

Heeding the Vocabulary of Another Culture Psychoanalysis in Japan

By Evelyne Albrecht Schwaber¹

In November, 2006, I visited Tokyo at the invitation of the Japanese Psychoanalytic Society, and the Koderia Foundation for Psychoanalytic Study at Keio University, to lecture and teach. It was for me an extraordinary opportunity on levels both professional and personal. There is, of course, the personal growth and pleasure in getting to know people and places more closely, but beyond that, I have also always found engaging in dialogue with colleagues from another culture - particularly in trying to think more deliberately about one's own choice of words in the effort to be comprehensible - a powerful learning experience. Having to pause for translation pushes me to reflect more closely on the nuances in the words and in what I mean to convey. It fosters the recognition and clarification of ambiguity even in my own thinking. Since English was not my first language, there may be a lingering familiarity in this effort.

Let me first share a bit about how this invitation came about: I have, for many years, been in correspondence with Dr. Takeo Doi, a renowned Japanese psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, having first met him when he presented a paper on his concept of *amae* at the IPA Congress in Montreal in 1987. I found Doi's ideas very meaningful and illuminating, and as he too felt a resonance with my own ideas about how we listen, we have exchanged views and writings ever since. I was deeply honored by his suggesting this invitation. I remain most appreciative as well of the close care and hospitality I received by many colleagues and other co-workers and by their impressive clinical participation and dialogue, impeccably organized by Dr. Rikihachiro Kano, a training analyst of the JPS.

DOI'S CONCEPT of AMAE

Takeo Doi's concept of *amae*, about which he has written extensively in English as well, has become a widely accepted theory of human behavior in Japan. A Japanese word for which there is no English equivalent, it speaks to what is seen as a universal psychology, referring to the feeling of "sweet" dependence of the infant towards its mother, which, taking place nonverbally, remains a lifelong part of human relatedness. Doi introduced this concept, and related terms, to the English-language reader in his book charting the Japanese personality, *Anatomy of Dependence*, published in 1971. A best seller in Japan, it has since been translated into eight languages. In it, he elaborates the sense of "cultural shock" he experienced during his first extended stay in the US in 1950, when he came to study psychiatry at the Menninger Clinic.

Doi writes:

"From time to time I began to feel an awkwardness arising from the difference between my ways of thinking and feeling and those of my hosts....Not long after my arrival in America, I visited the house of someone to whom I had been introduced by a Japanese acquaintance, and was talking to him when he asked me, 'Are you hungry? We have some ice cream if you'd like.' As I remember, I was rather hungry, but finding myself asked point-blank if I was hungry by

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someone whom I was visiting for the first time, I could not bring myself to admit it, and ended by denying the suggestion. I probably cherished a mild hope that he would press me again; but my host, disappointingly, said ‘I see’ with no further ado, leaving me regretting that I had not replied more honestly. And I found myself thinking that a Japanese would almost never ask a stranger unceremoniously if he was hungry, but would produce something to give him without asking.”

Noting the differences in cultural values of autonomy and independence in the US and the “indulgent dependence” of personal relations in Japan, Dr. Doi began to think about cultural differences in terms of native language, seeing language as the “royal road” to the understanding of a culture. He wrote, “The typical psychology of a given nation can be learned only through familiarity with its native language. The language comprises everything which is intrinsic to the soul of a nation and therefore provides the best projective test there is for each nation.” And so it occurred to him that the rich vocabulary of words related to *amae* expressed the nature of personal relations in Japan.

Among other of his publications, Doi’s more recent book, *Understanding Amae: The Japanese Concept of Need-Love*, 2005, is a collection of English-language writings on the subject extending over his professional life of more than 55 years.

In 2006, Doi received the Sigourney Award at the American Psychoanalytic Association. As his health did not permit him to make the trip to New York, the Award was accepted on his behalf by his fellow Menninger-trained colleague from Osaka, Dr. Tetsuro Takahashi (whom I later met in Tokyo). Dr. Joseph Okimoto, of the Seattle Psychoanalytic Society, spoke at the award ceremony of the impact of Dr. Doi’s work on his own thinking. Although he had not met Dr. Doi in person, he told of having become an avid reader of his publications in his own quest, as the son of immigrant parents from Japan, to try to “fill in the cultural deficiencies he felt in the institute’s training curriculum.” In his remarks, Dr. Okimoto noted, “Doi has provided an ‘insider’s view’ of Japanese personality utilizing psychoanalytic concepts expressed in Japanese vocabulary. His work has been a psychoanalytic bridge between his culture and the West that offers the possibility of greater bidirectional understanding. It would be my hope that his work might become part of the Western psychoanalytic curriculum addressing cultural issues in psychoanalysis. Such a movement would contribute to a better understanding globally as well as addressing the issue of cultural diversity domestically.”

RECOGNITION and AMAE

In a paper published in 1993 in a volume by the IPA on Freud’s “Transference-Love,” Doi wrote of the central relevance of *amae* for the understanding of transference. I was honored to learn that in illustration of his views, he drew upon clinical material from my own writings in which I try to illuminate the importance of ‘recognition’ as central to therapeutic action. Commenting on a patient I described, he states, “she almost came to articulate her wish for *amae*. In the transference, she would become angry again and again at something Dr. S said or did not say. Dr. S tried to make sense of her experience after each such incident, but (though it was seemingly understood) to no avail, since it did not prevent her from creating angry scenes anew. One day an idea occurred to Dr. S, and I quote the passage describing it:

‘Then I realized there was an element I had not addressed. The patient’s way of relating was to recount an experience she’d had without any hint apparent to me that she was seeking a particular response and to become furious with me

afterwards when I failed to comment about the concern which she only then made explicit. I shared my observation of this sequence with her, asking her why she made her feelings clearer to me only afterwards. And she answered: “I want you to understand me without my having to spell it out. If you really care about me, you would know; if I have to ask, it feels like begging. Even if you then understand, it is no longer the same.”

