Historical development of psychology in Japan

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Abstract:

Psychology in Japan developed gradually since the mid-nineteenth century and the opening of the country after its long feudal period. Foreign cooperation played an important role in this development: Holland, Germany, but especially the U.S are the main countries that hosted Japanese students and researchers for further training. Primarily experimental in its origins, psychology became after the Second World War mainly educational in Japan. Since the early 1990s a new trend is rapidly developing: clinical psychology and counseling in particular. About psychoanalysis, it was a pretty fickle development during the twentieth century and stay currently quite marginal despite a trial for new start today in particular by the recent reforms around the training of psychoanalysts who was one of the problematic areas of the discipline in Japan. Today, clinical psychology is therefore in its beginnings and it will be interesting to see its future development and perhaps the birth of new approaches related to Japanese culture and more widely Asian thought.

The history of psychology in Japan is full of unexpected developments like the term “shinrigaku”, translation of “psychology” in Japanese. According to Nishikawa (2005), “shinrigaku” (shin: heart / ri: logic / gaku: study) would have appeared in the 1870s when a Japanese student, Nishi Amane, went to Holland to study at the University of Leiden and then returned to Japan to present psychology as “a system of modern sciences”. Until the mid-nineteenth century, Japan lived in isolation with the outside world for nearly 300 years and Nishi was then one of the first students to be sent abroad to complete his training.

In 1875, Nishi translated the book of Joseph Haven “Mental Philosophy: Including the Intellect, Sensibilities and Will” and gave him the title “Shinrigaku” which was accepted by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science who published the book which became the generally accepted term for “psychology”. This book, widely disseminated and known throughout Japan at the time, was then one of the first to deal with culture, philosophy, ethics and “moral psychology”.

Also, we can note here that the word “shinrigaku” is built in Japan in the same way that in China “xīn lǐ xué” (xīn: heart / lǐ: truth / xué: study) or in Vietnam “tâm lý học” (tâm: heart / lý: argument / học: study), where special emphasis is placed on the “heart”, while in the West, “psychology” is based on the Greek word “psukhê” (soul), connotation perhaps too spiritual to be used as it is in Asia... However, these two etymologies are not that different than they appear considering the heart was justly regarded by the Greeks and Aristotle first, as the seat of the soul, at least for some of it parts.
I. The emergence of experimental psychology in Japan (late nineteenth and early twentieth)

In addition to cooperation with Holland, the Japanese psychology has developed mainly through exchange with the U.S, including some illegal ones like with Yujiro Motora, a pioneer of psychology in Japan, who studied from 1864 to 1873 and obtained his doctorate at Boston University and the Johns Hopkins University without authorization from Edo government. In the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, dozens of Japanese students then studied psychology in the U.S, and then opened the first laboratories of experimental psychology in Japan. Motora develops his own in the Tokyo Imperial University who later became the main research centre in psychology of Japan (see Figure 1).

![Psychology laboratory at the Imperial University of Tokyo in 1903](https://www.psychologie-tokyo.com/images/psychology_laboratory.jpg)

**Figure 1.** Psychology laboratory at the Imperial University of Tokyo in 1903 (in Hidano (1998) cited in Sato and Sato (2005)).

As related by Arakawa (2005), various psychological experiments are then conducted in Japan as the ones of Matataro Matsumoto in 1910, student Motora, on “the relationship between emotions, breathing and blood pressure”, on fatigue, on muscle control... (see Figures 2 and 3). At that time, the German Gestalt psychology is present as well, especially through the famous works of Wundt's laboratory in Leipzig which hosted several Japanese researchers.
II. The inter-war period: the emergence of psychological associations and the dissemination of psychology in Japan

According to Nishikawa (2005), it is in the early 20s that the first Japanese psychological associations appeared. Gathering too few members or encountering various problems, many disappeared except one in particular, still active today: the Japanese Psychological Association created in 1927 under the leadership of Matataro Matsumoto, a professor at Tokyo Imperial University and former student Motora.

At this time, psychology is mainly used to improve productivity, human organization and strengthen the forces of the Empire which is preparing for war. But at the same time, this psychology has also been extremely flexible and involved in many areas being then, according to Nishikawa (2005), under the direct influence of the “needs,
demands and pressures of the moment”. Researches of the Japanese Psychological Association was then concentrating on six areas: general psychology, educational psychology, industrial psychology, law psychology, military psychology and clinical psychology.

Also, as Sato (2005) precise, it is interesting to note here that at the same time, China were also interested in Western psychology and “attempted to import and accept “modern” psychology” through the creation in 1921 of the Chinese Psychological Society.

III. The post-war growth of the educational psychology

World War II marks a milestone in the history of psychology in Japan and brought the U.S model in the archipelago which had a significant influence to the further development of the discipline. For example, as Tsuiki (2006) stated about psychoanalysis, “Japanese psychoanalysis has become U.S. orientated after the War. Like the entire civilization of our country”.

