mother in a much more fundamental way than the sexually defined Oedipus complex. A sense of *oneness* with the mother develops, fostered by long indulgence and close contact. Eventually, Doi says, this longing develops into a denial of the fact of separation from the mother and leads an adult to try to reestablish this sort of intimate relationship with his or her superiors. The result, he concludes, is the sort of vertically structured, group-oriented society that is found in Japan today.

The picture of the individual Japanese personality that emerges from this theory—which is consistent with direct observation—shows a person dependent on others, with an emphasis on one-to-one relationships. These can be visualized as two concentric circles: With members of an inner circle of closest friends the Japanese adult can reestablish a relationship of *amae*—unrestrained dependence or indulgence. With acquaintances or business contacts, in the outer circle, there is a relationship of restrained politeness and mutual obligation. Outside these circles, however, no relationship is perceived, and the Japanese have become notorious for their lack of public-spiritedness and their coldness to strangers.

The sort of society that results from this kind of relationship structure has been outlined by social anthropologist Chie Nakane. Whether the individual relationship be intimate or polite, she says, there will always be a senior partner and a junior partner—imitating the parent-child relationship. Even the Japanese language reflects this structure: Forms of address, and even verb endings, signify whether one is talking “up” to a person or “down.” Individuals, then, identify themselves primarily as members of some specific group—usually the company where they work—in which they have a very specific rank.

The picture that emerges of Japanese society can be described as a series of escalators, on which the individuals rise automatically as they grow older (seniority in promotion is rigidly adhered to). Each escalator (a corporation or government ministry) has its own rank in the Japanese scheme of prestige and, in turn, is fed at its bottom step by graduates of certain specific universities. Universities, too, can almost be pictured as escalators, because passing is virtually automatic and passage from prestigious university into prestigious company is almost assured. Theoretically, the main point of individual competition comes at college entrance, with a brutal set of rigidly structured examinations, but competition has become so intense at this level that now even the



Detail from “Merrymaking Under the Cherry Blossoms,” a pair of early seventeenth-century screens of the Kano school.



Masaaki Kato, director of Japan's NIMH.

best *kindergartens* give a type of entrance exam.

The carefully nurtured and happily indulged Japanese child is thus quickly thrust into a series of make-or-break examinations that will determine his or her whole future far more completely than do those in European education systems. Even the winners, those who succeed in grasping a spot on the top escalator, do not escape the wrenching transition emotionally unscathed. And for those who fail—or whose experience and abilities vary in even slight ways from the prescribed routine—there remains almost no chance to try again or to find creative expression for their talents.

Out of this conflict can sometimes emerge a personality whose specific combination of neurotic symptoms is virtually unknown in the West. Called *shinkeishitsu* (literally, “nervous temperament”), this disorder is marked by anxiety or obsession related to interpersonal relationships. University of Southern California anthropologist David K. Reynolds offers the following quotation from a *shinkeishitsu* sufferer that presents one set of possible symptoms most vividly:

“I began to be self-conscious about my facial expression. When called on in class I had the feeling that my teacher was watching my mouth. My mouth was frozen! Horrible! Even when I left the classroom my mouth felt tight, so I'd practice opening it properly in front of a mirror.”

The process by which such symptoms develop remains unclear, but the symptoms represent an exaggeration of some stereotypical Japanese characteristics—introversion, hypersensitivity to social situations and discomfort when removed from familiar, intimate surroundings. To counteract the disorder, psychiatrist Shōma Morita developed, early in this century, a system of therapy that has only recently been used experimentally in the West. Reynolds published the leading Western study of this system and its use in the book *Morita Psychotherapy* (University of California Press, 1976).

Although there are, in fact, several versions of Morita therapy in current use in Japan, they all aim at redirecting the patients' attention away from preoccupation with the self. First the patients are isolated for a week to wallow in their own thoughts, creating an urgent desire for external stimulation. Next they are allowed to do light, meaningless work (like raking leaves) and must attend long indoctrination lectures. During the next phase, they are given hard physical work (such as chopping wood) and allowed to mix socially with other patients at the same level of treatment. And finally, after several weeks, patients can begin to prepare for normal life by leaving the hospital to go to work or attend school.

Unlike Freudian psychoanalysis, Morita therapy makes no effort to delve into the patients' past or to even help them “understand” their condition. The technique of isolating patients and thus disposing them to welcome whatever happens next is related to brainwashing, while the succeeding stages condition them away from symptoms in a manner similar to that used in Western behaviorist therapy. However, the basic philosophy of Morita treatment—to focus attention on immediate reality—was derived largely from Zen Buddhism and is related most closely to Western existential analysis or logotherapy.

