

Made in Japan from an anthropological and psychoanalytic perspective

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1. Made in Japan from a psychoanalytic perspective

Historically, non-Japanese ethnic tribes could not easily invade and conquer Japan since the country is surrounded by water. During the Sui (AD 581–618) and Tang dynasties (AD 618–907), Japan sent envoys to China who brought back Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, and a ceremonial court dress system closely related to the class system. Japan sometimes imported Chinese culture, while at other times it adopted a closed-door policy. This gave Japan time and space to develop a mature culture specific to itself. Consequently, a typical Japanese culture—including martial arts, manners of tea ceremonies and flower arrangements, and Noh theater—was cultivated during the Muromachi period (AD 1333–1573). As a result, four cultural strata can be found in Japan: the top stratum is Western culture; the second is Chinese culture, including Confucianism; the third is Buddhism; and the last is *animism*, a fusion of ancient Japanese philosophy on the gods and Chinese Taoism. These four cultural strata have continually influenced each other, often engendering new cultural features and vitalizing Japanese society.

Since Japan was not conquered by outsiders, these four cultural strata were never diminished or extinguished and have been preserved over time. Historically, military aggression was often accompanied by cultural oppression and the imposition of religion on conquered people. Major world religions such as Christianity and Islam were imposed by rulers, while ancient indigenous religions (such as animism) were suppressed or extinguished. In Japan, however, monotheistic religions such

as Christianity did not replace animism since the missionaries who came to Japan were expelled. Missionaries were thought to be involved in exchanging Japanese women as slaves for Western weapons and ammunition in the sixteenth century; such arms would be used by the local government of Kyushu island to rebel against the central government in the seventeenth century. Missionaries were also thought to represent the vanguard of cultural and military imperialism.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, since Japanese people are not thoroughly “castrated,” they are demi-humans or children. Castration means that people reluctantly accept that absolute enjoyment (*jouissance* in French) is prohibited, though not impossible. A preweaned infant hugged by his or her mother is considered to be in a state of absolute enjoyment. Believing that this state of absolute enjoyment is lost forever produces despair and intolerable pain. Therefore, absolute enjoyment is recast as prohibited (though not impossible in principle), and by accepting this law of prohibition—which the father or *father-god* imposes on child—moral order comes about and people develop a cherished conscience. This psychoanalytic drama reveals the meaning of castration, and people passing through castration are called *neurotics*. In Japan, Christianity was expelled by rulers in early modern times, and accordingly, the force of the father-god is weak in the Japanese mind and imperfectly imposes the law of prohibition on the child. Considering also that in Japanese society shame is emphasized rather than sin, castration is incomplete, and therefore Japanese people are “childish” or unable to become adults. In other words, Japanese people are “perverted” because people who do not think of the law of castration as prohibition—but, rather, *deny* this law in their minds, even if they recognize that there exists a law of castration—are considered perverse. For example, in the novel *Alice in Wonderland*, the law of science is reversed or *perverted*, and ordinarily the devil resides in such a perverted world. Similarly, in Japan the way of life—one’s sense of value, work-life balance, and so on—are reversed from the standpoint of Western culture. Japan is a kind of holy place of perversion. It is very difficult to find mature adults in Japan; most are childish people who bully the weak, women, and workers. In psychoanalysis, bullying (teasing) and sexual/moral/power harassment are considered sadism, which is a mental illness; as such, many people in Japan should be in mental hospitals since a great deal of bullying occurs every day. The appendix at the end of this paper shows the Japanese position as compared with the West from an anthropological and psychoanalytic perspective.

Japan is famous for its animation (cartoons). In Western society, pedophilia is

prohibited, but in Japan, there are a lot of adult men who are pedophiles because they are not mentally mature. Figure 1 shows an example of a *hentai* cartoon. Hentai refers to both pornographic comics and sexual abnormality. Perverted Japanese adult men love young girls because adult women do not take them seriously; therefore, the heroines in Japanese animation are not mature women but girls. For example, Figure 2 shows Nausicaä, the heroine of *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, directed by Miyazaki Hayao. Unlike Nausicaä, in Western cinema a mature woman (such as Milla Jovovich in *Resident Evil: Retribution*) usually fights an enemy. In Western society, transitioning from a girl to a woman is good and normal, but in Japan, remaining an immature girl is desirable. Japan is similar to the world of *Alice in Wonderland* and produced the highly perverted novel *Yapoo: The Human Cattle*, written by Numa Shozo. Since Japanese men are incompletely castrated, they neglect the order of morality and love the cruel scenes depicted in comics. Therefore, Japanese hentai comics often portray barbarous scenes in which girls are raped; such scenes help immature adult men, or demi-humans, compensate for their inferiority complexes.

