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Uniwersalne narzędzia badawcze kontra wewnętrzne aspekty kulturowe. Konstrukty społeczne *honne-tatamae* oraz *uchi-soto* jako elementy problematyczne w badaniach indywidualizacji-kolektywizacji społeczeństwa japońskiego.

Universal research tools against internal cultural constructs. Concepts of *honne-tatamae* and *uchi-soto* as phenomena problematic in research of individualisation-collectivism of Japanese society

Abstrakt:

Niniejszy artykuł prezentuje dlaczego uniwersalistyczne wytwarzanie wskaźników w spektrum indywidualizmu-kolektywizmu okazuje się problematyczne z naukowego punktu widzenia - zwłaszcza w odniesieniu do społeczeństw Azji Wschodniej – w tym Japonii. Analiza konceptów kulturowych *honne-tatamae* oraz *uchi-soto* służy wyjaśnieniu błędów w zbyt uniwersalistycznej klasyfikacji niektórych zmiennych i wskaźników jako oznak indywidualizmu-kolektywizmu. Do badania wykorzystano zarówno literaturę naukową, jak też 14 indywidualnych wywiadów pogłębionych [IDI_1 - IDI_14] przeprowadzonych w latach 2017-2018 z Japończykami z młodszych i starszych pokoleń (obecnymi studentami i ich rodzicami). W efekcie postawiony zostaje postulat bardziej wrażliwego uwzględniania lokalnie uwarunkowanych, wewnętrznych zjawisk kulturowych jako czynników kluczowych i wartych redefinicji w teoriach szerokiego zasięgu o indywidualizacji-kolektywizacji. Jak może się bowiem okazać, pewne pozornie łatwe do klasyfikacji przy tworzeniu indeksów i wskaźników indywidualizacji zjawiska mogą być czymś zupełnie innym, niż wydają się z zewnątrz.

Słowa kluczowe: Japonia, indywidualizm, kolektywizm, *honne-tatamae*, *uchi-soto*.

Abstract:

The paper presents why universalist construction of indicators within spectrum of individualism-collectivism becomes misleading from anthropological point of view - especially in relation to the Eastern Asian societies including Japan. A study of cultural concepts *honne-tatamae* (*honest-facade*) and *uchi-soto* (*inner-outer groups/others*) serves to clarify mistakes in classifying some variables or indicators too fast as signs of individualism-collectivism spectrum. Using both scientific literature and 14 individual in-depth interviews [IDI_1 - IDI_14] conducted between 2017-2018 with Japanese citizens from younger and older generations (current students and their parents), the conclusion is drawn that including locally determined, internal understanding and concepts of cultures as the key factors in individualism-collectivism studies of different cultures and especially in cross-cultural studies seems necessary. Presented examples prove that internal, cultural constructs may be so unique and specifically opposite to the point that they are worth more reflection within the scope of theories of individualization and collectivization.

Keywords: Japan, individualism, collectivism, *honne-tatamae*, *uchi-soto*.

Introduction

A spectrum of individualism-collectivism in Japan has long been the area of interest for researchers all around the world. First anthropological work on the Land of the Rising Sun – created without the actual scientific trips to Japan - was also based on an attempt to understand the key phenomena within the Japanese individualism and collectivism dimension. At that time, this spectrum was believed to have influenced Japanese behavior during World War II. In effect, the scientific findings aimed specifically at solving problems with predicting the military tactics of Japanese commanders by American strategists, which required understanding Japanese collectivism or individualism [Benedict, 1947]. Over the years, many other books and reports studying empirical quantitative and qualitative data have been presented. The spectrum of individualism-collectivism finally caught the interest of Japanese researchers [Hirakawa 1989; Yamagishi 1999; Kitayama, & Cohen 2007; Kameda, Takezawa, & Hastie 2005]. They explained specific, non-obvious cultural nuances and internal understandings up to date perceived as Japanese indicators of collectivism. Those researchers based their analyses on personal, internal understanding, which allowed criticizing most Western interpretations and explaining that some theoretically collectivist behaviors may be actually examples of hidden individualism [Hirakawa 1989; Yamagishi 1999; Kitayama, & Cohen 2007; Kameda, Takezawa, & Hastie 2005].