Another Japanese-developed therapy, which was designed to help rehabilitate criminals and “immoral” persons, also owes its inspiration to Zen, especially the practice of Zazen meditation. In so-called

Kobe Municipal Museum of Namban Art

John H. Douglas

Naikan therapy, the patients are again isolated, but this time the therapist visits the patient every hour or so to direct a detailed reexamination of his or her past life. Patients are told to think of various persons who helped them in their childhoods and are then reminded of how often they did not repay the debt they owed and how they hurt those who loved them the most. The effect is to build up an almost intolerable burden of guilt mixed with gratitude, which often pours out in a final tearful pledge to reform.

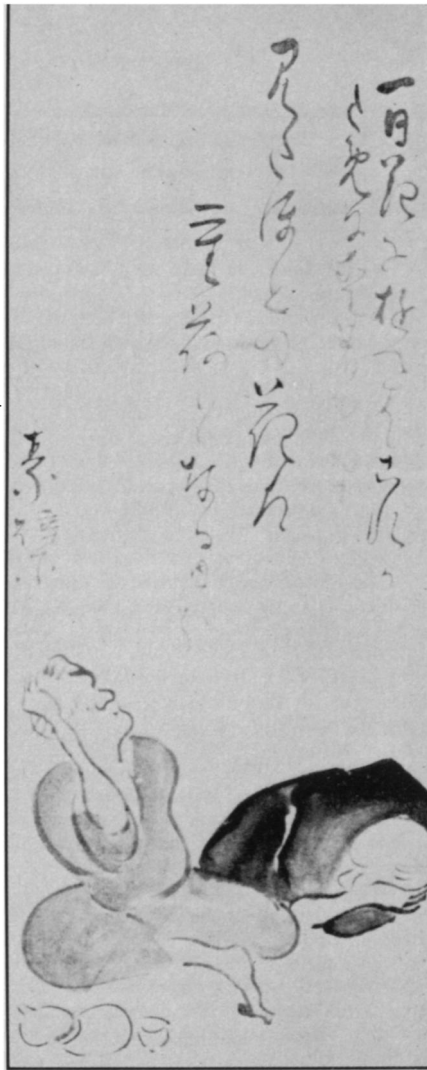
Again the emphasis is on direct attack against symptoms — to the point of “brainwashing” — rather than on developing patient insight. The extent to which either Morita or Naikan therapy might be used with more individually and rationally oriented Western patients is still unknown, and even in Japan techniques are undergoing change to cope with younger patients who “demand answers.” But an examination of such therapies and the theories that underlie them might well help Western psychologists develop a broader perspective of their own work.

Western psychologists and psychiatrists in the Freudian tradition have emphasized the role played by unconscious sexual desires in causing emotional disturbance. Their therapies have generally been aimed at helping individuals understand the origins of their problems and, thus, consciously overcome them. By contrast, Japanese therapists have been working with patients reared in a group-oriented society, whose symptoms can be understood (according to Doi and others) as unconscious frustration of the desire of *amae* or as some conflict in their obligations to others. Therapy is aimed more at reintegrating the patient to the group than at reintegrating their conscious and unconscious desires.

How well patients' groups accept them, according to psychiatrist Keigo Takeyama, depends on how well they are able to function. Company department heads, he says, are expected to offer informal counseling to their subordinates and to play a key role in maintaining the mental health of a group.

In addition to developing new therapies to help individuals cope with specific emotional problems, Japanese psychologists have also experimented with new group techniques to address the problem of helping larger numbers of people improve their adaptation to a changing society. In an interview with *SCIENCE NEWS*, Michael J. Kobayashi, a psychologist at Sophia University, described some of these developments.

As a result of their earlier group-oriented training, Japanese college students, he says, often have difficulty expressing themselves verbally, making their own decisions and producing creative work. Too often, Kobayashi says, the students have remained so dependent on their parents that they don't know how to choose their



The 18th-century poet Sobaku sketched two men lying exhausted from a full day of cherry blossom viewing, a traditional and still common family activity. “To enjoy oneself with the cherry blossoms all day,” he wrote, “is to be bound by the ties of love.” The haiku poem which follows (Mita hodo no/hana wa omoni to/naru hi kana) says, approximately, “All the cherry blossoms I saw today have become a burden to me.” A Western observer of today's rapidly changing Japan might find irony in applying the poem to the present: Is the “burden” of the cherry blossoms, symbols rich in tradition, growing heavier?

own major or even know why they are in college at all. They rely on intuition rather than reason in their thinking, but while their emotional intuition has been well prepared by their previous training, their intuitive insight into intellectual problems is weak. Many feel inferior, isolated and lonely, and have difficulty expressing their feelings to others. Although they may make good grades in the rigidly prescribed courses, they become anxious when asked to perform independent or creative work. Kobayashi has given creativity tests to groups of American and Japanese students and finds that the Japanese score more poorly on all subtests except that of “elaboration.”

