

THE ASPECTS OF AUTHORITARIANISM AMONG JAPANESE PEOPLE IN JAPANESE CULTURE AND SOCIETY

Ayako Mizumura
University of Kansas

According to Bob Altemeyer (1996), authoritarianism or right wing authoritarianism (RWA) is defined as a personality trait involving three attitudinal clusters in people who tend to respond in the same ways to perceived established authorities, sanctioned targets, and social conventions. (p. 6) The attitudinal clusters *conventionalism*, *authoritarian aggression*, and *authoritarian submission* are not only correlated but also strongly connected to ethnocentrism. Using the concept of RWA as well as T. W. Adorno, Else Frankel-Brunswick, Daniel Levinson, and R. Nevitt Sanford (1982), work on the authoritarian personality, particularly Levinson's discussion of ethnocentrism, this paper explores authoritarianism in Japanese society.

Collectivism in Japanese Culture

According to Harry Triandis and Sumiko Iwao, cultural constructs among different societies are understood in terms of "the extent to which cultures emphasize individualism or collectivism." (Iwao and Triandis 1993: 429) Triandis with K. Leung, M. J. Villareal, and F. L. Clack (1985) defines collectivism as:

[A] social pattern consisting of closely linked individuals who see themselves as parts of one or more collectives (family, co-workers, tribe, nation); are primarily motivated by the norms of, and duties imposed by, those collectives; are willing to give priority to the goals of these collectives over their own personal goals; and emphasize their connectedness to the members of these collectives. (quoted in Realo, Allik, and Vadi 1997: 94)

Given this definition of collectivism, it is argued that the construction of Japanese culture is oriented toward collectivism rather than individualism, since individuals tend to be viewed as part of an "interconnected social web" in which "a sense of self develops as a person discerns the expectations of others concerning right and wrong behavior in particular situations." (Bower 1997: 248) Therefore, in a collectivist society,

individuals usually give priority to the collective self over the private self, especially in situations when these two come into conflict. This tendency to surrender one's private self to the collective self is, according to Triandis, et. al. (1985), called personal collectivism or *allocentrism*.

Even though allocentrism can be found in both collectivist and individualist cultures, Susumu Yamaguchi, David Kuhlman, and Shinkichi Sugimori (1995) found that there are higher allocentric tendencies among people in collectivist cultures (e.g. Japan, Korea) than in individualist cultures (e.g. the US). However, within collectivist cultures, there are differences among individuals in their "general disposition to accept collectivistic elements from their own culture and to activate them," depending on different interpersonal relationships that individuals have in different social contexts. (Realo et. al 1997: 97) Realo et. al. (1997) argues that "it is possible that one individual is very dependent and collectivistic in his or her attitudes toward authorities (vertical collectivism) but relatively less dependent in the relations with peer (horizontal collectivism)." (p. 95) Also, different cultures emphasize particular elements of collectivism among various types of collective trait-like attributes. This suggests that there are variations not only in allocentric tendencies among individuals within a collectivist culture, but also that there are differences in cultural inclination to certain types of collectivist elements or trait-like attributes.

Despite diversity within collectivist cultures, there are some major personality dimensions or allocentric tendencies that are shared by different collectivist cultures. (Realo et. al. 1997) These major personality traits can be summarized as obedience, submission and acceptance to collectivistic attitudes, norms, values, tradition, and authority which are also found among high RWAs in Altemeyer's authoritarian model, since RWAs demonstrate a strong conformity to conventional social norms and customs that determine how people ought to act. (Altemeyer 1996: 11) This indicates there is a connection between allocentric tendencies and some aspects of authoritarianism, especially with respect to *conventionalism*.

Allocentric tendencies are also related to authoritarianism in that both of them are accompanied by fear of rejection from in-group members. (Yamaguchi et. al. 1995) Rejection from the in-group is regarded as a punishment since allocentrics and high RWAs both tend to be psychologically and emotionally dependent on the in-group. This psychological attachment to the group enforces a sense of belonging that demands obedience and submission to the in-group authorities. Yamaguchi et. al. (1995) claims that there is a positive relationship between allocentric

tendencies and expectations of reward and/or punishment in-group settings. The person's concern about punishment and/or reward can motivate him/her to behave in an allocentric way and sacrifice self-interest for in-group interests. The group norms associated with reward and/or punishment by the in-group play important roles in manipulating the psychology of individuals to behave "properly" in order to be accepted as members of the group. The psychological need among the allocentric for belongingness to the group can be translated to submission to authority in moralistic terms, or what Altemeyer calls *Authoritarian submission*.

