



The Anatomy of Dependence

Takeo Doi

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A classic study of the Japanese psyche, a starting point for a true understanding Japanese behavior....

The discovery that a major concept of human feeling-easily expressed in everyday Japanese- totally resisted translation into a Western language led Dr. Takeo Doi to explore and define an area of the psyche which has previously received little attention. The resulting essay, *The Anatomy of Dependence*, is one of the most penetrating analyses of the Japanese mind ever written, as well as an important original contribution to psychology which transcends the boundaries of cultures and nations.

Published in Japan as *Amae no Kozo* (The Structure of Amae), Dr. Doi's work is focused upon the word "amae" (indulgence) and its related vocabulary. Expressive of an emotion central to the Japanese experience, "amae" refers to the indulging, passive love which surrounds and supports the individual in a group, whether family, neighborhood, or the world at large. Considering the lack of such words in Western languages, Dr. Doi suggests inherent differences between the two cultures-contrasting the ideal of self-reliance with those of interdependence and the indulgence of weaknesses. Yet, he finds that Western audiences have no difficulty in recognizing and identifying with the emotions he describes, and are even searching for a way to express this need.

While there is no doubt that the concept of "amae" is more developed in Japan and the feelings it engenders more profound, Dr. Doi's work is widely recognized as having a universal application. This translation of his most important essay has now been long welcomed as a major contribution-not only as an insight into the Japanese mind, but into the minds of men everywhere.

The Anatomy of Dependence Details

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Author : Takeo Doi

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From Reader Review *The Anatomy of Dependence* for online ebook

Edward says

Ruth Benedict analyzed Japan through the lens of giri/ninjo. Chie Nakane highlighted "vertical relationships." For Takeo Doi, the foundation of Japanese society is "Amae."

Perhaps the trickiest cipher I've encountered in my "Nihonjinron" studies yet, Amae is one of those culturally-specific words that has so many meanings it almost circles back around to meaninglessness. There is a similarity in Japanese to German in its tendency to capture very precise ideas or feelings in a single (albeit long) word. Ironically, the idea behind doing so was as a shortcut: all language is just audible shorthand or code shared between people who speak it. But if you don't, the opposite can occur--confusion and puzzlement.

So what is Amae? The dictionary definition is derived from the Japanese verb "amaeru," which means something like "to rely on." The connotation involves a child-like attitude, the indulgent and sometimes bratty behavior a kid might display only with a doting parent. This might seem like an odd starting point for explaining the behavior of millions of people, but Doi lays out a fairly compelling case.

As a Japanese psychologist, Doi's input here is also valuable since the previous two authors I mentioned were not professionals in this field. Both Benedict and Nakane worked in anthropology. Doi read their works and recognized their insights. But something, some key idea or feeling, was missing. As a psychologist who directly observed and spoke with Japanese patients who were struggling with various internal issues, he realized many of them had something in common--a frustration or inhibition of Amae. Like the concept of Love, or Acceptance in the West, he determined that Amae is a critical emotional and spiritual need that Japanese people crave whether they know it or not.

So do all Japanese exhibit some childish need to be spoiled? It's not quite that simple. First of all, Amae is simply a word the Japanese have for something all humans want, according to Doi. The fact that they have a specific word for it merely reflects their different cultural attitudes and focus, not the existence of the concept itself. That concept is deeply rooted in an almost subconscious desire to be united with others, and a dislike of separation--something that happens shortly after we are born. "Separation anxiety" isn't exactly the same, but it can be helpful in getting at his point.