Figure 1. Hentai cartoon



source : <http://japanesehentai.blog.fc2.com/>

Figure 2. Nausicaä



source : <http://www.ghibli.jp/>

2. Made in Japan from an anthropological perspective

Generally, animism is the worldview that natural physical entities—including animals, plants, and often inanimate objects or phenomena—possess a spiritual essence. In other words, animism is interpreted as human sociality (human dispositions and social attributes) projected onto the non-human world (natural

beings); this traditional animism is based on an ontological dualism that separates human from nonhuman beings. For example, Figure 3 shows a hero dog called Weed from the comic *The Legend of Weed Who Has a Silver Fang*; Weed fights for peace.

In recent anthropology, radical animism is referred to as perspectivism (Viveiros de Castro; 2012). One characteristic of perspectivism is multinaturalism, which presupposes that all natural physical entities—including animals, plants, and even inanimate objects or phenomena—have a similar spirit (soul) despite having different bodies or appearances. This philosophy suggests that all natural physical entities have family, community, ceremonial/moral rules, and systems of trade similar to humans. There is only one culture, but it has various bodies and appearances. Contrary to multinaturalism, Western multiculturalism presupposes one concept of nature with various cultures based on different tribes or species. Japanese people do not distinguish themselves from natural beings and feel that humans change and expire as all natural beings do. For Japanese people, it is not peculiar for animals or plants to “speak” and become heroes or heroines in novels and other narratives. For example, Figure 4 shows a Japanese comics hero called *Dog-Yaksha* (*yaksha* means “demon”) who has doglike ears and semihuman features, and fights against other demons.