Unfortunately, serious problems have occurred in Japan in trying to use the en-

counter group techniques developed in the West to help people express their feelings and learn how to deal with others. It may seem ironic that such group-oriented people as the Japanese should even need such training, but while their childhood experiences teach them well how to fit into their intimate circle of *amae* or act courteously in rigidly structured formal circumstances, Kobayashi says they are too often left helpless when faced with a novel situation. Thus a person with a basically weak personality may be overwhelmed by an aggressive encounter group (some suicides have been reported), while a strong individual may become too aggressive to fit back into a traditional Japanese group.

In his own work, Kobayashi has modified the encounter group technique to minimize aggression and to address directly the specific needs of the average Japanese. He divides his initial group into three subgroups of about half a dozen people each. Group A then holds a discussion while each member of group B watches some particular member of group A. Members of Group C take note of what happens to group A as a whole. After group A's discussion, members of groups B and C practice telling *objectively* what they observed. On subsequent days, the groups exchange roles.

According to Kobayashi, the advantage of this technique, called Micro-Laboratory Training (MLT), is that participants can practice expressing themselves in a strange situation and learn how others perceive them, while aggression is minimized by limiting the discussions to objective observations. Kobayashi has not only used MLT with college students but has been frequently asked to hold sessions with groups of teachers and businessmen, including executives of Japan Air Lines.

Finally, as significant numbers of Japanese young people receive part of their schooling abroad, a sort of reorientation to Japanese society has become necessary. Boys often have trouble catching up on the specific topics covered by the college entrance examinations (few girls go to the best universities and they are not encouraged to pursue professional careers). For their part, the girls often lack the specific social graces deemed necessary for a desirable marriage match (parents still often arrange marriages). A common complaint is that girls become too independent while abroad; they no longer respond as well to being called “Oy!” (“Hey you!”) by their husbands.

The problem is becoming acute and no adequate solution has yet been found, but another Sophia University professor, anthropologist Anne Murase, has been conducting research that, she hopes, will lead to a softening of rigid academic and social requirements. She also helps counsel returning students.

“I think this is primarily a structural problem,” she told *SCIENCE NEWS*. “Being

different academically has some very long-term consequences. ... And it's not just enough to succeed educationally, you need a personality that fits into the particular bureaucracy or company." Eventually companies and universities should change their entrance requirements, she says, but in the meantime more international schools, like Sophia, are needed to help the 3,000 Japanese students returning each year from abroad.

To gain a perspective on these diverse trends in Japanese psychology, SCIENCE NEWS interviewed Masaaki Kato, director of Japan's National Institute of Mental Health and a delegate to the World Health Organization. The East and West still have much to learn from each other, he says: Whereas the Westerners are relatively strictly trained even as small children, then given increasing freedom as they grow older, Japanese children begin in almost total freedom and find themselves most confined after they reach adulthood. An optimum pattern of training, he says, probably lies somewhere between these two extremes, with training reaching a peak after a relatively carefree childhood and before an adulthood of individual freedom.

The *amae* concept is an important contribution, he says, but he prefers the term "colaterality," coined by the late American anthropologist William Caudill. Kato says Takeo Doi developed his *amae* theories out of his experiences with Caudill in the United States, but that he emphasized the passive aspect of dependency. Colaterality, on the other hand, is the *mutual* dependency that close examination reveals in the relationship of mother and child. In Japan this mutual dependency can sometimes become too strong; in the West, it is more likely to be suppressed. Either extreme can cause emotional problems.

Kato expressed some chagrin over the state of the health care profession in Japan. Some 85 percent of the 1,500 psychiatric hospitals in Japan are private and run very commercially, he says. Only about one-third are what he would call "good." Although a government license is required to become a "mental health inspector" (recommendation by two such inspectors is required for involuntary hospital admission), there is no equivalent of board certification needed for any doctor to practice psychiatry.

Still, he says, Western psychologists can learn from the Japanese experience. He laughingly tells of describing the symptoms of *shinkeishitsu* to some Western colleagues, most of whom did not recognize it as a culture-bound neurosis, but tended to diagnose the disorder as schizophrenia or paranoid psychosis. He says Western therapists can also profit from studying Naikan and Morita therapies, with their emphasis on the patient's conscious level.