While fear of rejection from the in-group develops within the group and strengthens conformity and submission to authorities, fear of the external world promotes hostility and aggression against the out-groups. High RWAs see themselves as a "moral majority" since they believe that they are allied with the authorities who determine how people ought to act and behave. (Altemeyer 1996) By considering outsiders to be threats, high RWAs establish a rigid boundary between the in-group and out-group to protect group purity. This in-group-out-group dichotomous distinction not only promotes the in-group unity, loyalty, and identification before outsiders (Altemeyer 1996), but also provides motivational basis for prejudice against out-groups. (Adorno et. al. 1982) Prejudice, in turn, provides a conventional outlet for aggressive impulses, which motivates authoritarians to target those who are unconventional, such as social deviants and certain minority groups. (Altemeyer 1996: 10) As Levinson (1982) stresses, those individuals who have strong and rigid adherence to conventional values tend to "look down on and to punish those who were believed to be violating conventional values." (p. 156) Therefore, conventionalism is highly related to ethnocentrism and authoritarian aggression in hierarchical social relations between the in-group and out-group. (Levinson 1982)

The development of authoritarian aggression in the prejudiced Japanese can be explained in terms of in-group-out-group interaction, which involves out-group rejection. According to Adorno et. al. (1982), the in-groups are conceived of as superior in morality, power, status, and ability relative to the out-group by developing an opposite and negative view toward out-groups as people of subordinate, weaker, and lower socioeconomic status. This unequal power relation between in-groups and out-groups is based on the ethnocentric belief that each individual/group must stay at its own level in society. The notion of "natural position" in hierarchical and authoritarian terms is interpreted as a "necessity" by ethnocentrists to keep the out-group

subordinated and segregated. (Levinson 1982: 150) In this respect, idealized Japanese self-identity or “Japaneseness” is an important concept to understand the general frame of mind of prejudiced and ethnocentric people in Japan.

Japaneseness is originally constructed around the popular public discourse of *Nihonjinron*, which stresses biological and genetic bases for the distinctiveness and superiority of the Japanese people and culture. (Weiner 1997: 2-3) The “racial” or “blood bonded” Japaneseness emphasizes a homogeneous and idealized self while rejecting “others” as out-groups, including both external others (foreigners or non-Japanese residents) and internal others (minorities such as *Ainu*, *Okinawan*, *Burakumin*,¹ Japanese Korean, and *Nikkeijin*²). This idealized identity of the in-group strengthens the boundary between the in-group and out-group, which in turn contributes to the creation of negative stereotypes of the out-groups as a negation of the in-group.

The stereotypes of out-groups play important roles in justifying prejudice and ethnocentrism toward the out-groups since ethnocentrists believe that the out-group possesses an “intrinsic evil” of human nature, such as aggressiveness, laziness, and power seeking, which is dangerous not only to their own group, but also to society as a whole. (Levinson 1982: 148) Tsuda (1998) explored the structure of Japanese ethnic prejudice toward Japanese-Brazilians (*Nikkeijin*) in Japanese society. Tsuda found that anti-Japanese-Brazilian prejudice developed from negative images of low socioeconomic status and educational levels that are reinforced by perceptions of Brazil as a backward, undeveloped country. Also, Japanese prejudice against Japanese-Brazilians is based on the stigma of their past emigration legacy which, in the eyes of some Japanese, resulted in the loss

¹ *Burakumin* are not a racial or ethnic minority, but they have been discriminated against for centuries because they are considered to be the descendants of the former outcasts.