Different cultures deal with this need to Amae in different ways. In Japan, one noted example was the Emperor system--the elevation of the Emperor during the Meiji era to a national, patriarchal figurehead. Historians have noted that this idea was actually rather new to the Japanese political consciousness, since the Emperor prior to this was largely unimportant to the average Japanese citizen, who was more likely to feel allegiance to their local lord. Doi documents the process by which this shift in loyalty was accomplished by the architects of the Restoration, who realized that the only way to create a sense of Japanese national pride was by centering it around a symbol--in this case the person of the Emperor himself. Doing so required an understanding of the Japanese sense of Amae--the need to feel an emotional connection or reliance on

someone. In the West, this sense of "public spirit" is still there, but due to Western emphasis on individuality, tends to center on things, not people. Take the American attitude toward the flag, for example. In many ways the sensitivity and outrage provoked by "disrespecting" the flag is comparable to the attitude of pre-war Japanese toward the Emperor. This is because many Americans feel a connection to the flag that is deeper than just politics or nationality. It represents something beyond those external concepts, moving into something very internal, about the Self. I am an American, the flag is America, the Flag is Myself.

As you can see, Doi's research gets into some deep territory. His discussion ranges into language, spirituality, politics, psychology, even sexuality. He connects everything back to *Amae*. It must be noted that some of these fields are well outside his training as a psychologist, and he does admit that. Nevertheless, his thesis carries a strangely compelling bent, since its root is something very mystical (and which has been a topic of discussion by various mystics and philosophers for quite some time). The initial separation of the Self and Other is something that has defined humanity probably since Humanity became a thing, and as Huxley noted, the concept of "two" was the beginning of a great many evils. We've been trying to repair the damage for a long time, and in the process have created kingdoms, nations, religions, societies. Japan recreated itself, and the Emperor system--a system which eventually fell.

Which leads to another point. Now that the Emperor is just a symbolic, powerless figurehead akin to the British monarch, how has this affected Japanese ideas of *Amae* and public spirit? Doi argues that because this older system was abolished and nothing ever took its place that sustains that *Amae* need, Japan has struggled to adapt to modern times. Democracy in the Western mold does not take *Amae* into account, with its intense focus on individual autonomy and freedom. His prognosis for Japan's social and political future is both profound and somewhat sobering:

"The aim from now on, surely, must be to overcome amae. Nor will it do simply to return to the Zen world of identity between subject and object; rather, it will be necessary to transcend amae by discovering the subject and object: to discover, in other words, the other person."

Aaron says

The book that got me into Takeo Doi, and by extension cross-cultural takes on clinical psychology. Doi explores the Japanese principle of *amae*, something universal to all human culture and experience, but only given an explicit name in Japanese language. *Amae* is related to intimate relationships we form with others, and how those relationships shape our behavior, and more so our total psyches. Doi draws on his own experiences in foreign cultures to define and explain what exactly is meant by the concept in order to use it as one of the fundamentals of a new kind of psychology (and from there, a psychotherapy).

A must read for those interested in sociocultural psychology, especially cross-cultural psychotherapy.

Sarah says

3.5 but I'm rounding up because of the food for thought it provides.

Things I like:

Doi offers a fascinating examination of the linguistic and social permutations of the *amae* psychology. Especially well thought out is the chapter on *The World of Amae* and the ways in which such a mentality informs myriad aspects of Japanese society.

The explanations of, and situations within *amae*, of terms such as ??????????????and ?? which proved incredibly enlightening to myself as a resident, and will no doubt prove well developed even for a reader unfamiliar with such terms as ?? and ??.

Things I find problematic:

Doi neglects to define his term 'Japanese'. Despite claims of a closed culture, multiculturalism is not a new phenomenon in Japan and the fact remains that citizenship is not granted to 3rd, 4th, or even 5th generation immigrants who cannot prove 'Japanese' blood. How long does one have to live immersed in the culture to be effected by this cultural psychology? What does it mean to Doi to *be* Japanese?

For someone writing in the 70s, and someone familiar with the sociological limits of psychoanalysis, he is startlingly uncritical of Freudian theory. In fact, I am willing to posit that he is unconsciously ?????-ing to his Oedipal father figure in more ways than one. Most prevalent is his utter disregard for the tones of misogyny rebounding around the pages of this little volume. He has no problem cutting and pasting ad nauseum Freud's views (don't forget Nietzsche's and St. Paul's!) on the masculine vs. the feminine, and using his phrases to expound what Doi is marketing as a universal Japanese psychology. There is a gaping hole in his theory that is the exact shape of Japanese socialized gendered behaviour, and frankly I'm a bit surprised it passed the second draft.