Figure 3. The hero dog called *Weed*



source : <http://www.nihonbungeisha.co.jp/weed/kabegami/017/k017.jpg>

Figure 4. The hero demon *Dog-Yaksha*

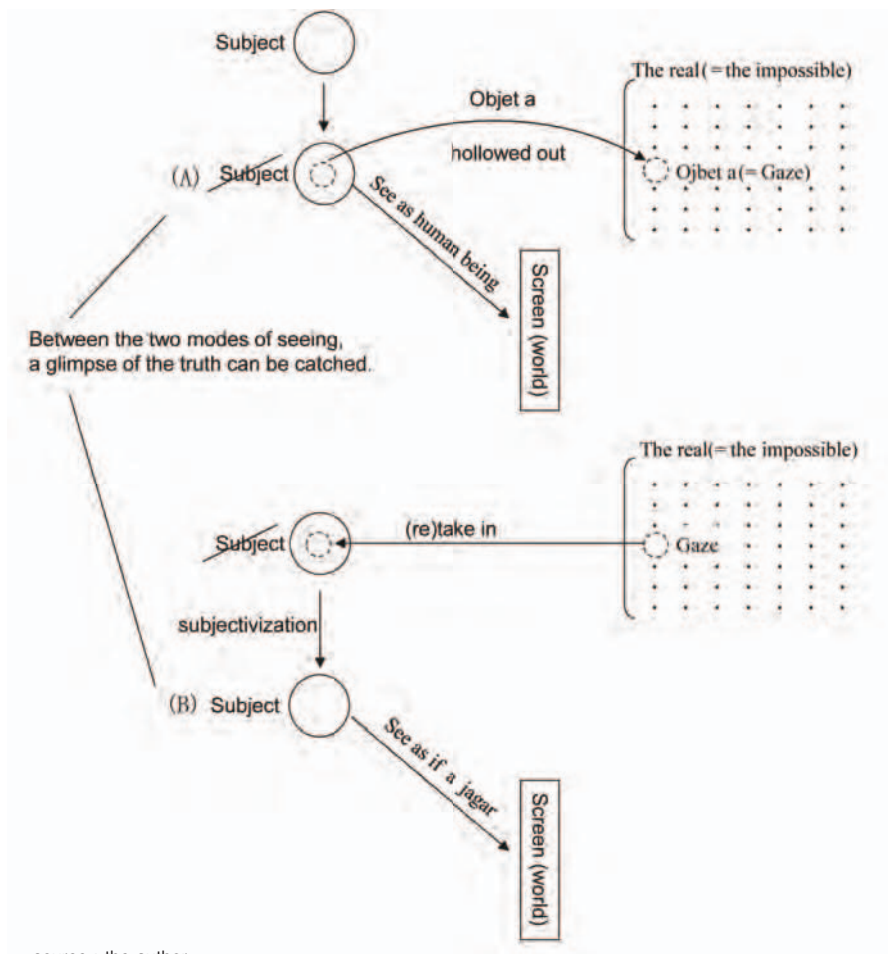


source : http://shao-lulu-aquadrops.cocolog-wbs.com/blog/2007/02/492_dc28.html

The second aspect of perspectivism involves the perspective of truth. Figure 5 shows how the dancing shaman has the position of the perspective of the truth, for which Nietzsche employed the term *midday*—at midday, people can overcome

relative truth and receive not transcendental but immanent truth. In Figure 5, subjects are at first castrated by losing the mother's gaze, which recognizes the being of baby itself (she does not want anything other than baby itself). There is a diagonal line on this subject (A), indicating castration. This castrated subject (A) sees the world (screen), but truth does not appear on the screen because truth is located in the impossible outer-world area, which is called "the real" in Lacanian terminology. Subject (B) is the dancing shaman who retakes (incorporates) the gaze, which is located in the real. The dancing shaman sometimes sees the world from the perspective of a jaguar and sometimes from that of a normal human being. Between the two modes of seeing, the immanent truth can be captured. With regard to the above-mentioned comics, *Dog-Yaksha* sometimes plays the role of a monster and sometimes that of a boy while fighting for the heroine.

Figure 5. The second aspect of perspectivism

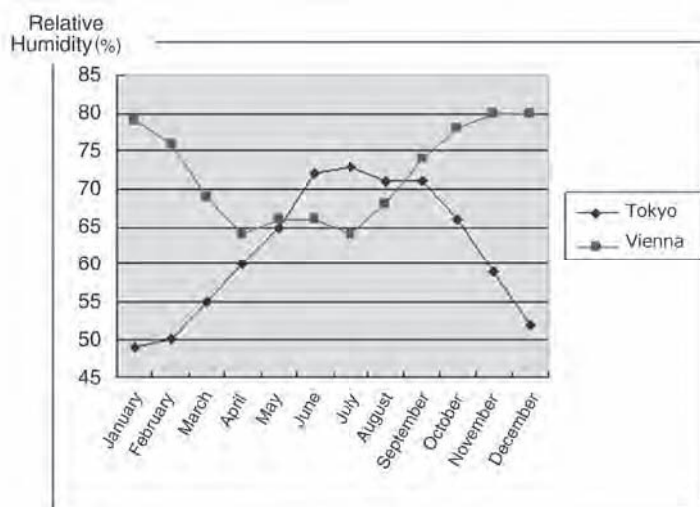


source : the author

3. Japanese climate and made in Japan

Table 1 shows the differences between Mediterranean climates and Asian monsoon climates in terms of relative humidity. Western-style clothing is suitable for Mediterranean climates (hot, dry summers and mild, wet winters). However, the Japanese kimono is suitable for the Asian monsoon climate (hot, humid summers and cold, dry winters). The kimono is designed to allow the wearer to breathe well and release hot air through the sleeves or collar in the summer, and retain heat by wearing extra layers of clothing underneath in the winter. There is great variety among the seasons in Japan. There are at least six main seasons—spring, rain (*tsuyu*), summer, typhoon (*nowaki*), fall, and winter—and as many as 24. People often change clothes due to the complex weather conditions. When Japanese people change clothes for the subtle and transitional seasons, they match the design patterns on the skirt of the kimono with the given season. The subtle and transitional Japanese seasons, as well as the culture of multinaturalism, have engendered the complicated flora and fauna that are reflected in the patterns on kimonos. With kimono design patterns, Japanese express their keen sense of the seasons; the kimono is viewed as a device used to display the subtle transitions of the seasons, as with the use of the wind bell or moon-viewing dumplings.