² *Nikkeijin* refers to descendants of Japanese who emigrated to South America particularly Brazil and Peru during 1868 and 1973. *Nikkeijin* started returning to Japan in the later 1980s in search of jobs in Japanese factories responding to a labor shortage for unskilled job. The Japanese government offered special visa arrangement for *Nikkeijin* up to the third generation while maintaining a strict immigration policy on other foreigners who attempt to work in Japan. (Sellek, 1997; Tsuda, 1998)

of Japanese cultural heritage while Brazilian cultures are regarded negatively. (Tsuda 1998) Even if those prejudiced Japanese have never had contact with Japanese-Brazilians, imaginary stereotypes reinforce the feeling of difference and are transformed into a sense of threat, hostility, and rejection against out-groups. (Levinson 1982) The roles of imaginary stereotypes of out-groups also explain why anti-Semitism exists in Japan even though the majority of Japanese have never met or had contact with Jews in Japanese society. (Goodman and Miyazawa 1995) As Levinson (1982) stresses, the ethnocentrists lack an ability to approach individuals as individuals since they are unable to identify with humanity as a whole but tend to see individuals collectively as a sample specimen of reified group. (p. 148)

Stereotypes also reflect ethnocentrists' psychological need to "place all the blame for group conflict upon out-groups." (Levinson 1982: 149) Scapegoating is one example of an action that fulfills this need. For instance, immigrants, especially those from the Middle East and Asia, are the most likely to be given the role of scapegoats. They are often considered to be responsible for various social problems such as the increase in crime rates, social instability, creation of foreign-populated slums, and the increase of certain diseases such as AIDS. (Tsuda 1998) In some instances, out-groups are even regarded as responsible for natural disasters. In fact, a number of Japanese Koreans were blamed for the 1921 Great Kanto Earthquake that caused at least 105,000 deaths and many cases of missing persons in the Kanto region. (Masuda, Yamamoto, and Inoue 1979: 330) Stereotypes of out-groups, along with Scapegoating, make the highly prejudiced Japanese believe that out-groups ought to be attacked, eliminated and/or segregated as dangerous elements, which in turn justifies their irrational conduct.

Although ethnic minority groups are most likely to become targets of ethnocentrists, victims are not always members of a particular racial or ethnic group. Rather, ethnocentrists target almost every group that is "different" or unconventional, since ethnocentrism is strongly connected to conventionalism and authoritarian aggression. (Altemeyer 1996: 10) Sakamaki (1996) argues that Japanese society, which is generally characterized as highly homogeneous and conformist, easily marginalizes the "deviant," no matter how subtle their differences are. Japanese schools are an example that shows how certain individuals become victimized as the deviants in a relatively closed social environment:

[A]n odd nuance of speech or appearance is enough to invite ostracism, and in a society where conformity is everything, no stigma weighs heavier than the curse of being different. Too fat or too short; too smart or too slow—all make inviting targets. Many Japanese children who have lived abroad deliberately perform poorly in, say, and English classes so as not to stand out. (Sakamaki 1996: 39)

Once someone is considered to be different or odd in his/her appearance behavior, punishment such as rejection by peers and other members within the deviant's own group is sanctioned. This rejection becomes a serious social problem known as *ijime*, or the bullying that has led fourteen Japanese students to commit suicide in the past fifteen months. (Sakamaki 1996)

The phenomenon of bullying in Japanese schools also illustrates the interplay of attitudinal clusters of authoritarianism-conventionalism, authoritarian-submission and authoritarian-aggression in relation to ethnocentrism. These variables are correlated and all three have to do with the "moral aspect of life—with standards of conduct, with the authorities who enforce these standards, with offenders against them who deserve to be punished." (Levinson 1982: 162-3) It is predicted that authoritarian disposition may be found in the personalities of those Japanese students who act out the bullying. First, those perpetrators of the bullying are highly conventional people whose behavior is characterized by strong adherence to group conformity. When someone is targeted for bullying, conventionalists tend to participate regardless of their own beliefs since, like high RWAs, they tend to lack the ability to make their own decisions and evaluate things for themselves. (Altemeyer 1996) Fear of punishment from members of the in-group can be another element that explains why some individuals obey the authorities. Second, those Japanese actors who engage in bullying also have elements of aggressive authoritarianism in their personality structure. Like high RWAs, Japanese actors develop hostility toward those who are thought to deserve punishment and justify such irrational acts based on a belief that proper authority approves of the acts. Who then represents the proper authority? Such authority may exist only as imaginary since "authority" can be anyone who not only enforces but also simultaneously obeys the group norm against perceived offenders. In some instances, however, teachers represent authority, especially when they tolerate the bullying or do not take it seriously until the situation gets worsened. Some teachers even take the initiative to conduct group punishment against

“misfits.” In fact, it is reported that half of the members of *Nikkyoso* or Japan Teacher’s Union believed that, “keeping order sometimes required corporal punishment.” (Wolferen 1990: 91) This suggests that school bullying reinforces conformity and order, which in turn contributes to the preservation of power of the real authority in school hierarchy.