It must be admitted that Europeans indeed somehow forced Japanese culture into a general, universalistic framework of individualism-collectivism indicators and done it nonchalantly. They also kept comparing many countries among themselves using the same tools over and over again and saw Japanese as extreme collectivists sometimes based on factual data and sometimes more on personal habits, attributions [Kraus, Piff, & Keltner 2009; Stephens, Markus, & Townsend 2007; Hofstede 2005; 2008]. The dimensions of individualism-collectivism themselves were in result too easily defined as absolute, objective and translatable to all the cultures of the world - in European understanding at least. With time, scientists stopped asking individualism and collectivism really mean but started studying them taking some things for granted and reproducing already used tools for the sake of comparability of reports. The most famous and probably the most commercially developed approach of this type is the long-lasting project by G. Hofstede - based on continual, cross-national quantitative data analysis [2005; 2008]. This project, almost reproducing the already known story of Ruth Benedict denial, also did not resist vast criticism. It based on a fact that

many different researchers came to contradictory conclusions after repeated re-verifications of the same data. For instance, as Hamamura says, sometimes reports concluded that Japan is extremely collectivist as compared to the USA, but South Korea is not - despite the identical values of the individualism-collectivism related variables and indexes between Japan and Korea [Hamamura 2012, Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier 2002; Heine, Lehman, Peng, & Greenholtz 2002]. In other cases, the same indicators and indexes of the Japanese individualism and the Korean individualism turned out to be completely different. Finally, in some reports the Japanese seemed to be no less and no more individualistic than the Spaniards but Spain was classified close to the USA culture while Japan kept being portrayed as completely different aka more collectivist than both USA and Spain [Hamamura 2012; Hofstede 2005; 2008].

In this paper, I present why the universalist construction of indicators within spectrum of individualism-collectivism becomes very dangerous from a scientific point of view - especially in relation to the Eastern Asian societies including Japan. I carry out the study of cultural concepts *honne-tatamae* and *uchi-soto*. . In rough translation, *tattamae* means "face" - public image while *honne* stands for private, real feelings. The other two concepts base on differentiation of people into "ours", close circles (*uchi*) vs broadly understood "others" (*soto*). The mentioned study serves to clarify mistakes in classifying some variables or indicators too fast as signs of individualism-collectivism spectrum. Using both scientific literature and 14 individual in-depth interviews [IDI_1 - IDI_14] conducted between 2017-2018 with Japanese citizens from younger and older generations (current students and their parents), I come to conclusion that it is necessary to include locally determined, internal understanding and concepts of cultures as the key factors in individualism-collectivism studies of different cultures and especially in cross-cultural studies. Presented examples prove that internal, cultural constructs may be so unique and specifically opposite to the point that they are worth more reflection within the scope of theories of individualization and collectivization.

Theories of modernization-individualisation and cultural differentiation

In the second decade of the 21st century, years of criticism of Ruth Benedict and the Hofstede project in Eastern Asia, resulted by a synthetic summary analysis of individualism-collectivism studies that compared countries from different parts of the world . A Japanese researcher Takeshi Hamamura - working at the University of Hong Kong - in his article entitled "Are Cultures Becoming Individualistic? A Cross-Temporal Comparison of Individualism-Collectivism in the United States and Japan " [2012] studied the numerous Western and Japanese research reports about individualism-collectivism from 1950-2010 mostly in USA and Japan but also making side notes to other countries when necessary. He analyzed the source databases, performed his own tests of statistical significance/reliability of variables and individual indicators/indexes of collectivism-individualism. As a result, Hamamura classified one type of repetitive research approaches as being born within the scope of theory of modernization-individualization. This theory based on the assumption, popular since the 1980s, that economic development, market liberalization and general prosperity boost the individualization of society in an universal manner. The second theory - called by Hamamura the theory of modernization without westernization or the theory of cultural diversity - preferred to explain the phenomena of individualization or collectivism underlining context of original meanings of the internal cultural constructs. This theory discussed how some elements can become in fact individualized, while others just the opposite, and what is most important – many are misunderstood themselves - classified as manifestations of individualism and collectivism just wrong. Others cannot be classified within this spectrum at all because of their unique role in a given culture. According to Hamamura, the last problem may happen even when in other cultures some dimensions, specific questions or ways of coding of variables "work" relatively well. Interestingly - contrary to what one would expect, most Japanese scientists did not completely deny the validity of the theory of modernization-individualization. Instead, they were simply trying to explain very specific phenomena that are key to Japanese culture and - which fall into categories that are interpreted incorrectly or may be even not qualitatively classifiable within the spectrum of individualism-collectivism – as said before. In result, aspects of key importance and visible for a person familiar with the local culture were often not studied at all by global research projects or depending on the country of origin - the researchers kept

constructing completely different indicators/indexes of individualism-collectivism using the same data [Hamamura 2012].