Thus, from the dialogue between East and West may emerge a fundamental new understanding of psychology. □

# LETTERS

## The ghost rides again

I would like to clear up some misconceptions evident in the letters of Ronald B. Gitchell (SN: 1/14/78, p. 19), Timothy P. Mann and Stanley R. Drake (SN: 2/11/78, p. 83) concerning the possibility of observing so-called "superluminal" velocities. Mr. Mann's remarks about the addition of relativistic velocities is correct up to a point. It is true that relative velocities cannot exceed  $c$ , the velocity of light, when two observers are involved; however, there could be a situation in which a "relative" velocity will be observed which is greater than  $c$ . Consider the following situation: Assume there are three observers, A, O and B situated such that relative to O, A is moving with speed  $.8c$  to O's left and B is moving in the opposite direction (to O's right) with speed  $.7c$ . In this case the following obtains:

As observed by A, B's speed is  $\sim .96c$ , and likewise as observed by B, A's speed is also  $\sim .96c$ . This was stated correctly by both Mann and Drake. However, it is certainly true that as observed by O, A's speed of recession "relative" to B (and vice versa) is indeed  $1.5c$ ; i.e. as observed by O, after  $t$  sec. A has traveled a distance  $.8ct$  to the left and B has traveled a distance  $.7ct$  to the right. In other words, O observes that a distance of  $1.5ct$  has been traveled during a time of  $t$  sec. To reiterate, according to O, A and B are separating with a relative speed of  $1.5c$ . This is all measured in the rest frame of O and does not contradict relativity. On the other hand, A and B maintain correctly that each moves with a speed  $\sim .96c$  relative to the other.

Joseph Puret  
Chicago, Ill.

The letters by Timothy Mann and Stanley Drake regarding the observed superluminal velocities of some quasars reflect on a widespread misinterpretation of the time speed paradox in the relativity theory, to wit:

If it is granted that one person (functioning as an observer) viewing a second person traveling at near light speed relative to him will see a slowing of time in the second person's universe, then it must also be granted that the same observation will of necessity be made by the second person observing the first (moving apparently at near light speed in the opposite direction) with an apparent slowing of time in the first person's universe, since all motion is relative and no observational point can be considered as primary or fixed.

Since the paradox appears identical to both observers, it follows that if they ever do connect at any single intersection point in space time, real time passage must be equal for them both, and the apparent relative time slowing effect in each observed universe will not occur. One cannot come back and meet one's great grandchildren. (This refers to situations involving pure velocity, allowing the acceleration effects of directional change and stopping required for the meeting of the two persons to be equal.)

The paradox becomes resolved as one considers that Einstein was referring to the observable universe only—that is, the optical image, rather than the unable-to-be-directly-observed material object itself. If this is allowed, then the theory expressed by Stanley Drake—that is, that while "relativity predicts that material ob-

jects themselves cannot go faster than the speed of light ... [but] ... the optical image can indeed go faster than the speed of light" is missing the point that relativity theory is actually predicting the characteristics of the optical image or the observable universe, leaving the "true" behavior of the material object itself unspecified. (Indeed, since the light waves of the optical image cannot travel faster than light waves can travel, the statement is self-contradictory.)

What will happen with the optical image, however, is that the apparent time speed in the observed universe will appear to slow down as the object moves away and to speed up as the object approaches as a result of the spreading out or bunching up of light waves from the object in the same manner as—and as a time equivalent of—the Doppler frequency shift. Considered in this manner, light speed appears as the terminal velocity in the observable universe precisely because light is the fastest known observational method possible, making this limit evident *a priori* when one defines how one actually observes.

Since this observational limitation does not apply to the viewing of two objects moving relative to one another in a plane perpendicular to the direction of observation of an observer distinct from the both, this would both explain the observed superluminal relative velocities observed in the quasars under discussion and would allow the terminal light speed concept to be removed from the sanctity of a quasi-religious doctrine to the more productive consideration of being a factor inherent in the observational limitations imposed by the relativistic spatial relationships of the system.

Roger P. Friedenthal, M.D.  
San Francisco, Calif.

I feel a word of support for Mr. Gitchell is needed. Admittedly, he can't speak of the velocity of an object "relative to the natural universe" if he wishes to retain relativity, but that doesn't mean he is ridiculous to look at it from a different viewpoint. Gitchell's observed velocity of separation is an absolute in his coordinate system which is anchored at the center of his natural universe.

The critics, Mann and Drake, seem to regard relativity as some sort of natural law which explains the way things are, whereas, in reality, it is merely an artifact of the way we observe ("see") and, instead of explaining the way things are, it merely explains the way we are constrained to perceive things to be.

If we could not perceive electromagnetic waves our universe would still obey Newtonian physics, but relativity would not exist.

Finally, Mr. Drake implies that we are studying quasars by reflecting light rays from them. This will be news to astronomers.

Robert E. McDaniel  
Las Cruces, N.M.

Stanley R. Drake has the right idea in his reply to Ronald B. Gitchell, but apparently has gotten lost in the conversion of km/sec. to km/hr, which results in the incorrect relative velocity of two cars going 100 km/hr in opposite directions. The speed of light is 299,792.2 km/sec. = 1079251920 km/hr the relative velocity is then:

$$\frac{100 + 100}{1 + \frac{(100)(100)}{1079251920^2}} = 199.99999999998283 \text{ km/hr}$$

Charles Kluepfel  
New York, N.Y.