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0521781590 - Japanese Frames of Mind: Cultural Perspectives on Human Development

Edited by Hidetada Shimizu and Robert A. LeVine

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Japanese Frames of Mind

Cultural Perspectives on Human Development

Japanese Frames of Mind addresses two problems in the light of studies by Japanese and American researchers at Harvard University: Does evidence from Japan challenge basic premises of current psychological theories? Are the universals of human nature claimed by academic psychology more accurately seen as Western or Euroamerican patterns? The chapters provide a wealth of new data and perspectives related to aspects of Japanese parenting, child development, moral reasoning and narratives, school and family socialization, and adolescent experience. By examining Japanese findings against Western theoretical frameworks, the book calls for a new understanding of those frameworks as reflecting the ethnopsychology of Western countries. Written largely in nontechnical language, this book will appeal to developmental and cultural psychologists, anthropologists interested in psychological anthropology, educators, and anyone interested in Japan and Asian studies.

Hidetada Shimizu is Assistant Professor of Educational Psychology in the Department of Educational Psychology and Foundations at Northern Illinois University.

Robert A. LeVine is Roy E. Larsen Professor of Education Emeritus and Professor of Anthropology Emeritus at Harvard University. He is coauthor of *Childcare and Culture: Lessons from Africa* and coeditor (with Richard Shweder) of *Culture Theory: Essays on Mind, Self, and Emotion*.

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Frontmatter

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Edited by

Hidetada Shimizu

Northern Illinois University

Robert A. LeVine

Harvard University



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Frontmatter

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PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, VIC 3166, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa
<http://www.cambridge.org>

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First published 2001

Printed in the United States of America

Typeface Palatino 9.75/13 pt. *System* QuarkXPress 4.04 [AG]

A catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Japanese frames of mind : cultural perspectives on human development / edited by
Hidetada Shimizu, Robert A. LeVine

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-521-78159-0 (hb) – ISBN 0-521-78698-3 (pbk.)

1. Psychology – Japan. I. Shimizu, Hidetada, 1960– II. LeVine, Robert Alan, 1932–

BF108.J3J36 2001

155.8'952–dc21 2001025172

ISBN 0 521 78159 0 hardback

ISBN 0 521 78698 3 paperback

Contents

<i>Notes on the Contributors</i>	<i>page</i> vii
<i>Preface: Japan as Front Line in the Cultural Psychology Wars</i> <i>Robert A. LeVine</i>	xi
Introduction: Japanese Cultural Psychology and Empathic Understanding: Implications for Academic and Cultural Psychology <i>Hidetada Shimizu</i>	1
PART ONE. MORAL SCRIPTS AND REASONING	
1 Moral Scripts: A U.S.–Japan Comparison <i>Hiroshi Azuma</i>	29
2 Moral Reasoning among Adults: Japan–U.S. Comparison <i>Nobumichi Iwasa</i>	51
PART TWO. MOTHER AND CHILD AT HOME	
3 The Maternal Role in Japan: Cultural Values and Socioeconomic Conditions <i>Yoshie Nishioka Rice</i>	85
4 Japanese Mother-Child Relationships: Skill Acquisition before the Preschool Years <i>Shusuke Kobayashi</i>	111

Cambridge University Press
0521781590 - Japanese Frames of Mind: Cultural Perspectives on Human Development
Edited by Hidetada Shimizu and Robert A. LeVine
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

PART THREE. GROUP LIFE: THE YOUNG CHILD IN PRESCHOOL AND SCHOOL	
5	Learning to Become Part of the Group: The Japanese Child's Transition to Preschool Life 143 <i>Lois Peak</i>
6	Peer Culture and Interaction: How Japanese Children Express Their Internalization of the Cultural Norms of Group Life (Shudan Seikatsu) 170 <i>Victoria E. Kelly</i>
PART FOUR. ADOLESCENT EXPERIENCE	
7	Beyond Individualism and Sociocentrism: An Ontological Analysis of the Opposing Elements in Personal Experiences of Japanese Adolescents 205 <i>Hidetada Shimizu</i>
8	Returnees to Japan: The Impact of Having Lived in the United States 228 <i>Miya Omori</i>
PART FIVE. REFLECTIONS	
9	Children and Families: Reflections on the "Crisis" in Japanese Childrearing Today 257 <i>Merry I. White</i>
	Index 267

