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[研究ノート]

# An Analysis Based on Intersubjective Communication in Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy

Toward the Discovery of the ‘Preemptive Guilt’ in the Context of Japanese Culture

## 精神分析的心理療法におけるインターサブジェクティブな交流に基づいた分析

日本文化における‘先取り型罪悪感’の発見に向けて

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**Abstract:** This paper analyzed the interactions of psychoanalytic psychotherapy between a Japanese client and her Japanese therapist over the issue of ‘guilt feelings’ from intersubjective perspectives. This led to the discovery of a third kind of guilt, seen as typically Japanese, or ‘preemptive guilt,’ after two kinds of guilt described by Japanese psychoanalysts, namely, ‘guilt feelings as a fear of punishment’ and ‘guilt feelings following forgiveness.’ At a certain time point in the course of this therapy, the therapist was stricken by a sense of guilt and spontaneously apologized to the client. This triggered a move forward in the therapy and uncovered the exact elements of their interactions that had driven the enactment of guilt feelings.

本稿では、日本人であるクライアントとセラピストとの間に生じた、罪悪感をめぐる精神分析的心理療法の交流を、間主観的な観点から分析した。それによって筆者は、日本の精神分析において論じられてきた2種の罪悪感、“処罰恐れ型”と“許され型”に加え、極めて日本的と言える“先取り型”罪悪感を見出した。セラピー過程のある局面において、セラピストはクライアントに罪悪感を抱き、思わず自分から謝った。これを契機に心理療法が展開した。二人の間のどのような相互交流がこのようなエナクトメントに結びついたのかを明らかにした。

**Keywords:** psychoanalytic psychotherapy, intersubjective communication, guilt feelings, enactment, Japanese culture

精神分析的心理療法、インターサブジェクティブな交流、罪悪感、エナクトメント、日本文化

## 1 Preface

This paper aims to discuss the intersubjective process surrounding the ‘sense of guilt’ observed in a clinical example of a Japanese female client treated by her Japanese therapist. The first psychoanalytical exploration of guilt in the history of Japanese psychoanalysis goes back to a paper entitled “Two Kinds of Guilt Feelings,” which Kosawa submitted to S. Freud in 1932 (Kosawa, 1953). In it, Kosawa proposed distinguishing between ‘guilt feelings as a fear of punishment’ and ‘guilt feelings following forgiveness.’ The first type of guilt is connected to the fear of being punished. On the other hand, ‘guilt feelings following forgiveness’ arise spontaneously when one feels forgiven. Kosawa referred to the Greek mythology of Oedipus with the former, and a Buddhist sutra entitled “Ajase”<sup>[1]</sup> with the latter (Kosawa, 1954).

Subsequently, in his discussion of object relations in Japanese culture, Okonogi clarified the mechanism of these two types of guilt by relating the former to the paternal principle of Oedipus complex, and the latter, to the maternal principle of the Ajase complex (Okonogi, 1979). The mythology of Oedipus is a tragic story in which his mother commits suicide and Oedipus blinded himself, after which he sets out on a wandering journey. In contrast, in the story of Ajase, the mother’s devotion to his care as atonement for her sin was perceived by Ajase as forgiveness of the sin he himself had committed, and he genuinely felt sorry for his actions. Okonogi maintains that this forms the basis of the emotional oneness between a mother and her child, through which they can both be liberated from their own sins, giving it an optimistic cast. Behind such optimism, Okonogi identified a sense of ‘amae’ in interpersonal relations unique to the Japanese, in which maternal principles prevailed (Okonogi, 1979). This kind of mentality surrounding optimism in a mutual sense of unity is similar to what Doi discussed in his theory of Amai (Doi, 1971).

As anthropologist Yanagida (1950) noted, Japanese people casually use

the language of apology in everyday life. Okano observed that, behind the excessive use of the language of guilt, there is a dependence-seeking or *amae* mentality characteristic of the Japanese. When a Japanese person apologizes, he or she is feeling dependent on others, and even expects to be comforted by them in return (Okano, 2009).

Based on the discussion above, in Japanese culture, where maternal principles prevail, the sense of guilt is not so much linked with the clarification of an individual's sin as with interdependence or the shared feeling of being forgiven within a sense of unity. This is where the Japanese mode of intersubjective communication comes into play. Concerning psychoanalysis (Freud, S.), which was born in Western culture where its theory and practice have since evolved, Togashi and Kottler made an important suggestion to help understand the therapeutic relationship from the Japanese perspective of 'twinship' (Togashi and Kottler, 2015). I also believe that it is of value to deepen psychoanalytical discussion in the context of Japanese culture.

In the process of Client A's psychotherapy, which is illustrated in this paper, a kind of enactment triggered a turning point that changed our therapeutic relationship. When A missed one appointment, I was unsure whether it was her mistake or mine. Seeing A coming to my office a week later, looking innocent and as if nothing had happened, I was taken by a sense of guilt, and words of apology slipped out of my mouth, although I was not sure if I myself had miscommunicated the date of the appointment or not. My sense of guilt and apology had, in a way, anticipated what was to unfold between us two. The preemptive nature of my sense of guilt and words of apology, I believe, characterizes a specific mode of enactment associated with Japanese culture. By examining the content of intersubjective communication exchanged with my client, I will most likely be able to elucidate the nature of interactions which had led to this kind of enactment.