Table 1. Mediterranean climate vs. Asian monsoon climate



source : the author

Being in a temperate zone, Japan has unique climate characteristics, including various rain patterns. For example, *samidare* refers to early summer rain with intermittent showers, and *shigure* refers to drizzling rain in late autumn and early winter. Japan is surrounded by the sea. Dust from the Yellow River region in China rarely reaches Japan, but frequent rainfall washes the lingering dust away. Therefore, kimonos do not need to protect against sand dust like Chinese dress. The kimono presupposes a hygienic concept and complements an environment that has very little dust.

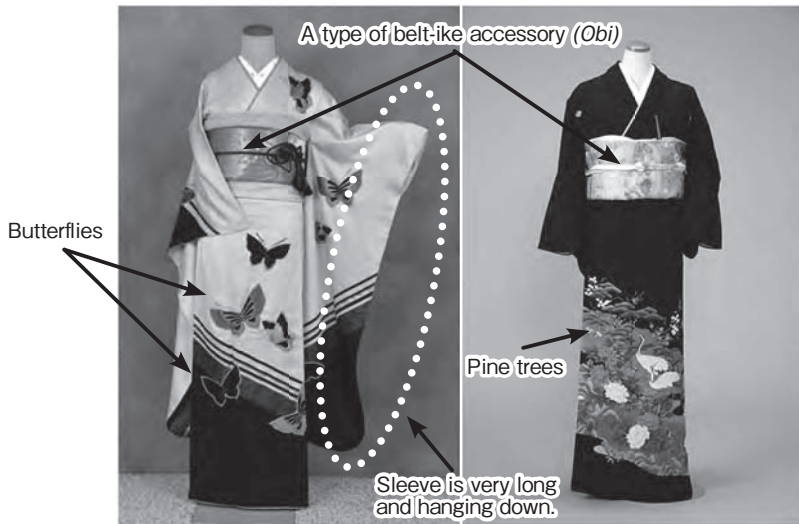
4. Case study: The traditional luxurious kimono

The word *kimono* literally means “a thing to wear” (*ki* meaning “wear” and *mono* meaning “thing”). Various design patterns on the skirt of the Japanese kimono reflect this radical animism (perspectivism), as mentioned above, that are reflective of Japan itself. In Figure 6, for example, the butterfly pattern on the kimono does not symbolize a fickle woman (coquette). In fact, it acts as a symbol of resurrection or revival—like a caterpillar or chrysalis metamorphosing into a beautiful butterfly. Pine trees, on the other hand, as shown in Figure 6, symbolize immortality. The question then arises whether all kimono patterns can be interpreted as human sociality (revival or immortality) imposed on the nonhuman world (such as butterflies or pine trees), based on the traditional concept of animism (dualism).

In Figure 7, a kind of belt-like accessory (*obi*) fixes the kimono by being wrapped around the body. The price of this obi is high (about 80% of the price of the kimono), and it has been compared to the tapestry tradition of the West. In addition to wrapping around the body, the obi has another function: it changes the kimono from a one-piece dress into a two-piece dress, which enables a greater variety of design patterns. Another function of the obi is that it guarantees the beauty of the backside of the person wearing the kimono.

Observing an obi on a kimono, a Chinese student once asked me, “What is that? It’s like the humps of a camel.” The symbolic meaning of the obi is that it connects a man’s heart with a woman’s heart; as such, only a boyfriend has the right to untie a woman’s obi. Does the obi imply feminine virtue, similar to the chastity belt but without a key?