School as a Socialization/Moralization Organization

It can now be inferred that there is a relationship between authoritarian personality traits found in RWAs and allocentric tendencies and authoritarianism perceived among Japanese people. The next question to be asked deals with development of authoritarian personality traits among the Japanese. Considering culture as a shaper of behavior and the personalities of individuals brings attention to a mechanism of the socialization process in which cultural values are internalized.

According to Realo et. al. (1997), “during socialization, an individual internalizes different patterns of [collectivism] that can be found in the specific subjective culture and transforms them into his or her own cognitive systems.” (p. 96) Social institutions such as schools, families, working places, and political institutions provide sites for the cognitive process in which cultural values are internalized.

According to Brian Mcveigh (1998), the school system in Japan constitutes a moralizing and socializing organization that distributes cultural and group norms in a hierarchical environment. V. Lee Hamilton and Joseph Sanders (1995) point to egalitarianism and hierarchalism as another cultural dimension by suggesting that, “macro level factors such as cultural inclination toward collectivism or hierarchy can influence perceptions of organizations and the actors within them.” (Hamilton and Sanders 1995: 71) Mcveigh (1998) views moral education, which is an integral part of the educational system in Japanese schools, as an important socialization mechanism in the school hierarchy. Moral education provides, “a discourse that the average Japanese finds understandable, acceptable, and desirable,” (Mcveigh 1998: 128) with its emphasis on discipline, conformity, obedience, and group identity. Even though there are variations among schools (i.e. liberal and conservative; private and public, etc.), many schools tend to establish a variety of regulations governing students’ behavior, dress standards and school curriculum. For instance, it is observed, especially in conservative schools that teachers carefully monitor students not only in for their behavior but also for their appearance. In fact, many conservative schools employ strict rules about school uniforms, hair length and style, and

posture and positioning of the body (Sakamaki 1996), to try to make students identical in appearance. The strict school regulation of their appearances, even at a superficial level, aims to make students develop a collective identity and sense of belongingness to the school as members of the group.

Belongingness is enhanced through various types of group activities, school events and ceremonies. Participation in such group-oriented activities promotes loyalty, responsibility and cooperation within larger groups. (Mcveigh 1998) Students are therefore expected to act more as a part of the larger groups than as individuals. Indeed, as a part of the group, students are expected to promote their own in-group's harmony and to behave in the right way as specified by in-group norms. (Iwao et. al. 1993: 429-430) However, these expectations do not mean that students always automatically agree with or believe in what school authority tells them to do. Rather, there might be an inner conflict between self-presentation (the public self) and self-perception (the private self) among students over particular issues. Yet this confrontation rarely appears on the surface since presenting such a psychological conflict is socially considered to be immature. (Tsuda 1998) Therefore, the social boundaries between the public self and private self are legitimated and this in turn strengthens a sense of group unity and harmony.

Uniform school curricula also contributed to the development of authoritarian personality structures among school children. All textbooks used in public schools (except for colleges and universities) have to pass the screening process under the supervision of the Education Ministry before they are published. (Sunazawa 1998) Additionally, the national government exerts influence on curriculum development, which attempt to achieve uniformity in teaching and in selection of textbooks. (Tanaka 1995)

Uniformity in teaching and curriculum development resulted in minimizing opportunities for the students to develop such abilities as critical thinking, asking questions, and analytic skills. Like high RWAs, Japanese students are likely to "receive little training in making their own decisions and evaluating things for themselves." (Altemeyer 1996) In fact, students tend to accept what teachers tell them to do and become more concerned about mastery of subjects based on memorization than on developing uniqueness and creativity. With their strong attachment to the in-group, Yamaguchi et. al argues that, "allocentrics are expected to conform to group standards and cannot logically emphasize their uniqueness in group setting." (Yamaguchi et. al 1995: 660) Since

uniqueness stresses individuality, which is opposed to collectivism, allocentric people tend to be more concerned with being “*hitonami*,’ or average as a person,” (Bower 1997: 248) than with viewing one’s uniqueness as advantages over others to pursue personal goals. Indeed, as long as students appear to be average, they do not need to worry about “standing out” and falling victim to bullying.