In the example, I go on to recount the ensuing elucidation and newly-found remembrances of the lifelong nature of this wish and its childhood frustration, central to the complexities in her relationships about which she first came for treatment.

I find myself *now* thinking of Doi’s words, “a Japanese would almost never ask a stranger unceremoniously if he was hungry, but would produce something to give him without asking.” With my patient, I did not then have to know her wish without her “spelling it out,” but it was of fundamental import that I could recognize and understand the basis of its power. To draw upon Doi’s comments on another example from my writings, “*She understood that (Dr. S) understood what it was she really meant to convey. And that in itself was good enough, because what she was really hoping for was not (a clairvoyant response) itself, but to be understood in the depth of her mind*” (my italics to Doi’s words). I found this to be a deceptively simple statement, yet quite powerful and moving, in illuminating the expression of *amae*. And it drew me towards further appreciation of what we might learn in heeding the vocabulary of another culture. (I would note that the infant researcher, Louis Sander, affirms the developmental correlates of this position, i.e., the inherent developmental thrust of ‘recognition.’)

PSYCHOANALYSIS in JAPAN

Let me say a bit more of what I learned of the history of psychoanalysis in Japan:

Its early introduction was in the 19’teens, when some of Freud’s writings began to be translated into Japanese, followed by the “collected works” in the years between 1929-1933. During the ‘30’s, some Japanese psychiatrists visited Freud in Vienna; one, in particular, was Heisaku Kosawa, ultimately considered the father of Japanese psychoanalysis. Actively studying with Freud for analytic training, Kosawa had an analysis with Richard Sterba and supervision with Paul Federn. On return to Japan, he and a small circle of colleagues organized a branch of the IPA in Sendai and in Tokyo.

During the Second World War, Kosawa was under constant surveillance by the special police because of his pursuit of what was labeled this “Jewish system of thought;” he nonetheless, maintained a private practice throughout those years.² The end of the war brought an influx of learning and culture from the US, and with “individualization of self” becoming an ideal, interest in psychoanalysis began to bud throughout the country. Some psychiatrists sought training analysis and supervision from Kosawa. Take Doi was one of his trainees.

As interest in psychoanalysis continued to spread, Kosawa asked the IPA to include the Japan Psychoanalytic Society (JPS) as a nationally organized entity, then admitted in 1955. A number of psychoanalysts visited from other parts of the world, offering lectures, seminars, and other coordinated teaching activities. Thereafter, a separate body of psychoanalytically oriented

² Outside the domain of psychoanalysis, there is the extraordinary story of Chiune Sugihara, the Japanese consul-general in Lithuania in 1939, who, together with his wife Yukiko, and against the rules of his commanders, forged thousands of visas by hand for desperate Jews, saving their lives at great peril to his own.

clinicians was started, apart from the JPS, and not based on the training criteria of the IPA, to further spread and develop psychoanalysis and dynamic psychiatry. This group is called the Japan Psychoanalytical Association (JPA), many of whose members belong to both organizations, and which continues to function actively and in cooperation with the IPA. In 1991, a relatively small training Institute (approximating about 20 members or a bit more - largely, though not exclusively, psychiatrists, and perhaps 12-15 trainees) was established in accord with IPA criteria, while the much larger membership continues in a rather sophisticated and ambitious psychoanalytic psychotherapy program.

In commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Japan Psychoanalytic Society, a remarkable collection of English-language papers by members of the Society was published for the first time, in 2004. (The cover illustration by Kiyoshi Yoshida, *Mount Fuji Mirrored in a Lake*, was a gift to Freud in 1932 by Kosawa.) These papers include an informative and fascinating grouping of multi-faceted articles by many of the leading figures of Japanese psychoanalysis. Their positions are eclectic in theoretical predilection and speak to the signal evolution and growth in the field locally, which, after all, has its origins from a Western cultural attitude. Masahisa Nishizono, the President of the JPS, wrote in this issue: “Some 60 years after WWII, social changes in this country are remarkable. Individuals are now asked to form an ‘individualized self.’ And the conflict with the sense of value of the traditional family system is intensifying. Under such a psychic situation, various psychotherapies have increased, and the need for psychoanalysis has spread. There has arisen a diversification of value in which one breaks away from the so-called ‘Marxist nation among free nations’ after the war and seeks ‘what one wishes’” (- notwithstanding, we might note, the centrality of the theme of *amae*). I would add, there is a most important contribution that Japanese cultural traditions, inasmuch as they are in flux and in evolution, can bring to our understanding of depth-psychological and developmental factors and stresses even in our Western cultural milieu. It is surely what I have found in my reach towards the work of Takeo Doi.

As I have tried to convey, my visit to the psychoanalytic community of Japan was a compelling experience, deepening my awareness and appreciation of commonality accessible through difference. I cannot say I fully knew what the translators did with my words in our discussions, or for that matter, whether I truly understood theirs as reported back to me, but it was a challenge stretching the intellect and imagination, in some ways as poetry – perhaps as haiku – might, and hopefully enlarging my capacity towards recognition, my *amae* for the depth and creativity of psychic experience.

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