Figure 6. Butterflies and pine trees drawn on kimonos



source : <http://www.chiso.co.jp>

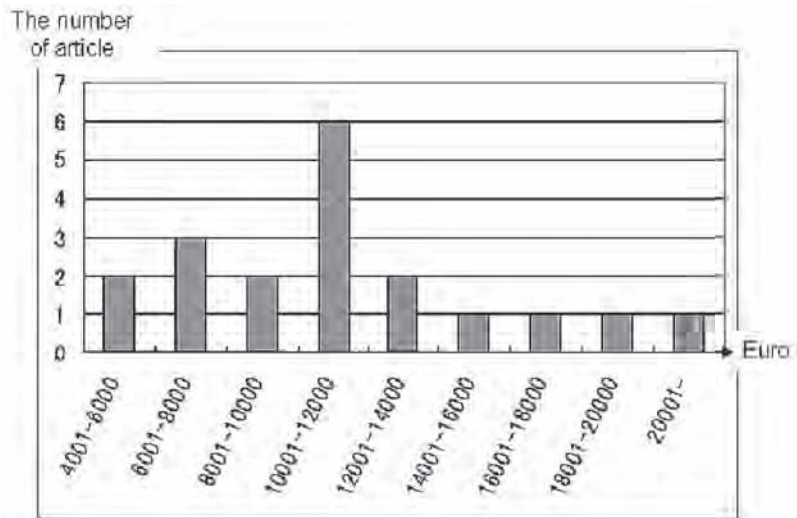
Figure 7. A belt-like accessory (*obi*)



source : <http://kimono-jin.jugem.jp/?eid=1143>

Table 2 shows the price range of kimonos for unmarried women. In comparison with Western clothes, kimonos are often made with expensive silk that the common people of the Edo era could only buy secondhand. Whether fat or thin, a wearer must wrap the kimono around his or her body. In other words, people do not have to maintain a slender figure since the obi adjusts the kimono; a kimono need not be replaced in case of weight gain. This is why the cloth of the kimono is primarily made of very expensive silk.

Table 2. Kimono price ranges for unmarried woman



source : <http://www.chiso.co.jp>

In addition to being expensive and durable, and containing beautiful design patterns, the kimono exhibits a kind of luxuriousness in its determination of the sophisticated behaviors of the Japanese. Figure 6 shows the very long, hanging sleeves of the kimono. For example, if a woman wearing a kimono waves her long sleeves slowly and gracefully, it means she is enticing a man, but if she waves her sleeves quickly and looks back, it means good-bye. Italian designer Ettore Sottsass said that drinking water using a paper cup is not desirable since we cannot experience the coldness of the water through the paper cup (Corraini; 1990). In general, sophisticated behavior is considered graceful and deliberate; therefore, using heavy glass, such as Baccarat glass, in daily life may add sophistication to one's manner of dining.

It is said that Japanese people have no custom of repapering the walls in their houses, because after taking off the kimono, people often hang it on an *iko* (a rack for temporarily hanging kimono) and appreciate it from a distance as a substitute for wallpaper.

Coco Chanel once said that Balenciaga did not love women because he observed the wrinkled skin on the necks of middle-aged women who wore dresses he designed; thus he broke with Chanel. Balenciaga intended to distract people's attention from the wrinkled skin by accessorizing with gorgeous necklaces. The kimono has a similar effect since the wrinkles of the neck are covered by a collar

and attention is directed toward the beautiful and colorful patterns on the kimono. In other words, the kimono is wearable regardless of age and does not require accessories such as jewelry or *haut horlogerie*.

While the kimono has many qualities of luxurious clothing, its design is also suitable for the Japanese climate. In contemporary Japan, people usually wear Western-style clothing. In the future, however, Japanese people may rediscover their cultural uniqueness (perspectivism) as reflected in the design patterns of kimonos, hopefully causing a revival of the kimono.

5. Conclusion

From an anthropological perspective, there is traditional animism and perspectivism in Japan, and therefore Japanese people do not distinguish themselves from animals and plants. For example, since they treat silkworms with care and cleanliness as if they were their own children, the quality of Japanese silk thread is the highest in the world; in Peru or Vietnam, however, people have no habit of feeding insects. Japanese people are good at feeding animals and plants since Japan is surrounded by water; it was nonsensical or impossible for them to deplete natural resources and then move to an untapped land to exploit it. Japanese are essentially agricultural people permanently settled on their land.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, Japanese people are children, and their basic desire is to remain children and reject maturity. Figure 8 shows the Licca-chan doll, which is popular among Japanese girls, while Figure 9 shows the Barbie doll loved by American girls. The Licca-chan doll reflects the feelings that Japanese girls should remain immature forever, while the Barbie doll reflects the desire of American girls to quickly become glamorous adults, get married, and have children. In fact, there is a line of “pregnant” Barbie dolls in which the abdomen can be removed to reveal a baby inside.

