

Psychoanalysis in Japan

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Japan

As a psychoanalytically oriented critic in the field of Japanese literature, I find that my work often meets with resistance from other Asianists who view psychoanalysis as a fundamentally Western theory that cannot be 'applied' in an Asian context. Most of these sceptics are taken aback to discover that psychoanalysis has a venerable history in Japan and that Japanese analysts have presented a number of highly original theories to the international psychoanalytic community.

By Andra Alvis

In my own experience, it is these innovative models that attract the most interest from non-Japanese. Therefore, following a brief introduction to the history of psychoanalysis in Japan, the core of my article is devoted to three of the most interesting theories from Japanese analysts: Kosawa Heisaku's Ajase complex, Doi Takeo's ideas on *amae*, and Kitayama Osamu's study of the 'Don't Look' prohibition.

The mainstream Kosawa School and its members aside, there are many other prominent analysts in Japan, who – owing to their lack of a medical degree and/or classical Freudian orientation – have been excluded from the Japan branch of the International Psychoanalytical Association. Among these are Konda Akihisa, and Sorai Kenzō, who was a clinician who founded the eclectic, psychoanalytically oriented Sannō Institute in Tokyo.

The history of psychoanalysis proper in Japan began with psychiatrist Marui Kiyoyasu and the so-called Tōhoku School, which flourished in the 1920s and 1930s. Marui's early attraction to psychoanalysis is evident from a course on psychoanalytic psychiatry he taught at Tōhoku University, Sendai, in 1918. This interest deepened in the 1920s, during the course of several years of study with Adolf Meyer at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland. In 1933, as the head of a group of psychoanalytically oriented psychiatrists, Marui received approval from Freud to establish the first Japanese branch of the International Psychoanalytic Association (IPA) in Sendai.

The 'Kosawa School', centred on stu-

dents trained by Kosawa Heisaku, became the core of psychoanalytic activity after World War II. A student of Marui, Kosawa left to study at the Vienna Psychoanalytic Institute from 1932–33, and established a psychoanalytic practice in Tokyo upon returning to Japan. In 1953, after Marui's death, Kosawa became head of the Japanese branch of the IPA and moved its headquarters to Tokyo. Students trained by Kosawa form the core of the present Japanese branch of the IPA, known familiarly as the 'Japan Psychoanalytical Association'. These psychoanalytically oriented psychiatrists include two theorists I will discuss below: Doi Takeo and Okonogi Keigo. As members of the Japan Psychoanalytical Association, students trained by Kosawa (and their own trainees) form the mainstream of psychoanalysis in Japan.

Psychoanalytic theories from Japan

Three members of the Japan Psychoanalytic Association have presented original theories to the international psychoanalytic community: Kosawa Heisaku, Doi Takeo, and Kitayama Osamu (trained by Okonogi Keigo). Taking their cue from Kosawa, who formulated his model of a mother-centred Ajase complex in the 1930s, all three paradigms focus on the mother (rather than the Oedipal father) as the centre of psychic life. In the interest of thematic unity, I will discuss the three theories out of chronological order, beginning with Doi's validation of positive mother-child interaction and proceeding to Kosawa's and Kitayama's discussions of more ambivalent mother-child bonds.

than on the mainland, as the island has moved rapidly into the modern world of high-tech democracy, putting a strain on family and bringing new vulnerabilities to everyday life. Mental health jobs are on the rise, and there is more academic interest in psychoanalytic approaches across a range of disciplines, especially literary criticism and gender studies. Commercial bookstores are full of pop psychology books, many with an analytic slant. Crowds follow self-help gurus who ask people to seek answers in greater self-knowledge. During a recent trip to Taiwan, I was fortunate to meet some academicians interested in psychoanalysis, and psychotherapists from the Taiwan Institute of Psychotherapy (www.tip.org.tw) and the Sinin Center of Psychotherapy, two private non-profit organizations. I was deeply impressed by the energy and innovation with which the members are building up these organizations for research, training, and community service. Responding to charges that psychoanalysis may reflect psychological problems specific to the West or even to Freud's Vienna, some Taiwan professionals have begun research projects exploring the idea that there may be specifically Chinese or Taiwanese psychological patterns. The Department of Psychology of the National Taiwan University now has a programme on indigenous psychology and publishes a very valuable journal entitled *Bentu xinlixue yanjiu* (Indigenous Psychological Research in Chinese Societies, 1993–), exploring such cultural and psychological topics as 'face,' 'favour and reciprocation', and 'filial piety' as demonstrated in clinical case studies.

Does psychoanalysis have a future in the Chinese environment? Psychoanalytic investigation of cultural differences is still in its earliest stages in the Mainland, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, though such inquiries began almost as soon as Freud's ideas first reached China's shores. As Chinese family structures and support networks undergo increasing transformation, individuals feeling squeezed out are more likely to seek professional help for mental health. And psychoanalytic approaches will have to adapt as the social environment changes. Psychoanalysis is therefore likely to have a similar fate in China as in the West: it will be studied and practised, it will grow and divide, and it will find innovators. ◀

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Jingyuan Zhang is Associate Professor of Chinese Literature and Comparative Literature at Georgetown University, Washington, D.C. She is currently working on a website 'East Asia Psychoanalysis Database Network', and hopes to take professional training in psychoanalysis. zhangj1@georgetown.edu
<http://eap.georgetown.edu>
www.georgetown.edu/faculty/zhangj1

Amae

The most well-known theory of the Kosawa School is that of *amae*, formulated by Doi Takeo. Doi defines the concept of *amae* as 'the feelings that all normal infants at the breast harbour towards the mother – dependence, the desire to be passively loved, the unwillingness to be separated from the warm mother-child circle and cast into a world of objective "reality".' (1973:7). While recognizing similarities between the concept of *amae* and Michael Balint's ideas of 'passive object love', Doi's early work links the idea of *amae* to a number of other words/concepts in Japanese culture, such as *enryo* (restraint), and *giri* vs. *ninjō* (social obligation vs. human feeling).