***Honne-tatamae* and the meaning of Asian concept of „face” in practical approach**

The Asian concept of "face" seems relatively understandable and became perceived as extreme collectivism. Is it really the case? For Japanese, the mechanism of keeping the "face" presents an extremely strong particularity about the social facade and the public image of a person and the ideal type of individual social roles. For example, if a Japanese mother meets any other human being, her *tatamae* must "look" like the perfect Japanese mother's cultural pattern. What she really thinks, feels, or wants to do as an individual person (practicing her *honne* – honest self) does not matter. The same applies to an ideal employee in a company, an ideal father, an ideal child or student at every stage of education. *Tatamae* works in a purely social context – it means maintaining the flawless "face" and fulfilling the roles of a friend, woman, man, literally all social roles that can only be played [IDI_1 - IDI_14].

Unfortunately, this is where it becomes very important to understand specific cultural categories through the eyes of the Japanese society. Looking only at quantitative data from surveys or even extensive Hofstede style comparisons approach starts lacking. First of all - the fact that particular Japanese meets expectations for a "show" (fake - as the Japanese themselves say about it [IDI_1 - IDI_14]), does not mean compliance of all these elements with *honne*, does not mean the Japanese person really believes them correct and even more - does not mean that they are actually implemented. You can show or say many things socially expected and do the opposite when you are finally alone. One can say something but think completely differently. If an individual is raised up in a society focused on extreme control of what is visible, he or she learns to show behaviours in a way that fulfills expectations but does not necessarily oblige to actually implement them. Europeans are also familiar with the process of smiling warmly and praising the boss in his presence but calling him using the worst possible insults after leaving the office. Sometimes we defend our own children in public – in presence of teacher or other parents – but scold them harsh for the problematic behaviour at home. In Japan, the situation is very similar [IDI_7]. Helping tourists at the

expense of being late to work, a Japanese person can smile and meet expectations, be very kind - to keep the public face of an effective, kind, helpful representative of the Japanese society - but inside he/she hates the tourist to the point of even wanting to kill him [IDI_4]. Despite this, he/she stops, shows a direction to a place 3 km away and loses the bonus salary of that month because of being late to work. Is this really a phenomenon revealing collectivism? Would the same Japanese person behave the same helping not a tourist but another Japanese? Should we list questions about similar issues as part of the individualism-collectivism spectrum without a deeper understanding of what the honest Japanese person consciousness/personality really thinks – not only what a person does?

Some emphasize, in line with Sapire-Whorf's thesis on the disclosure of social rules in the structure of the language itself (1972; 2002), that the very existence of the *honne* concept indicates something very important. To Japanese it may be individualism rather than collectivism. After all, you can meet social expectations or actual necessity (for instance - project at work), but "escape your thoughts and spirit" to another "world" - where you are just yourself and "with impunity" meet your individual needs [IDI_3]. According to the interlocutors - if there was no widespread need for individualism in Japan, then *honne-tatamae* opposites would not be created in language. Instead, the full faith in social role and its assumptions would be promoted, as is the case in South Korea – at least that is what Japanese bring up when directly asked [IDI_1 - IDI_14]. In Japan alone, no one has ever taught about the need to honestly believing in the values presented and accepted in public - it is rather about "fulfilling" the role than "believing" in it. It is about "duty", not willingness (actual, conscious support, internalization and awareness, that "what I do is actually me") [IDI_1, IDI_4, IDI_5, IDI_8]. Another interpretation emphasizes the total arbitrariness of the "intensity" in choosing between *honne-tatamae* depending on the situation - when buying casual shoes it will be less important than when choosing specific work shoes. What is more - a Japanese lawyer can put the "flashy, inappropriate" shoes back on the shelf and start watching those ideally suited to the role when he meets a colleague at work and the next day he "will come for those beautiful New Rocks (brand of rock boots, naturally unacceptable in an elegant corporation - author's note) "[IDI_2]. The brutal statement that Japanese culture is even sarcastically artificial, that most people lie, cannot be trusted, and due to strong social pressure and excessive ritualization - "we do not know who is who unless a deep friendship becomes established " also appeared in interviews. That is why many Japanese do not like