Obedience to authority is another important cultural value that moral education emphasizes in the hierarchical school environment. Students are socialized to understand and accept hierarchy through interpersonal relations that are organized in a vertical line: they must respect those who are above them and stay in their proper place in the vertical social relationship between teachers and students as well as between senior and junior students. This indicates that students identify themselves as subordinates in relation to the authority in the hierarchy, and at the same time they develop a strong sense of belongingness to the group as part of the system. As Neil Lutsky suggests (1995), “the development of effective authority obligations typically requires long periods of socialization to clearly defined roles, exposure to well-established patterns of behavior, and ongoing displays of institutional legitimacy—all reinforced by the potential exercise of reward and coercive power.” (p. 59) This “long periods of socialization” is what moral education in Japanese schools intends to provide from early childhood through adolescence for the Japanese people. Furthermore, students came to realize that hierarchy exists not only within their own school but also among different schools based on school reputation, which corresponds to the economic-bureaucratic hierarchy in the world of business.

Family as Socialization Organization

Family is another important institution that provides socialization through the parent-child relationship. Adorno et. al (1982) claims that family background and early childhood experiences in the parent-child relationship are important components of a theoretical attempt to understand authoritarianism. The development of authoritarianism also can be traced during early childhood in the Japanese family through parental influence on the children. Failure in adjusting one’s behavior during the socialization process is often considered to be proof that one is “deviant” from society, and parents are often thought to be responsible for almost everything about their children’s behavior and conduct until children are socially considered to be full adults when they turn twenty years old. Because of such socially

perceived parental roles, moral education of children within the family is a central concern among Japanese parents.

One of the most circulated Japanese newspapers, "*Yomiurishinbun*" (Yomiuri newspaper), conducted a public opinion survey on various issues concerning the family. (*Yomiurishinbun* 1998) Three thousand adult individuals were randomly selected throughout Japan and asked to complete survey questionnaires. When respondents were asked to list important aspects of socialization with their children as parents, fifty-six percent of the respondents stressed "punishment when necessary" followed by fifty-three percent stressing that "discipline[d] children [with] socially acceptable manners and rules," forty-four percent stressing "increase [in] communication and time to spend with children," forty-four percent and "encourage and reward children as much as possible." When focusing on a specific age group (thirty to forty years old) of these respondents, in which grade and/or junior high school children are mostly concentrated, about sixty percent of these respondents chose punishment and discipline as important aspects of parent-child relationships. This indicates that the parents aged thirty-forty with grade/junior high school children tend to employ more strict and punitive attitudes toward childbearing than any other age groups. (*Yomiurishinbun* 1998)

Even though it is not said that less authoritarian parents simply come to exhibit a more authoritarian tendency (or reversibly authoritarian parents become less authoritarian) when their children reach a certain age, the parents' attitudinal orientation to authoritarianism or non-authoritarianism in the socialization process can be modified by various external factors such as changes in political, economic and sociocultural conditions. In this sense, Adorno et. al.'s concept of the fixed and unchangeable nature of authoritarian personality traits appears to be too simplistic. An alternative to such views is the social learning theory, to which Altemeyer is inclined, a stance that came to gain greater attention from social scientists:

[I]n a contextual, historical sense, the manner in which the experiences with the family and the respective psychological characteristics are transformed is determined to a great extent by the current situation, the prevailing political and cultural environment, educational influences, and influences of the media. (Hopf 1993: 133)

From the view point of social learning theory, the reasons why Japanese parents of grade/junior high school age children are more likely to

support strict discipline and punishment can be partly explained by their response to changes in the social environment surrounding the children. For instance, once children enter grade school, their interpersonal relations occur not only within the family but also in public spheres, especially in schools where conformity and obedience are stressed. Additionally, by the time children enter junior high school, they must be strictly disciplined to survive the excessive educational competition since academic achievement is viewed as a key measure of potential for success. Therefore, school and family as socializing institutions reinforce each other to internalize cultural values and social norms in the mind of children.