Other issues involve his claim to eschew value judgments, while simultaneously subscribing to a Freudian analytic that insists infantile passive-object-love is pathological regression and cries out to be remedied. Oh, and the persistent idea that the modern day mind is part of some sort of cutting edge *avant guard*, facing new and exciting problems at the heights of achievement and humanity, and that the past was some sort of magical Golden Age--a land of peace and harmony where everything was simple and uncomplicated by today's 'issues'.

Finally his stretching of his concept of *amae* to explain and predict the student uprisings and the youthful rebellion of the 60s and early 70s seems a bit self-indulgent (but it's an exciting new idea--can't I apply it to everything in order to self-congratulate some more?) and certainly doesn't stand the test of time.

So in conclusion, it's problematic and dated, but in no way should that get in the way of a critical and engaging exploration of the Japanese psychology.

Lily says

This book is unique because it has a more Asian-centered POV. Every other one I've picked up immediately smells of something else. At the same time, it also takes the West into account. I don't think I would have

found a foothold in it otherwise. It's just that it's not written exclusively for the West; he retains a respect for his native culture and hasn't abandoned the truth for the sake of being more palatable to the American reader.

Although the translator says in the introduction that it's written for the Japanese audience, it's ideal for a bicultural or someone struggling to reconcile the two cultures. It would be most rewarding for someone who already has some sense of the numerous words defined in this book. It is basically a list of terms in Japanese and what they mean.

It needs an index.

Ali Reda says

Doi starts out by making a linguistic relativity hypothesis based observation that any word that exists in one language but cannot be expressed easily in others, refers to a phenomena which is culturally important in culture of the first language, but not so important in the culture of the others which lack a means of its expression. Quoting linguist Benjamin Whorf:

Every language is a vast pattern-system, different from others, in which are culturally ordained the forms and categories by which the personality not only communicates, but also analyzes nature, notices or neglects types of relationship and phenomena, channels his reasoning, and builds the house of his consciousness.

Amaeru, according to him, is a word that cannot be directly translated into English. It means the need or desire to be loved. It denotes dependency needs.

Another word is Sumimasen or sumanai, which is according to him, a strange term as it encapsulates both gratitude and apology. The derivation of sumimasen is to finish, to end, to be completed. In other words, the matter disputed is not ended because one has not done everything one should have done. Thus it expresses a strong feeling of need to apologize for the other person.

The Japanese perspective on freedom comes in the word jiyuu. When the Japanese needed a word for the Western concept this is the one they choose. Traditionally, Doi argues, this word has meant freedom in the sense of free to amaeru. It's usage was within the context of the group.

In the Western sense, freedom has served as the basis for asserting individuality. In Japan, little value is attributed to the individual's private realm as distinct from the group as a result you find the ambiguity and hesitation of self-expression is a common trait in the Japanese people. The reasons for a whole number of Japanese traits, mostly in terms of group harmony' or a lack of individualism revolve around either a) rice agriculture being important in Japanese history or b) Japan's geography forcing people to live close together.

Doi describes how the post-war removal of ideological restrictions (The introduction of American/Western concepts of freedom) didn't directly serve the cause of individualism, but by destroying the traditional channels of amae had contributed, if anything, to the spiritual and social confusion.

Some thinkers such as Sartre, have held onto the idea of human freedom as the only absolute in the face of a superstructure in the process of collapse. He replies:

Yet where does this type of freedom lead? Ultimately, it can only mean – if not the simple gratification of

individual desires – solidarity with others through participation, in which the Western idea of freedom becomes ultimately something not so different from the Japanese.

Marci says

First off, providing a star rating was difficult on this particular text. It's my suspicion that whatever issues I have with it are either based on my own upbringing or based on my own lack of understanding as a separate issue. I mean, yes, it's clearly a product of its time, but I can't fault it for that.