Japaneseness, although they do not publicly admit it [IDI_1 - IDI_5, IDI_7 - IDI_8]. Does this sound more like a declaration of individualism or collectivism from European theories? What does a full acceptance that you can be someone else completely in private means for individualism-collectivism dimension? It turns out that it is difficult to determine and many scientists have opposite opinions on the topic [Hirakawa 1989; Yamagishi 1999; Kitayama, & Cohen 2007; Kameda, Takezawa, & Hastie 2005]. Some take it simply as collectivism, some understand the individualistic hidden layer behind superficial behavior and others refuse to classify this cultural phenomena within individualism-collectivism at all proposing other more suitable categories like feeling of social pressure, social obligation in group or alone.

Therefore, it is not difficult to understand that asking Japanese some standardized survey questions or using universalized comparative methods of determining individualism-collectivism between cultures in style of Hofstede brings scientifically dangerous results. On one hand, all answers that highlight family values, publicly conformist behavior etc., create a picture of explicit collectivism in eyes of the researcher. On the other hand - the phenomena of going against the public "face" so often and this topic being obvious, so popularly brought by Japanese almost screams with the label "individualism". What is more problematic - the Japanese actually become more open with subsequent generational changes, reveal more feelings, more often say what they think, more often behave in accordance with their own conscience/needs and less restrictively fulfill the expectations of society or even reject them completely. However, we need to take this fact cautiously. It does not necessarily mean that through openness Japanese are more individualistic or more collectivistic [Hamamura 2012; Hamamura, Meijer, Heine, Kamaya, & Hori 2009; Lee, Aaker, & Gardner 2000; Kitayama, Park, Sevincer, Karasawa, & Uskul 2009]. Although the importance of maintaining the public face of the young Japanese people is declining, does it allow to draw conclusions about potentially greater individualism in comparison with parents who used to just publicly play what is expected of them, and in private they would have been doing something completely different - solely guided by their own opinions and needs? Here the answers are not clear either so the concept of *hone-tatamae* proves problematic for universal individualism-collectivism indicators in cross-cultural studies.

Uchi-soto meaning inner and outer group, „ours” vs „other” (not just alien) and a matter of individualism-collectivism

The situation becomes even more confusing when we add another two of the previously mentioned concepts: *uchi* (his/her inner/personal group to which we already belong) and *soto* (broadly understood others, but beware - not literally "strangers" nor "aliens" [IDI_10]). In Japan there seems to be a strong gradation of commitments and behaviors towards oneself and towards others. Some Japanese for example, believe that their relatives or friends do not require such a level of attention and care for the relationship because they will accept ourselves "being truly who we are". That is a concept of *uchi* (inner-groups) – in which people have entered a deeper level of relationship. In turn, *soto* (others, outer-groups) require more attention, more courtesy, more attention on playing the idealized social roles in accordance with the publicly constructed *tatamae* [IDI_4 - IDI_5, IDI_8 - IDI_10]. Similar declarations tend to be understood as social collectivism. Sometimes it is largely the case, but here also the phenomenon of "playing someone" turns out to be crucial. If Japanese become real friends, it means much greater acceptance to reveal the real needs, feelings and opinions, which can be even critical and uncomfortable for some to deal with [IDI_1 - IDI_10]. Sometimes we personally experience a situation where a kind and reserved Japanese "opens up" at some point to throw out a stream of rude criticism towards other people, events, places or things. It is here where the potentially obvious phenomenon of concealment and restraint of one's own personality in outer-groups, for the benefit of others begins to diverge from simple interpretations as collectivism-individualism. Also, the concept of *uchi-soto* extends to a much wider range of activities performed "in company" than in Europe.