Cambridge University Press

0521781590 - Japanese Frames of Mind: Cultural Perspectives on Human Development

Edited by Hidetada Shimizu and Robert A. LeVine

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Notes on the Contributors

HIROSHI AZUMA is the President of the Japanese Psychological Association, Adjunct Professor of Psychology at Bunkyo Women's University, and Professor Emeritus at the University of Tokyo. He received his bachelor's degree in psychology at Tokyo University and his doctorate in educational psychology at the University of Illinois. Founder and President of the Japanese Society of Developmental Psychology, Dr. Azuma has been an active member of numerous international organizations and editorial boards. His research specializations include educational and developmental psychology. He recently has been working on cultural influences on psychological development.

NOBUMICHI IWASA is Professor of Education at Reitaku University and Researcher at the Institute of Moralogy in Japan. He received his master's degree in education from Keio University and doctoral degree in education from Harvard University. He currently is interested in moral development in a life-long perspective, especially the relationship between the development of interpersonal morality and social responsibility.

VICTORIA E. KELLY is a Japanese-English translator and marketing researcher in the Boston area. She received her bachelor's degree in anthropology at Oakland University and her doctorate in human development from Harvard University. She was a recipient of grants from the Fulbright-Hays Foundation and the Social Science Research Council and was Visiting Scholar at the Department of Psychological Research at Shizuoka University. Her research specializations include cross-cultural peer interactions and consumer psychology.

Cambridge University Press

0521781590 - Japanese Frames of Mind: Cultural Perspectives on Human Development

Edited by Hidetada Shimizu and Robert A. LeVine

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

SHUSUKE KOBAYASHI is Assistant Professor of Child Studies at Notre Dame Seishin University, Okayama, Japan. He received his master's degree and doctorate in human development and psychology from Harvard University. His research interests include cultural and social aspects of child development and education in Japan. He edited a Japanese translation of Robert LeVine's papers, *Culture and Human Development* (1996), and papers by diverse hands, *Human Development and Education* (1999).

ROBERT A. LEVINE is Roy E. Larsen Professor of Education Emeritus and Professor of Anthropology Emeritus at Harvard University. He received his doctorate from Harvard University and master's and bachelor's degrees from the University of Chicago. His research concerns cultural aspects of parenthood, child development, and adult personality in African, Asian, North and Central American, and other societies. His most recent research is on the influence of schooling on maternal behavior in Nepal and Venezuela. He is the coauthor of *Childcare and Culture: Lessons from Africa* (1994) and the coeditor (with Richard Shweder) of *Culture Theory: Essays on Mind, Self, and Emotion* (1984).

MIYA OMORI is a consultant for several educational and mental health related corporations and organizations in Japan. She also is a counselor for children in Japan, which allows her first-hand contact with the many emotional challenges and academic dilemmas of youth in Japan today. She completed her master's degree in counseling and consulting psychology and received a doctorate in human development and psychology from Harvard University.

LOIS PEAK is a Senior Education Policy Analyst in the International Affairs Division of the Office of the Undersecretary, U.S. Department of Education. She served as the U.S. Department of Education project officer in charge of the 1995 Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), and she authored the final TIMSS report, *Pursuing Excellence*. She received her doctorate in comparative human development from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and her dissertation *Learning to Go to School in Japan* was published by the University of California Press. The research and analysis presented in this chapter were conducted in her private capacity. No official support by the U.S. Department of Education is intended or should be inferred.

Cambridge University Press

0521781590 - Japanese Frames of Mind: Cultural Perspectives on Human Development

Edited by Hidetada Shimizu and Robert A. LeVine

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Notes on the Contributors

ix

YOSHIE NISHIOKA RICE is a freelance journalist in the Boston area. She received her doctorate in human development from Harvard University.

HIDETADA SHIMIZU is Assistant Professor of Educational Psychology in the Department of Educational Psychology and Foundations at Northern Illinois University. He received his master's degree in counseling and consulting psychology and doctorate in human development and psychology from Harvard University. He was a recipient of a Spencer Post-Doctoral Fellowship from the National Academy of Education and was Primary Researcher in the Case Study Project of the 1995 Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). His research interests include acculturation of individuals, cultural influences on personality and behavioral development, cultural phenomenology, and minority experiences in Japan.