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## 2 Case Vignette <sup>[2]</sup>

Client A is a woman in her late 20s who complained of difficulty in fitting into new situations and environments. A traumatic experience of racial discrimination she suffered in her teenage years while in a foreign country was suspected to have had a causative link. A 50-minute once-weekly session was prescribed.

### [The First Three Months of Psychotherapy]

A actively talked nonstop, not giving me, the therapist, any chance to interrupt her. She also repeatedly complained that she would forget essential things. As the psychotherapy sessions progressed, she began to reveal various aspects of her personality. For example, when she realized that she was beginning to harbor feelings of dependency on me, however minor, she quickly became defensive and excessively active.

On days when no psychotherapy sessions were scheduled, moreover, A ran to the extreme and engaged in ‘certain activities’ <sup>[3]</sup> as if to fill the void.

In response, the therapist conveyed her thoughts on A’s emotional instability that had prompted her to act out in this way. Then, in the following session, for the first time, A began to talk in quite specific terms about her parents, who had been unable to help her when she had suffered traumatic experiences in the past. As we started discussing A’s internal conflict with her parents about her traumatic experiences, the summer holidays began. She faced the reality that the therapist on whom she was about to become dependent would separate from her, albeit temporarily. At the time, however, neither of us were aware that it was going to reactivate the client’s past experience of seeking her parents’ support without success when she was seriously traumatized, or, in other words, the possibility that the ‘repetitive dimensions of the transference’ (Stolorow and Atwood, 1992) would soon unfold in this dyadic relationship, and be brought to the fore in therapy.

### **[An Illusionary Session]**

Since the summer holidays are quite long, the therapist and A agreed to hold three extra sessions during this period.

At the second session during the holiday, A declared that she had engaged once again in ‘certain activities.’ A month later, A did not show up for the next session, and I wondered why. When I was waiting and expecting her to come, I thought first that she might have mistaken the date. I then began to suspect that it might have been me who had given her the wrong date at the end of the last session. One week later, when she arrived, looking totally innocent, I concluded that it must have been my mistake and felt somewhat guilty, so words of apology slipped out of my mouth. “Last week, I was expecting you, maybe because I gave you the wrong date. I’m sorry.”... A looked puzzled, with a blank look on her face.

### **[The Quality of the Relationship Changes]**

During this session, A continued to tell her story. A moment later, she began to talk about her friends. Quickly noticing that I was going to throw in a comment, she asked me if I was going to say something. Until then, being too keen to talk about herself and preoccupied by her problems, she had paid no attention to other people. So this was the first time she had noticed that I was trying to say something.

This showed that the quality of her relationship with me was beginning to change. I felt that, although up to now she had been talking without listening, she was now able to perceive that I, who was willing to listen to her story, was sitting in front of her.

### **[The First Occasion of Discussing Guilt Feelings]**

Since that point, I, as the therapist, consistently focused on A’s deep-seated conflict about dependence which was being displaced by ‘certain activities.’ A then expressed her honest feelings of guilt toward her parents

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involving those activities. At that moment, I considered that the fact that I conveyed my guilt to her a month ago might have some link with the fact that she had begun to speak, for the first time, about the feelings of guilt she had toward her parents. As she became more aware of her guilt feelings, her insight into her dependence, which was being displaced by ‘certain activities’, deepened.

### **3 Discussion**

#### **3.1 The Therapist’s Sense of Guilt that She was ‘Aware’ and ‘Unaware’**

While I was feeling more and more uneasy, suspecting that I might have given the wrong date to A, I apologized to her. However, I had no conscious intention of using it as a therapeutic intervention. The act was an expression of my bad conscience. I simply felt sorry for the wrong I had done her. In that sense, I was enacting my apology to her. I developed the following thoughts around this apology.

First, I was aware of my guilt feeling for having deprived her of the chance to receive one session. Later, with further introspection, I discovered another reason for feeling guilty. In the session that was resumed during the summer vacation, A somehow put me off when she spoke quite graphically, in an aloof and uninterested tone, about ‘certain activities.’ And if I had given her the wrong date for the next appointment at the end of that session, I may have done so unknowingly, due to an unconscious desire to temporarily keep a distance from a woman who engaged in ‘certain activities.’ I believe that, while being unaware of it, I was feeling guilty for my inadequacy as a therapist.

#### **3.2 Reciprocal Exchanges about Guilt and Sincerity**

A, I believe, also had an experience surrounding guilt in the following manner. Her parents’ guilt: I could see from A’s recollections that her parents had suffered from a sense of guilt for not having offered any help to their

child when they lived in a foreign country, though they had never verbalized it. A's guilt: As therapy progressed, she became increasingly aware of her guilt feelings for 'certain activities' and keeping it secret from her parents.