Considering academic prestige and socially acceptable behaviors as keys to success in Japan, parental influence on children becomes an important factor in achieving such goals. Since children's new experiences in school appear to be a turning point for many parents to modify their socialization strategies, my focus needs to be placed on those parents who tend to be inclined to authoritarianism during the child's "examination years." A typical case is found among those parents who push children to climb the established educational ladder to success. These parents are said to be highly conventional since they readily adapt a rigid and externalized set of values based on cultural and social norms: "what is socially accepted and what is helpful in climbing the social ladder is considered 'good,' and what deviates, what is different, and what is socially inferior is considered 'bad.'" (Frenkel-Brunswik 1982: 257)

Many Japanese parents in conventional families start exerting more pressure and control over the children to succeed academically as well as socially in early childhood. Once children enter the preparation period for entrance exams, those conventional parents often start restricting children's private activities such as their hobbies, sports, and social life to make children devote themselves to academic achievement. (Tanaka 1995) For instance, many parents send their children to *juku* or "cramming schools" to prepare their children for upcoming entrance exams. It is reported that 64.2% of students between the ages of twelve and fifteen attend "cram schools." (Sakamaki 1996) Most parents view cramming schools as a key to pass entrance exams, and at the same time they feel they should follow what other parents do. It is true that those children who do not attend one of those "cramming schools" have problems in finding playmates after regular school (Tanaka, 1995), since these private schools have become so common.

As for the children, they are expected to respond enthusiastically to parental expectations and to obey what parents tell them is in their best interests. The acceptance of the order from parental authority cannot be realized, according to Karel van Wolferen (1990), without considering the child-mother relationship. In fact, since mothers feel greater responsibility for the performance of her children, they make considerable efforts to motivate, encourage, scold, punish, bribe, and do anything that might make children become “good.” (Tanaka 1995) In the typical Japanese socialization process:

[I]deas of proper conduct are instilled into the child less by reference to a universal scheme of how the word works than by manipulation of the child’s emotions. He or she leans to recognize good or bad behavior generally by its effect on the mother’s disposition. One result of this is that the *kyoiku mama* (“education mother”) is able to instill in her child very strong feelings of guilt, which she uses as a spur. (Wolferen 1990: 88)

Feelings of guilt associated with the child’s fear of displeasing the parents make children submissive to parental authority, which enforces “good behavior” along with punishment and/or reward and coercive power. As Frenkel-Brunswik (1982) points out, “a relative lack of mutuality in the area of emotion and shifts of emphasis onto the exchange of ‘goods’ and of material benefits without adequate development of underlying self-reliance, forms the basis for the opportunistic type of dependence of children on their parents.” (p. 258) The emotional dependence, fear, and feelings of guilt among children regarding parental authority in the conventional Japanese family in turn contributes to the disposition of authoritarianism that involves superficial identification with the powerful while rejecting the inferior and weak.

Conclusion

As socializing institutions, schools and families play important roles not only in reproducing cultural ideology and social norms but also work to internalize them in children. However, these two institutions are not entities that are independent or separate from each other. Rather, family and schools are strongly connected and enforce one another by powerfully influencing the disposition of personality among Japanese children. Furthermore, the family often functions as a mediator that connects school discourses to the broader economic system through the familial socialization process. In fact,

there are intimate relationships between the school system and the business world in the sense that Japanese schools operate “as a sorting mechanism and recruiting agent for placement in the various overlapping hierarchies.” (Wolferen 1990: 83) Therefore, moral education is also designed to provide a “normative knowledge linking state interests and individual subjectivity’s [which] allows an understanding of the unspoken role of invisible ideologies.” (Mcveigh 1998: 126) In this view, moral education is used as an instrument to internalize an external organization (state) within its subjects or citizens as they are socialized to obey established authority and respect social order from early childhood, with the help of family authority. Therefore, as Wolferen (1990) stresses, socialization processes in school and families combine to produce a “generation of disciplined workers for a techno-meritocratic system that requires highly socialized individuals capable of performing reliably in a rigorous, hierarchical, and finely turned organizational environment.” (p. 83) This indicates that authoritarianism is strongly linked not only to Japanese culture but also to the larger economic system.

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