I suspect that this is a book I should come back to in a year or two, after the ideas have had some time to settle in my mind, and see how I react to it then. As it stands, I find the core psychological behavior confusing and uncomfortable (which leads me to think I need to examine it more closely), and the notion of cultural interactions based thereon alien to the extreme (which, again, leads me to think I need to look more closely at it).

So I'm giving it 4 stars for definitely being a book I'll need to revisit...

Michael Pronko says

This classic work on the psychology of Japanese offers amazing insights to the interpersonal world of Japan. While some readers might feel impatient with the psychoanalytic approach here, the observations and careful connections the author makes are very much on target. Having lived in Tokyo for 15 years, and in China for three, the opening up of the so-called inscrutable mind of Japan shows that they are both unique and people just like everyone else in the world. That balance of uniqueness and ordinariness is only part of what makes this book a helpful way of understanding one culture and the differences between cultures. A must-read about Japan.

Devin Curtis says

While ostensibly talking about the Japanese psychology Doi essentially adds a whole new component to the understanding of basic human psychology (which was a huge relief to me because this could have easily been another book mystifying/fetishizing the Japanese) His concept of Amaeru being fundamental to human development and it's indulgence or repression being the subsequent cause of various psychological phenomena is well argued almost all of the time. It's a little uneven in spots, but over all Doi presents himself as an exceptional writer and critical thinker.

Without knowing much about the field of psychology, I'd say this is a must read whether you have a particular interest in Japanese culture or not.

Michael says

Absolutely fascinating. Though I think any critical reader would be skeptical when hearing how many things are to be interpreted as amae, the breadth and depth of Doi's thesis is astonishing. At times it seems the ideas

might be better expressed in poetry or drama but really no other form could encompass so much. Jiyo, jibun, giri, ninjo, wabi sabi-Doi interprets everything through the lens of *amae*. Even when not utterly convincing, his descriptions are eye opening about Japan as well as the universal human condition. Helped me understand many facets of Japanese culture as well as of myself.

Rochelle says

This book explains group relations in the context of the Japanese idea of *amae*, taking others' good will for granted. Doi argues that dependency on others in group relationships in general begins between mother and child, "that even puppies do it." And while in Japan *amae* is valued between close friends, and even between a leader and her people, in the West it is eclipsed by notions of individualism and freedom of choice.

I do not agree with Doi on all insights, such as that to *amaeru* is better than to be independent in general, but I certainly appreciate learning about the different issues that come about when one does not *amaeru* enough.

Overall, a great brainy read for anyone curious about Japanese culture or group psychology, or trying to understand anime (^.^)

Chris says

Those of you who are paying attention might recall that I have reviewed another book by Takeo Doi, *The Anatomy of Self*, which deals with the problem of how one can live in a society where the primary drive of everyone is to return to the state of perfect peace and dependence that we knew as an infant at our mother's breast. In Japanese, this emotion is called *amae* and it's one of those great words that can only be imperfectly translated. The image of the baby at the breast is Doi's way of describing it.

He believes that while the feeling is one common to all humans, the Japanese are the only people who have an everyday word to describe it, and a whole host of words to describe what happens when *amae* goes wrong. This being the case, he believes that the Japanese are somehow special in being the only culture in the world that holds *amae* as a core element in their national psychology.

In his opinion, to understand Japanese psychology and the way Japanese people behave with one another, you have to understand *amae*, and that's a very long struggle.

The verb form, *amaeru* is defined in my dictionary as, "to fawn; to take advantage of; to depend on," which, of course, is kind of misleading. To many Westerners, Americans especially, there's very little in that definition that is positive. We are brought up to deny *amae*, and so strike out to become independent, individual, and beholden to no one. To the Japanese, though, it is a way of gauging relationships with other people, and the level to which one can *amaeru* with another person defines everything about their relationship. How they will talk, how they'll act, how much of their true opinions they'll let out and how much they'll conceal.

Doi takes *amae* to be his central pillar of his own practice in psychology, and so his perspective on all other concepts of relationship is defined by his views on *amae*.