This “orientation” had then direct impact on the field as many Japanese psychologists went to train in most major American universities and participated in important U.S researches especially on behaviourism, approach they will after import into their country.

Also, the education system, previously based on the German model, went in overhaul, and get now “based on the principles of democracy” like the U.S model (Fumino, 2005). In accordance with the new laws on education as the Law for Certification of Education Personnel (1949), training of all teachers, from elementary school to university, must now include modules of child and adolescents psychology, educational psychology, developmental psychology...

This new approach to education and training then leads into the second half of the twentieth century, a rapid increase of demand in educational psychologists and numerous researches on the field went conducted simultaneously across the country.

Reinforcing this trend, the Japanese Ministry of Education, taking into account the baby boom and strong after-war economic development, opened from the 60s and until now a significant number of new universities, public but mostly private and special schools which maintained the need for educational psychologists (see Figure 4).
During all the second half of the twentieth century, educational psychology went then widely developed and dominate the whole field but parallel to it, other areas of psychology also developed and are now rapidly growing like clinical psychology (see Figure 5).

IV. The development and future of clinical psychology and counseling

Since the early 90s, a strong demand for training in clinical psychology and counseling emerged in the universities and the number of faculty in clinical psychology in Japan is still growing (see Figure 6).
Clinical psychology and counseling arrived late in Japan. Appeared in the 50s through American psychologists practicing in Japan, counselling was first developed in academic and university environments but didn't find an easy democratization as it happened in the United States.

Different reasons that could explain the slow development of clinical psychology and counseling in Japan are proposed Watanabe-Muraoka (2007). According to her, there was a lack of involvement of professionals to develop the discipline and a lack of theories adapted to Japanese society.

At university, there was only few courses in clinical psychology and only a limited number of psychologists who could teach based on sufficient clinical experience coupled with a good knowledge of Japanese culture.

Also, the Anglo-Saxon term “counseling” as is used in Japanese, was very little explicit to the Japanese population, got misunderstood and appeared for a long time as a strange practice. It was only in 2002 that the Japanese Association of Counseling Science wished to better define the counseling and commissioned a team of professionals to “officially declare the definition to the members of the Association as well as to the public”. A first draft emerged in 2004 during the 37th annual conference of the association where Togami and Ozawa (2004) proposed to define counseling psychology as “a scientific function conducted through a human relationship in which the client is fully respected by the counsellor”. In parallel, they identified three main objectives of the discipline: “(a) promote human development based on the approaches of lifespan development and career development, (b) prevent problems, and (c) help to solve practical problems”.

Finally, it is the mid-90s that clinical psychology has gradually imposed when the country was experiencing a social and economic crisis. Japan then “experienced the loss of old certainties” (Watanabe-Muraoka, 2007) and began to seek new directions for business life, family life and social life in general: traditional values were losing ground to individual values, the certainty gave way to doubt, careers within large
organizations were moving toward more personal careers, groupal decisions were countered by individual decisions, management based on seniority and lifetime employment got replaced by a variety of different types of contracts... All these “dramatic social changes” asked then individuals to identify very quickly their skills and make the right decisions to manage their careers effectively and find their personal resources to withstand stress and the idea of an “unpredictable future” (Watanabe-Muraoka, 2007).

Meanwhile, at the same time, several laws made personal decisions more decisive in the workplace, also promoted the development of clinical psychology and counseling. In 1999, the amendment to the Employment Security Law authorizes the division of labour between the public and the private sector, thus creating a strong demand for professional counseling and career assessments. Also, parity laws as amendments to the Equal Employment Opportunity Law of 1997 allowed women to rethink their value systems and better choose their investment between their family life and professional career. In addition, the school guidance became increasingly active at all levels of education, from elementary school to university. Finally, clinical psychology also continued to develop in a period where unemployment grew, syndrome of young adults not wanting to work became more and more present, suicide increased and the mental suffering spread through the population...

V. And psychoanalysis?

During an interview, Tsuiki (2006) offered a panorama of the history of psychoanalysis in Japan which begins as follows: “Does psychoanalysis exist in Japan? I still say yes... but it is not obvious”.

According to him, first meetings with Japanese and psychoanalysis happened early but are remaining obscure: the writer Ogai Mori, also medical doctor mentioned the Freudian theory of sexuality in an article in 1902; Sasaki wrote in 1904 a series of articles about Zurich psychologist G. W. Storring in which he mentioned the Freudian case of Elizabeth von R; Hikozo Khaki, auditor of Freud in his lecture at Clark University in 1909, probably introduced in 1911 the first time psychoanalysis as such in Japan... Thus, psychoanalysis appeared sporadically in two major journals in psychology from the beginning of the century: Shinrikenkyu (Psychological Studies) and Hentaishinri (Abnormal Psychology).

The Japanese interest in psychoanalysis was almost immediate while, at the same time in 1914, Freud said about France that it was probably the European country in which psychoanalysis remained the least developed. For Tsuiki (2006), the strong Japanese interest in psychoanalysis is certainly due to its recent opening in the middle of the nineteenth century and its rapid modernization, “everything went fast, and intellectuals got the passion to know and they didn't miss a thing about news of Western science”.