MERRY I. WHITE is Professor of Anthropology at Boston University and Associate in Research at the Harvard Edwin D. Reischauer Institute of Japanese Studies. She is a graduate of Harvard College and recipient of master's and doctoral degrees from Harvard University. She has been a consultant to a wide range of education and corporate institutions and to the U.S. congress. Her research has focused on Japanese education, family, and social issues. Recent publications include *The Material Child: Coming of Age in Japan and America* (1993) and *Home Truths: Families, Ideologies, and Common Sense in Japan* (in press).

Cambridge University Press

0521781590 - Japanese Frames of Mind: Cultural Perspectives on Human Development

Edited by Hidetada Shimizu and Robert A. LeVine

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Preface

Japan as Front Line in the Cultural Psychology Wars

Robert A. LeVine

The specter of Japan haunts Western psychology, posing the threat that presumed universals of human nature will be shrunk to local findings by disconfirming evidence from Asia. Margaret Lock's (1993) demonstration that Japanese women rarely experience the symptoms of menopause most often reported in North America is only the latest in a long series of indications over the last fifty years that something may be radically different about Japanese experience of the life cycle. Is Japan the mirror into which the titan of universal psychology looks and finds himself reduced to a dwarf – one local psychology among many in a world of unpredicted variations? This is the nightmare of cultural relativity from which European and American psychologists awaken to reassure themselves that their instruments have passed the tests of reliability and validity, and their findings have been replicated not only in Madison and Melbourne but even in Bogotá and Bombay (if only among university students). But psychology's "Japanese problem" – a particular case of the questions raised by all cultural variations in human behavior and development – is not so easily solved, and it needs to be confronted directly, as this volume does in provocative and illuminating detail.

Anthropologists waged intermittent guerrilla warfare against psychological universalism during much of the twentieth century. From the days of Malinowski (1927) and Mead (1928) onward, field data from non-Western societies have been used to attack and revise generalizations issued by Western psychologists and psychoanalysts. This empirical critique was given organized form in the middle of the century by John W. M. Whiting and Beatrice B. Whiting (Whiting, 1954; Whiting & Whiting, 1960; Whiting, Child, & Lambert, 1966), who provided systematic methods for marshalling

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0521781590 - Japanese Frames of Mind: Cultural Perspectives on Human Development

Edited by Hidetada Shimizu and Robert A. Levine

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

field observations to address questions in developmental psychology. But American and European psychologists and psychoanalysts have rarely seen the need to take seriously these challenges from abroad, convinced as they are that their clinical or experimental methods give them access to the deepest levels of generically human biopsychology. In recent years, however, some developmental and social psychologists, under the banner of cultural psychology, have paid increasing attention to the possibility that the plasticity of human development and the varying environmental conditions under which it occurs, make knowledge of human diversity central to psychological understanding (Bruner, 1990, 1996; Cole, 1996; Greenfield & Cocking, 1994; Kitayama & Markus, 1994; Miller, 1997; Shweder et al., 1998; Stevenson & Stigler, 1992; Valsiner, 2000). For this new and vigorous attack – still resisted and ignored by mainstream psychologies – Japan must be the front line of the battle.

WHY JAPAN?

Why Japan? As an affluent urban society admired in the West for its achievements in technology, industrial production, education, and the arts, Japan commands the kind of respect that makes evidence of its distinctive psychological tendencies harder to ignore than if it were a “Third World” country. American psychologists seem able to discount evidence from non-Western peoples who are poor, isolated, and unschooled, however unjustifiable this may be from any scientific perspective. There may be a tacit assumption that such peoples – the rural majority of Africa, South Asia, Oceania, and South America – can differ from us psychologically without repealing the laws of psychological science. But the Japanese are not only among the winners in the contemporary world, they are also too familiar to Americans in their modernity, education, and wealth to ignore or discount. If it turns out that *their* psychological development diverges substantially from Euroamerican patterns presumed to be universal, the difference cannot be attributed to poverty, illiteracy, “backwardness,” or marginality. Further, if they have reached some of *our* cherished goals in education, health, and other fields, but through radically different pathways from what we follow, then the Japanese evidence demands careful examination. The threat to psychological universalism is direct, palpable, and – it would seem – inescapable.