As you can imagine, it's not the easiest book in the world to get through.

While the book is written for popular consumption, there are a few places where it would have helped to have known some basics in psychological terminology. But if you're very familiar with life in Japan, you can see that he certainly has a point. For example, he views the Emperor as the embodiment of *amae* in Japan. He is, in theory, the most important person in the country, and yet he is the most helpless. Everything is done for him by assistants or staff. Every dinner is chosen by dietitians, every moment of a traveling schedule, every wardrobe decision, every word of his speeches is prepared for him.

In other words, he is like a baby, comfortable in the knowledge that no matter what, he will be taken care of, he will be "loved." His life is steeped in *amae*, and if he ever had to rely on his own resources, he would probably be totally lost. And yet this is the ideal to which all Japanese aspire. It is the knowledge that they cannot achieve it that brings about the elaborate social constructs that keep everyone from going nuts from their unfulfilled desire to be taken care of.

A thought occurs to me as I write this, too - about the Two Princesses.

Princess Kiko, who had a baby boy last week, is very popular with the Japanese people. Not only because she had a boy, but because she does everything that a princess is expected to do. She smiles, she waves, she is sweet and pleasant and kind, without a bad word to anybody or, near as I can tell, any ambition but to be a good Princess. In other words, she allows herself to be loved and indulged by the people of Japan. She *amaerus*.

Princess Masako, on the other hand, is a little less popular, and not only because she had a little girl. She is more independent, having spent time living and studying in the US and working on diplomatic missions for the Japanese Foreign Ministry. She has had a lot of trouble fitting into the Princess role, leaving behind a life of her own and entering one where she is no longer in control of her own existence. Currently she's keeping a very low profile due to anxiety and nervous exhaustion. In other words, she doesn't *amaeru* - she doesn't want to be taken care of or doted upon, but she really has no choice in the matter, and so the conflict is driving her slowly nuts.

Anyway, enough armchair psychology. It's a fascinating book for anyone interested in comparative psychology or Japanese society. Take a look....

Emily says

Psychoanalyst Takeo Doi describes the foundation of all interpersonal relationships in Japan, which is a concept called "*amae*". Doi does an excellent job of describing Japanese terms and concepts that do not exist in a western framework and is careful to note connotations of these words, which may be different from their western counterparts. A must read for anyone interested in dealings with Japan, especially anyone wishing to spend an extending period of time there.

Noreen says

One of my favorite words pg 58 Hohitsu: I want someone who would leave me to take responsibility to all

outward appearances but in fact would give me advice and recognition. Hohitsu can only be translated as "assist" but implies shouldering all responsibilities while conceding all apparent authority.

There are so many men and managers who want women and staff to "hohitsu" them. You do all the work and take all the responsibility but cede all the recognition and credit to them. "The Help" comes to mind.

I'm not a psychologist, there are many many insights I'm not capable of teasing out of Dr. Doi's work.

Matthew says

An interesting book, describing a core aspect of Japanese cultural psychology, encapsulated in one word, "amae". No English equivalent exists, though the title uses the concept of "indulgence", i.e., the desire of the Japanese to be pampered or babied, and/or give such pampering to others.

This was a surprise, considering my own understanding of the Japanese as all business and serious. It turns out that face is designed especially for the outsider, contrasted greatly with deeply intimate friendships to the extent of group think, diminishing the power of the individual and subsuming them to the group's agenda.

Also fascinating was the discussion on homosexuality. In Japanese culture, same sex intimate friendships, (presumably non-sexual) are far more acceptable than in American culture, feeding my suspicion that a large part of homosexuality in America relates directly to the inadequacy of American gender role allowances for men, as much as any DNA or father-role considerations.

A good read, shining a curious foreign light on my own cultural paradigm, while shining great familiarity on what was previously quite foreign.

Delia says

The book explores an interesting theory - the term of "amae" and its impact upon the Japanese individual and social psyche - but in my opinion, the arguments are rather poor and undeveloped. It made me think of the saying "when all you have is a hammer, everything around you seems like nails".