In general, Japanese products leave nothing to be desired in the way of attentiveness or scrupulous care because customers are regarded as children who need care and great attention to detail.

Figure 8. Licca-chan doll



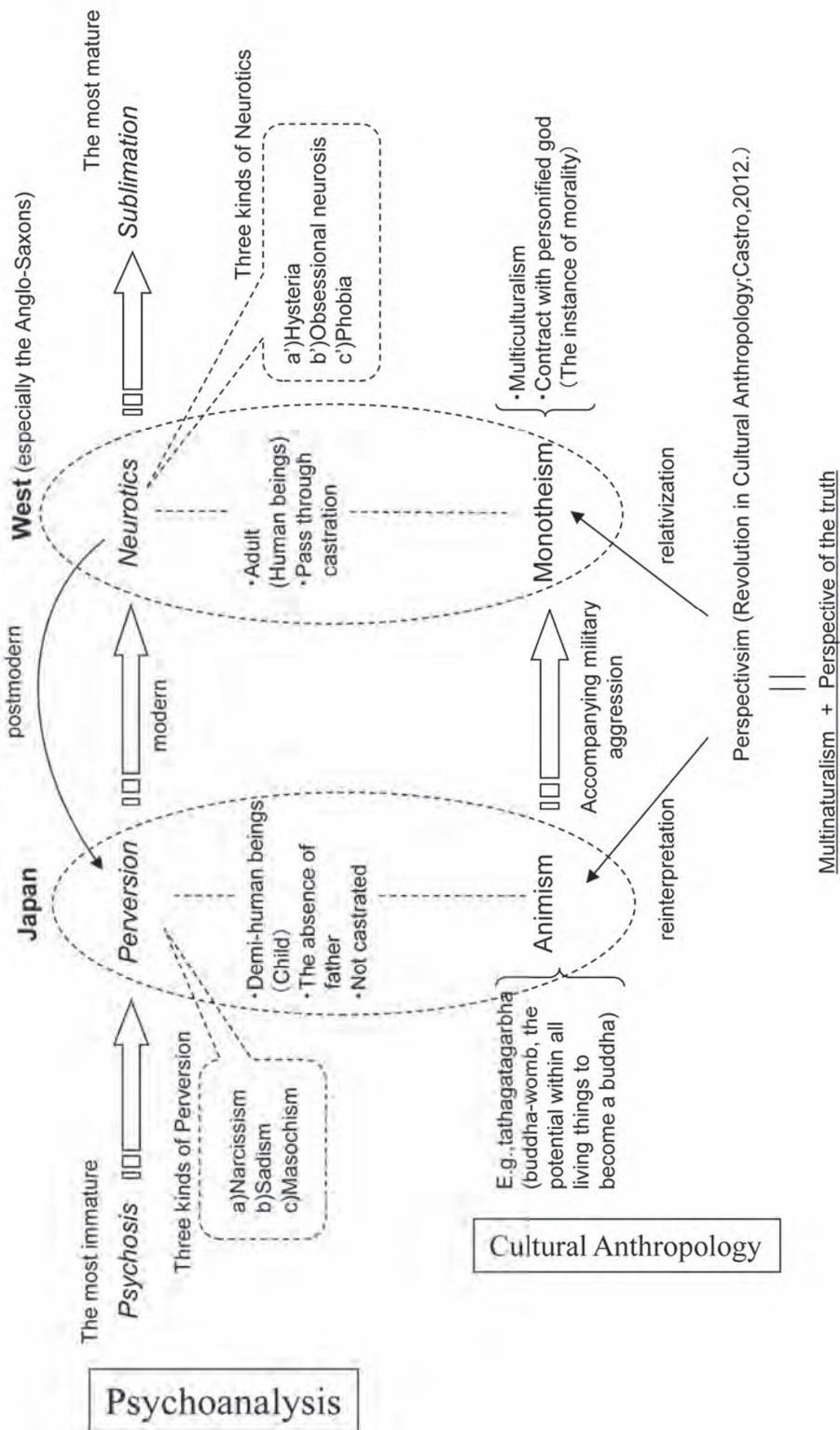
source : <http://licca.takaratomy.co.jp/>

Figure 9. Barbie doll



source : <http://barbie-japan.jp/main/>

Appendix: The cultural background of Made in Japan



source : the author

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