The other factor that had influenced me to focus our therapy on the sense of guilt, I believe, was A's earnestness. When I saw A the week after the missing session, looking as if nothing had happened, and being so eager to talk like she always did, I was deeply touched by her courage. In fact, being so earnest in her constant effort as a client, A urged me to respond with sincerity on my part as a therapist. And this kind of interaction unknowingly characterized the nature of our relationship. Further, her sincerity may have reactivated my inherent obsession with therapist's integrity. Therefore, my apology to her, in a sense, was a pledge for me to be truthful to her.

For such reciprocal exchanges, Jaenicke states, "We can't hide behind our role in terms of the impact we have on clients and that they have on us" (Jaenicke, 2008, p.6). This was exactly where you can experience what Orange refers to as 'There is no outside' between a client and a therapist (Orange, 2002). The apology of the therapist is thought to be an act that grew out of a chain of overlapping interactions between the two.

### **3.3 Intersubjective Exchanges in 'Preemptive Guilt'**

In closing, I would like to discuss emotional interchanges about a sense of guilt in the context of Japanese culture, by taking into account the fact that both the client and the therapist in this case are Japanese. First, when I apologized to A, it was not in fear of punishment. In other words, it was not for fear of being reproached by the client or criticized by my supervisor. Rather, if the fault was mine, by honestly admitting it, I wanted to receive A's forgiveness. Also, I think I wanted to access her tenderness, by truthfully acknowledging my mistake and conveying it to A. I also felt secure that A would accept my apology without reproaching me. If that was the case, there must have been hidden inside me an optimistic expectation

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to be forgiven, which was typically Japanese in its nature, or a kind of ‘amae’ directed at A. If A had grown up in a non-Japanese culture, such an implicit assumption would not have occurred to me. On the contrary, out of fear of being reproached for my mistake, I may have hesitated to apologize straightforwardly.

On the other hand, because of her traumatic experience with her dependence objects, A was vulnerable and scared of being hurt again, and suffered from a serious conflict about her need of dependence. Her unsatisfied desire for dependence had turned into ‘certain activities.’ For someone like this, by being apologized to by me and by witnessing my weaknesses and amae, she may have felt relief, as if a heavy burden had been lifted off her shoulders. For A, who was latently feeling guilty for her ‘certain activities’, my expressing feelings of guilt before her had ‘fertilized the soil’ for a place where she could feel safe to face her guilt. The feelings of guilt that had lurked ambiguously inside A, her parents and the therapist, may probably have drifted between the two for some time. My uncertainty about my own mistake may have cleared the air of the guilt feelings that were then hovering between the two, and crystallized them into an enactment of apology. I believe that this ‘preemptive’ type of guilt had, as is often manifested in Japanese culture, an aspect of amae, that, if you are the first to admit your fault, you will be accepted and forgiven; there was also the unspoken assumption that other person will open his or her heart more to you as a result. Having been sensitive to the emotional air that had vaguely become created between the two, and by preemptively perceiving it and presenting it to A, I was able to help create, in A’s mind, the extra capacity to feel a sense of guilt, which until then had been difficult to perceive and acknowledge.

## 4 Conclusion

The intersubjective communication triggered by the therapist’s apology

was a deeply meaningful experience for A that enabled her to step out into a new mode of human relationships. The context implicitly shared between the two was uncovered, and by exploring, in depth, the content of mutual interactions, I deepened my understanding of preemptive guilt which is an aspect of guilt feelings different from the ‘guilt feelings following forgiveness’ so far discussed as typical in Japanese culture.

In this paper, therefore, I have illustrated a new type of guilt by capturing an intersubjective process in a psychoanalytic therapeutic relationship, which embedded in the context of Japanese culture. This practice of detailed exploration by casting layers of light on the content of interaction with the client, will, I am sure, offer valuable clues to better understand enactments with our future clients.

## Notes

- [1] Ajase was the son of a king in India. The queen, fearing the loss of her youth and beauty, wanted to bear a child so she could retain the king's love for her. A prophet told her that a hermit who lived in the forest would be reborn as the king's son. The queen, however, could not wait for the maturation of prophecy, and killed the hermit and conceived a baby prince. Just before being slain, the hermit had told the queen that he would be reborn as her son and curse his father. The queen, fearful of what she had done, tried to abort and kill the baby, but failed. When Ajase grew up and learned the secret surrounding his birth, he murdered his father in a furious rage, and, just as he was about to kill his mother, he developed a severe case of abscess. Seeing his mother's selfless devotion to his care, Ajase felt that his sin was forgiven by her, and was stricken by a profound sense of guilt (Okonogi, 2001).
- [2] This paper was written with a focus on intersubjective communication necessary for examining the main theme. Therefore, the Case Vignette described in this paper is not a full account of all the facts.
- [3] The term ‘certain activities’ refers to a pattern of activities which the client had repeatedly engaged in. After having engaged in this behavior, she was stricken with feelings of self-disgust; still, she was unable to stop them. It was the kind of behavior that worried her parents and broke their heart.

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