If Japan looms large as a promising battleground in the war of cultural psychology against universalism, it is also because Japanese conceptions of

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0521781590 - Japanese Frames of Mind: Cultural Perspectives on Human Development

Edited by Hidetada Shimizu and Robert A. LeVine

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Preface*

xiii

interpersonal relations, family life, education, and the life cycle – as described in a half-century of social science research by American and Japanese investigators – are as different from Western ones as those of any non-Western culture. In other words, there is no question as to whether Japan differs from Western societies in the ideologies, norms, moral concepts, and popular images that give meaning to social life and personal development. It differs substantially, often dramatically, sometimes inverting Western values entirely – as in Lebra's (1976) example of the contrast between Japanese social relativism – emphasizing the moral value of accommodating to the norms of differing situations – and the American moral virtue of integrity, defined in terms of maintaining personal consistency across varying situational norms. The question is how much difference such contrasts make to the psychological development and functioning of individuals.

Finally and most importantly, Japan has its own psychologists and psychiatrists, whose pioneering figures, Takeo Doi (1973, 1986, 1990) and Hiroshi Azuma (e.g., 1996; this volume), have provided a basis for reconceptualizing psychology in Japanese terms and contributed to the new cultural psychology. Both were trained in the United States after World War II – Doi in psychiatry and Freudian psychoanalysis, Azuma in academic developmental and educational psychology – and both discovered that the disciplines they studied were framed in terms of distinctively Euroamerican assumptions contrasting with those prevalent in Japan. They have argued forcefully that psychological studies operate not only with explicit theory and concepts but also with unexamined premises reflecting a naive or folk psychology derived from the culture of the investigator. Western psychological studies, despite their claims to universality, are no different in this respect from others, and Japanese concepts and models can help decenter psychological theory from its monocultural Euroamerican perspective.

Some psychologists in Japan have been pursuing research based on this line of argument. If their impact has been limited so far in American psychology, it may be due in part to their avoiding the combative tone of this Preface, which uses the very un-Japanese rhetorical device of a military metaphor – cultural psychology wars – to draw attention to evidence that contradicts theoretical expectation. Without a level of belligerency sufficient to generate serious debate in Anglo-American psychology and psychiatry, important findings can be overlooked. For example, when Mary D. S. Ainsworth introduced her famous Strange Situation (SS) to the child development field as a measure of infant attachment under conditions of moderate stress, she already knew that, for the Japanese infants studied by Keiko Takahashi (1986), who were rarely left with a person other than the

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0521781590 - Japanese Frames of Mind: Cultural Perspectives on Human Development

Edited by Hidetada Shimizu and Robert A. LeVine

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

mother (an average of 2.2 times in the month before being assessed) or even taken out of the home, the stress of being in an unfamiliar place with unfamiliar people was more than moderate (Ainsworth et al., 1978, xiv). In fact, a large proportion of the Japanese infants cried from the first episode of the SS onwards rather than only when separated from their mothers, indicating the high level of emotional stress of the unfamiliar situation for them (Takahashi, 1986). These findings indicate not only the culture-specificity of the SS as a context in which to assess attachment but also how customs of infant care can influence the behavior assessed by the SS – a point subsequently overlooked in universalist interpretations of the evidence on infant attachment. The Great Debate over the theoretical implications of early emotional development in Japan that might have been provoked by these findings in 1978 has not yet occurred. We hope this volume, particularly the chapters by Rice and Kobayashi, will provoke such a debate, jarring assumptions about what is normal and necessary in the early mother-child relationship that currently prevail in American child development research.

Japanese mothers operate with ideals of maternal commitment and strategies for teaching and control that would be regarded by childcare professionals in the West as unwisely fostering overdependence and unethically manipulating the emotions of young children (Azuma, 1996; Doi, 1973; Hess et al., 1980). As the studies of this volume show in detail, the standards by which Japanese childcare practices and early education would be classified as “developmentally inappropriate” (e.g., Bredekamp, 1987) are simply blind to the alternative pathways for normal childcare and development constituted by Japanese standards. By understanding in depth how the Japanese alternatives shape the contexts and experience of children from their preschool years to adolescence, we become capable of reconceptualizing *normal* human development in pluralist rather than universalist terms (Shweder et al., 1998).