Doi, as noted above, finds the prototype for *amae* in the nursing infant's relation to the mother and her breast. In this sense, *amae* could be viewed as an 'attempt to deny the fact of separation that is such an inseparable part of human existence and to obliterate the pain of separation.' However, as Doi goes on to say, '[A]mae plays an indispensable role in a healthy spiritual life. If it is unrealistic to close one's eyes completely to the fact of separation, it is equally unrealistic to be overwhelmed by it and isolate oneself in despair over the possibility of human relationships' (1973:75). Thus *amae* involves a constellation of feelings that emphasize a positive sense of connection to the mother over (a presumably painful) separation from her.

The Ajase complex

By contrast, Kosawa's Ajase model, based on Buddhist legend, delineates a more ambivalent mother-child bond.

Kosawa derived his theory from two Buddhist sources: the *Daihatsu Nehangyō* (Nirvana Sutra) and the *Kanmuryōjūkyō* (Sutra of the Contemplation of Infinite Life). Both stories describe how the Prince Ajatasatru ('Ajase' in Japanese) seeks redemption from the Buddha for murderous impulses towards his parents: not only has he imprisoned his father Binbashara in order to accede to the throne, he has also drawn his sword on his mother, Idaike, when he discovered her secretly supplying Binbashara with food. However, the two sutras emphasize very different aspects of the legend. While the *Nehangyō* version centres on father-son hostility, the *Kanmuryōjūkyō* focuses on conflict in the mother-son bond. Kosawa's theory of the Ajase complex was inspired by the *Kanmuryōjūkyō*'s maternally focused storyline.

Kosawa's writings on the Ajase complex stress conflict deriving from a subject's primary endeavour to work through oral, ambivalent impulses in the context of the mother-child bond. Firstly, he underscores the non-genital nature of mother-child relationships – specifically, their oral aspects (Kosawa, similar to Melanie Klein, apparently interprets Ajase's sword as a tooth rather than a penis.) Secondly, he places strong emphasis on the ambivalence of the relationship with the mother, composed of both loving and hostile impulses. In the legend, it should be noted, Ajatasatru attempts to murder his mother, but is dissuaded by a minister. Thirdly, Kosawa views the (re-)establishing of a positive mother-child dyad as essential to psychic health.

Beginning in the 1970s, Kosawa's student Okonogi Keigo revised and developed the Ajase theory. Okonogi's writings on the Ajase complex also emphasize the subject's endeavour to work through ambivalent impulses in the mother-child bond; however, he locates the origin of mother-child conflict in maternal sexuality. For Okonogi, Ajase's matricidal rage stems from the discovery of Idaike's exclusive, and excluding relationship with Binbashara. Okonogi terms this anger at the child's discovery of his or her origin in the parent's sexual relationship *mishōon* or 'prenatal resentment.' In his most recent work, Okonogi discusses the Ajase complex as an intersubjective model for understanding not only children's ambivalence towards their mothers but also women's ambivalent experience of maternity.

The 'pre-Oedipal' taboo

Kitayama's theory of the 'pre-Oedipal' taboo, like the Ajase complex, focuses on guilt and anxiety toward the mother. In this model, however, guilt concerns fears that reproductive functions such as birth and nursing have irreparably damaged the maternal body.

Kitayama draws on several Japanese folktales that portray relations between a human husband and non-human wife. These stories begin with an animal transforming itself into a woman and marrying a human male. The animal/wife proves to be a productive homemaker and loving spouse; however, she forbids her husband to watch her as she performs a specific task, such as nursing, giving birth or wear-

ing. When the hero eventually breaks this 'Don't look' prohibition (*miru na no kinshi*), he discovers his mate in her 'true' animal form. The animal/wife then departs, never to return.

Situating his ideas in an object-relations context of child development, Kitayama understands the 'Don't look' prohibition as a taboo that warns against the child's too-early discovery of maternal (re)productive functions – and their damaging capacity in relation to the mother's body. Several of the tales he examines show the non-human wife/mother wounded by the task she performs in secrecy. For example, in one story, a crane wife plucks feathers from her body to weave cloth for the hero. Kitayama argues that a child's recognition of the physical nature of his or her mother's nurturing capacities and their potential depleting of her body may give rise to fantasies of having harmed the mother through birth, nursing, etc. Whereas the Oedipal taboo against incest is, according to Kitayama, the 'taboo to be kept', the pre-Oedipal taboo against realizing the physicality of motherhood should be gradually broken over time (presumably, as the child develops the intellectual and emotional capacities to accept the physicality of maternal (re)productive functions).

Japan represents an unusual chapter in the transnational spread of psychoanalysis. Not only does psychoanalytic thinking in Japan have a nearly one-hundred year history; in addition, Japanese analysts have offered a number of innovative theories to the international community. Japan thus offers a unique contribution to the project of culturally inflecting psychoanalysis – one that should attract further attention as Asianists, and other non-Western scholars, continue the work of transforming psychoanalytic thought into a truly multicultural discipline. ◀

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Professor Andra Alvis is an assistant professor of Japanese literature at Indiana University, Bloomington. Her research interests include autobiography, gender theory, and psychoanalysis.

alalvis@indiana.edu