As a simple example shows, especially in a research situation, it is difficult to clearly determine whether a Japanese is an individualist or a collectivist when we do not belong to his circle of *uchi*. The problem is, for example, a question from a specific research situation that I discussed in my personal in-depth interviews. Some Japanese will choose the socially correct answer in the survey, a survey, which we Europeans see as a personal and private thing. To the Japanese, who are even not afraid of showing their real "face", filling a survey may be just not that private thing when we simply did not get the honor of joining his circle of *uchi*. It is automatic ritualization, not collectivism and not individualism itself. Of course, it resembles the European temptation to respond "better" (in a more socially or symbolically valued way) than we actually think, but according to the Japanese themselves it should be understood as a completely different process. The process of improving one's image in front of oneself,

morally - also exists in Japan but has nothing to do with answering the survey honestly for the sake of the *soto* researcher [IDI_2, IDI_4-5, IDI_8, IDI_11, IDI_14]. Japanese may seem to be very formal, confirmistic, which again - does not simply mean collectivism, but rather following social rituals in the *soto* group. There is no direct link to what the Japanese believes and does – it is at least a much smaller relationship than between Europeans – at least the questioned Japanese claim like that [IDI_1-IDI_14]. Theoretically, to get around this problem, we may simply assume that the public image is real, because it exists, because it is something that is respected and significant, because it translates into actual actions in the community. In result, sometimes it is correct to treat behavior in *soto* circles as just behavior in society, but what does it say directly about the dimension of individualism or collectivism of a Japanese person behaving before *soto* as it is expected but doing something totally opposite later? Is it individualism, collectivism, none of them?

Here as well, many scientists from different cultures had different opinions. They constructed their indicators of individualism-collectivism based on quantitative questionnaires in a completely different way. Usually, choosing selection based on the statistical significance/reliability of index seemed popular even this was also often influenced by thinking specific to one's own culture. The more aggregated the data, the more the evidence that social conformism in Japan existed, but is this conformity directly translatable into the spectrum of individualism-collectivism? [Hamamura 2012; Hamamura, Meijer, Heine, Kamaya & Hori 2009; Lee, Aaker, & Gardner 2000; Kitayama, Park, Sevincer, Karasawa, & Uskul 2009]. The existence of the *uchi-soto* cultural concept does not discredit neither intercultural comparisons as such, nor the claims of individualization-modernization theory in the strict sense, i.e. after analyzing many factors at once, excluding elements of culturally unclear or omitting the terms of individualism universally and easily defined by the world of Western science and collectivism – it proves generally correct but requires much more in-depth understanding of specific cultural dimensions because they have been actually interpreted mostly wrong in details [Hamamura 2012; Hamamura, Meijer, Heine, Kamaya & Hori 2009; Lee, Aaker, & Gardner 2000; Kitayama, Park, Sevincer, Karasawa, & Uskul 2009].

Conclusions

All the presented linguistic and sociological examples and processes seem to indicate that to make sense out of the dimensions of individualism-collectivism in relation to Japan (and probably any other country from any part of the world), we should understand the key cultural nuances before we proceed to analyze individual phenomena as manifestations of individualism-collectivism. It proves even more crucial when constructing universal, qualitative indicators and comparing cultures with each other. Conscious and responsible researchers - be it anthropologists, statisticians, economists, or sociologists dealing with issues of individualism-collectivism in their research projects – should practice a more sensitive, qualitative understanding of the internal, exclusive cultural phenomena. It should be done by at least discovery, isolation, cataloging and operationalization of them based on the existing literature. Preferably, it requires additional, preliminary cultural studies of at least characteristic and specific phenomena before we start a cross-comparison project. Without understanding such internal, cultural “traps”, we can interpret individual dimensions of indicators quite the opposite than it should be done. Sometimes, there is even no clarity as to how we should interpret them, so it is better to exclude them from the analysis at all or to look for analytical categories more suitable for a given culture than those used by the universal theories of a wider reach or by our colleagues before. General trends in the study of large samples seem not to be extremely bad influenced by mistakes made in detailed cultural concepts interpretations, but as scientists studying the problem suggested, they matter much more for the credibility and detailed narration of explaining general tendencies very much [Hamamura 2012; Hamamura, Meijer, Heine, Kamaya & Hori 2009; Lee, Aaker, & Gardner 2000; Kitayama, Park, Sevincer, Karasawa, & Uskul 2009]. Western researchers should undoubtedly take that into consideration - especially in relation to Asian cultures. On the other hand, Asian scientists commenting on general trends in science should take into account this difficulty and provide useful critical tools to correct the errors of other researchers, to explain those nuanced cultural phenomena and not focus solely on criticism of global science seen as attacks on Asian culture.

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