In the remainder of this preface, I shall show how anthropological, linguistic, and sociological studies have contributed to a Japanese cultural psychology and in effect to the foundations of cultural psychology in general. Recent writings on cultural psychology have made use of ethnographic and other social science evidence, often in an ad hoc way, but they have not explained how cultural psychology is and should be related to social research. Here I propose two approaches from the toolkit of the social science subdiscipline of psychological anthropology: *ethnopsychology*, broadly defined as describing not only the vernacular categories of subjective experience in a culture and its models for personal and interpersonal

Cambridge University Press

0521781590 - Japanese Frames of Mind: Cultural Perspectives on Human Development

Edited by Hidetada Shimizu and Robert A. LeVine

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Preface

xv

behavior but also their uses in communicative practices; and *cultural psychodynamics*, the investigation of psychic equilibrium and disequilibrium in the various institutional settings that make up individual lives. Both approaches have been used in Japan, and together they form a background that gives broader and deeper meaning to the specific studies of this volume.

JAPANESE ETHNOPSYCHOLOGY AND COMMUNICATIVE PRACTICES

Ethnopsychology as an investigative approach describes the vocabulary for mental and behavioral phenomena and processes in a given language that bear directly on the experience of individuals. By translating the extended meanings of vernacular terms with their contextual specifications, the anthropologist is able to establish the categories and norms for the emotional and cognitive responses of individuals in a particular speech-community, as embedded in its communicative practices (Levy, 1973; White & Kirkpatrick, 1985). Ethnopsychology is limited, however, by the fact that some languages and cultures have a restricted vocabulary of mental states and processes, using bodily organs, social situations, or deities and spirits rather than personal thoughts and feelings in the cultural idioms that describe and explain individual behavior and its development (Lutz, 1988). Thus the cultures of the world are not equally amenable to ethnopsychological study, and this approach does not always lead to the kind of understanding sought in cultural psychology.

The contemporary Japanese, however, have an extensive repertoire of psychological concepts, and it has seemed to many observers that the translation of key terms from the Japanese language must be the first step toward psychological understanding (White & LeVine, 1986). Indeed, Doi (1973) organized an entire book around the one term *amae*, describing its referents and functions in adult social life, its developmental origins in the mother-child relationship, and its abnormal variants in psychopathology. In the studies that follow in this volume, terms – such as *amae*, *omoiyari*, *ikigai*, *kosodate*, *shudan seikatsu*, *uchi* versus *soto*, *honne* versus *tatamae* – are translated and play a major role in describing the relational contexts that make up the psychologically salient environments of Japanese individuals. These words are embedded in semantic fields that connect them, referentially and metaphorically, with social relationships, emotions, and ideological concepts that are salient in the popular culture of Japan and have been influenced by its philosophical, political, and literary traditions. But words,

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0521781590 - Japanese Frames of Mind: Cultural Perspectives on Human Development

Edited by Hidetada Shimizu and Robert A. LeVine

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xvi

Robert LeVine

however rich their semantic connections, are just the beginning; an ethnopsychology is also comprised of narratives of person or self embedded in the conventional scripts for routine social interaction, public occasions, and biographical representation (LeVine, 1982). By examining the narrative content of these scripts in Japan, anthropologists and linguists have uncovered the wishes, fears, and ideals in terms of which Japanese men and women experience their lives and their relationships and toward which they organize the development of their children.

The classic book *Japanese Patterns of Behavior* (1976) by Takie Sugiyama Lebra is a case in point. Lebra, an anthropologist raised in Japan but trained in the United States, has lived in America and continued to conduct research in the country of her birth throughout her career. Her book synthesized a large body of diverse studies in several disciplines, using the extended translation of Japanese terms into English as a starting point for conveying to American and other Western readers distinctively Japanese views of psychologically salient topics ranging from everyday social interaction to parenthood and child development to psychopathology and therapy. She demonstrated how the difficult-to-translate words encompass a range of meanings embedded in Japanese scripts for appropriate interpersonal behavior, desirable parent-child relationships, and emotional disturbance and its treatment. One of the key terms is *omoiyari*, roughly translatable as empathy, but with the implications of sensitivity to the needs and feelings of others and anticipation of those needs and feeling in the planning of one's behavior. Lebra argued that parents take *omoiyari* as the goal for their children's development and shape their childrearing behavior accordingly; subsequent researchers (e.g., Hess et al., 1980; Clancy, 1986) showed how this model influences the mother-child relationship. *Omoiyari* is a major theme in the studies of the present volume; the chapters that follow demonstrate its influence in parental behavior (Rice and Kobayashi), group interaction and conformity (Peak and Kelly), adolescent anxiety (Shimizu), and intercultural experience (Omori). When parents and children alike have internalized the standards of interpersonal sensitivity represented by *omoiyari*, the social and psychological symptoms of such sensitivity are wide and deep.