In these times before the Second World War, the psychoanalytic writings spread rapidly: the translation of Freud's works was published in 1929 as 15 volumes, under the name “Great collection of psychoanalytic work of Freud”. In 1933, the journal “Psychoanalysis” is founded by the psychoanalyst Kenji Otsuki and will publish until
1978 theoretical papers, case observation, socio-cultural analysis, literary and film criticism, translations of major psychoanalysts... In 1951, the first “Dictionary of Psychoanalysis” is published by Kenji Otsuki. Finally, in 1965, let's mention the book on psychoanalysis of the great Japanese writer Yukio Mishima, “Ongaku” (The Music) that we presented earlier.

Before the Second World War, Yaekichi Yabe certainly appeared as the first Japanese psychoanalyst. Trained in psychology in the University of California, he has been analyzed in London in 1930 by Edward Glover then instructed personally by Ernest Jones through private lessons. He became the first Japanese member of IPA (International Psychoanalytical Association) and personally met Freud in Vienna in May 1930. On his return to Tokyo, he founded a private clinic and in 1931, the Japan Psychoanalytical Society as the IPA official representative in Japan.

Alongside Yabe, another analyst, Kiyoyasu Marui appears as well as one of the pioneers of psychoanalysis in Japan. Psychiatrist, he worked with Adolf Meyer at the Johns Hopkins University on psychosis. Disagree with Yabe, he founded in 1934 a second Japanese association of psychoanalysis, the Sendai Psychoanalytical Society located in the Tohoku University in the north-east part of Japan. Thus, as in Europe or the United States, psychoanalysis in Japan early met divergences among its practitioners, between physicians and non-physicians, academics and non-academic... with also within these groups, disagreements bearing on theoretical points or practical applications.

After the war, the discipline turned with Heisaku Kosawa who became the new leader of psychoanalysis in Japan. Sometimes called, rightly or wrongly, as “founding father of psychoanalysis in Japan”, he will be responsible according Tsuiki (2006) to the future difficulties of psychoanalysis in Japan, accumulating the “fundamental problems, all the twists and distortions, all complications and strange confusions”.

Indeed, at that time and for almost forty years, there were in psychoanalytical associations great negligence around the training of psychoanalysts, where the usual requirement for a psychoanalyst to make a personal psychoanalysis, known in these cases as "didactic", was not respected. There followed many difficulties on the field and a lack of benchmarks among practitioners due to practical anarchy that existed kind of everywhere.

Finally, it was only in 1996 that general rules for the training of analysts has been established, corresponding to international standards and then demanding to candidate a university degree, the need for a training analysis, an obligation to be supervised... However, regrets Tsuiki (2006), because of this unorganized development and certainly other cultural reasons that we will try to discuss later, Japanese psychoanalysis stick today at a “marginal existence”, and “today more than 2000 members, mainly psychiatrists and psychologists, claim to exercise analytic orientation therapies without ever having stretched themselves on the couch”.

In conclusion

After a favourable time for the development of experimental psychology, educational
psychology, social psychology... japanese psychology is heading today to the new areas of clinical psychology and counseling which is a new adventure both for the discipline but also for the country, as Japanese culture seems today far from what Lagache (1945) defined as which "is to accommodate the original way to be of the subject."

Indeed, individuality and emancipation in general remains a deep question in Japan and more widely in Asia. Psychoanalysis, for example, didn't succeed to be truly accepted throughout the twentieth century Japanese, victim of infighting but certainly also difficulties to transpose and apply the Freudian concepts in the Japanese culture. Then, japanese clinical psychology will not able to rely solely on the basis that currently exist in the West, and will need to find new roots to grow in line with the socio-cultural realities of the society.

Here then is the future challenge of clinical psychology in Japan, as in many other countries where the discipline is still relatively undeveloped or often stays largely dominated by western approaches. In this case, the need to retain certain theories, reject others and create new ones may finally appear a work much harder to achieve than developing a theory freely, without a heavy influence pre-existing works from other cultures, perhaps partly unsuitable but though respected and difficult to contradict.

Arakawa (2005) illustrates this idea when putting forward that “as we followed studies conducted in foreign countries and learned from them, Japanese psychologists should conduct their own studies in Japan. The psychology of feelings and emotions in Japan has reached the stage of development and is ready for advancement in the future”. But this step is obviously not easy to achieve...

However, despite these methodological difficulties and in view of statistics (see Figure 6), clinical psychology seems to have a promising future in Japan. Its development in the near future will then be particularly interesting to watch because Japan could be one of the first country in Asia to really establish a scientific clinical psychology suited to Asian culture, original, built on Confucian principles, on Taoism, Buddhism and Shintoism beliefs.

New theoretical reflections could then be created or confirmed, and combined with original clinical practice, they would be able to generate new approaches that would benefit both Japanese society and perhaps to a larger Asian population.

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Bibliography