One symptom is the cultural script for "apologizing" as described by Wierzbicka (1996). Apologies, or something roughly equivalent to the apology in Anglo-American discourse, abound in the normal communicative practices of Japanese, occurring in many contexts that contrast with those of Anglo-American speech: for example, the providing of hospitality to a visitor, talking about one's son to his hosts, the policy declarations of politi-

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0521781590 - Japanese Frames of Mind: Cultural Perspectives on Human Development

Edited by Hidetada Shimizu and Robert A. Levine

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Preface*

xvii

cians. But these socially expected apologies and the behavior that accompanies them are intended – and interpreted – less as confessing a misdemeanor or even humbling oneself to the other than as demonstrating sincerity in one's concern for the feelings of others. Thus, the driver of a car should visit a minimally injured pedestrian in the hospital even when it is clear to all concerned that the driver was not responsible for the accident, and the prime minister whose personal affairs have diverted the attention of parliament from other matters should resign and apologize, even when his culpability has not been established. Culpability in these cases is beside the point; the focus is on the emotional upset an event has caused and the central actor's responsibility for restoring harmony by demonstrating sincere concern for the feelings of others. This principle reflects *omoiyari* and related concepts such as “*magokoro*, a sincere heart, or *sunao na kokoro*, a naive, receptive sensitive heart” (Kondo, 1990, p. 105). It suggests, in my opinion, that such concepts and the scripts related to them entail taking responsibility for the emotional states of others to a degree that exceeds the expectations embodied in the Anglo-American terms empathy or interpersonal sensitivity.

This “expanded” sense of responsibility for others (from an Anglo-American perspective) is a recurrent theme in descriptions of Japanese child-training goals and adult behavior. Mothers urge their young children to good behavior by calling attention to the impact it makes on their own (mothers') feelings and those of other children and even inanimate objects (Hess et al., 1980); children in preschools and schools are required to take responsibility for keeping the school clean and tidy (Lewis 1995; White, 1987). Japanese children are thus made to feel responsible for the care of their physical and social environment, including the feelings of those around them. A Japanese host is expected to anticipate the desires of a guest to such an extent that even asking the guest to express his preference (as in American norms) signals a failure of sensitivity (Doi, 1973; Wierzbicka, 1996). This intense sense of responsibility enhances trust and community participation in a way that an outsider can admire, but it depends on a willingness to diminish oneself vis-à-vis others that Anglo-Americans are likely to see as being at variance with their own standards of conduct. Japanese are often described as slow to criticize others directly but frequently engaging in self-criticism, as well as able to accept public criticism without the humiliation that Anglo-Americans experience. The cultural script for apologies also presents a diminished or inadequate self in normal contexts of social interaction. But public presentations of self may indicate only conformity with a code of public conduct. The question is how deeply

Cambridge University Press

0521781590 - Japanese Frames of Mind: Cultural Perspectives on Human Development

Edited by Hidetada Shimizu and Robert A. LeVine

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xviii

Robert LeVine

the apologies, self-criticisms, and self-reproaches that are culturally scripted in Japanese communicative conventions represent the feelings of individuals. In other words, to what extent are they psychological phenomena as well as sociolinguistic codes?

The evidence that apologies, self-criticisms, and self-reproaches represent deep feelings rather than simply conformist behavior comes from observations of diverse Japanese individuals under varying degrees of social constraint. In Dorinne Kondo's (1990) account of her experience at an "ethical retreat center" for Japanese workers, for example, there are lessons in filial piety that include "[a]pologizing [to parents] for all the trouble we have caused and promising to improve in the future" (Kondo, 1990, p. 99). Kondo, an American anthropologist of Japanese parentage, expected the rehearsal of the confession to parents to elicit nothing more than embarrassment:

But for most participants, the ethics teachings seemed to take on personal meaning at this point. To listen to the confessions, the room was full of selfish and egotistical people. Even the most rebellious young men who had been sent on company order seemed to take this exercise seriously. One of the foundry workers, labeled "insolent" by the teachers, tearfully poured out his emotions. He . . . remembered how tenderly his mother had cared for him during times of illness. Like others, he promised to appreciate all she had done for him and to be less selfish in the future. (Kondo, 1990, p. 99)

The performance of this man and the others described by Kondo could be interpreted as merely following a cultural script, but their emotional responsiveness to the script indicates at the least that they had acquired it as part of their experience of self. DeVos (1986) found similar themes of self-reproach in relation to parents in the responses by various Japanese subjects to the Thematic Apperception Test, suggesting that self-reproach, either in adaptive forms as constructive self-criticism or maladaptive forms as depression and withdrawal, is a recurrent psychological as well as cultural theme in Japan. It is important to realize that the Japanese population contains individuals who are alienated from its "sociocentric" cultural models of behavior and emotional expression, as documented by Mathews (1996), and that their numbers may be increasing, but the burden of evidence seems to suggest that the scripts for apologies, self-criticism, and self-reproach are psychologically salient for many Japanese. In the semantic field that connects *omoiyari* with self-reproach are high standards of interpersonal conduct that motivate altruistic behavior in Japanese social rela-

Cambridge University Press

0521781590 - Japanese Frames of Mind: Cultural Perspectives on Human Development

Edited by Hidetada Shimizu and Robert A. LeVine

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

tionships but can also be experienced as burdensome sources of personal anxiety and anguish.

CULTURAL PSYCHODYNAMICS IN JAPAN

Cultural psychodynamics goes beyond the descriptive account of ethnopsychology to interpret culturally shaped individual experience in terms of psychic equilibrium, disequilibrium, and change. A Japanese example comes from William Caudill's ambitious investigation, left incomplete at his death in 1972. He documented that the average Japanese (in the early 1960s) slept and bathed with mother during the early years, continued sleeping with a family member until age fifteen, and then engaged in intergenerational co-sleeping again as a young parent (Caudill & Plath, 1966). He believed that this kind of physical closeness with another person became part of the ordinary person's intrapsychic equilibrium in the course of growing up. When that equilibrium was seriously disturbed by social stresses (as in the ongoing final industrialization that eliminated so many family businesses when he was there), sleep disorders would be one of the primary symptoms. He showed that sleep disorders were frequent among hospitalized Japanese mental patients (Caudill & Schooler, 1969) and that Japanese mental hospitals had institutionalized the culture-specific role of the *tsukisoi*, who would stay with patients and help them get to sleep (Caudill, 1961).

Caudill documented each of these assertions with quantitative data as well as ethnographic evidence. He described individual differences in the Japanese population, not only culturally homogeneous aspects of experience and practice. In interpreting the evidence, he argued that the closeness of child with mother and later with others was much more part of the inner regulation of the individual (interpersonal involvement in aspects of body management, like getting to sleep) than posited by orthodox psychoanalytic theory. He claimed that this closeness became a deep-seated emotional need, underlying normal family behavior in adulthood for most Japanese, reactions to extremely stressful conditions for some individuals, the manifest symptoms of hospitalized mental patients, and even the policies and practices of Japanese mental hospitals. Understood this way, the Japanese case represented a much greater penetration of cultural practices into the deepest parts of the psyche than Freudian or neo-Freudian formulations could accommodate. It thus called for a radical revision of psychoanalytic theory in cultural terms, which Caudill did not live to carry out. His unfinished work serves as an ideal, however, pointing the way to

Cambridge University Press

0521781590 - Japanese Frames of Mind: Cultural Perspectives on Human Development

Edited by Hidetada Shimizu and Robert A. LeVine

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xx

Robert LeVine

a cultural psychodynamics that refuses to take culture as window-dressing on a generically human psyche but insists on exploring the ways in which culturally organized experience sets the agenda for psychological patterns of normal development, adult functioning, and pathological breakdown.

It is no accident that the inspiration for Caudill's project of cultural psychodynamics came from Japan, which has, through its own cultural practices, challenged so many Western assumptions about the meanings of social life and human activities. This book continues that project's approach in its exploration of meanings in Japanese parenthood, childhood, and adolescence – meanings that shed new light on the experience of human development.

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Frontmatter

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Preface

xxi

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xxii

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