

Psychology in Japan

In the 17th century Japan was isolated by its geographical location and its government. The Tokugawa Shogunate feared the spread of Christianity and decided to trade only with China and Holland. This isolation lasted for over 250 years – the Edo era, a peaceful period during which the arts and learning flourished – until the arrival in 1853 of Commodore Perry and his US fleet of ‘black ships’ forced Japan to open up to the outside world. The Meiji Restoration in 1868, which brought an end to the Shogunate and the Edo era, was the product of two movements: one towards modernisation of the nation and the other towards restoration of imperial rule.

With this opening up to the outside world, the Japanese became hungry for Western knowledge, and psychology was amongst a range of imported subjects, such as medicine, law, science, engineering, philosophy and education.

But imperial policy brought four major wars in the 20th century, ending with defeat in World War II when atomic bombs were dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima. During the period of the allied occupation after the war, Japanese systems were reformed under the US Mission. Japan recovered economically to export many industrial products, to which cultural products, such as Manga cartoons, have more recently been added.

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Beginnings of psychology in Japan

There were fixed social strata in the Edo era (an age of feudalism), with no mobility. However, education was taken seriously at all levels of society. Towards the end of the Edo era, there were nearly 300 fief schools (*hanko*) in the country, and although no accurate statistics are available, several times that number of private academies (*shijuku*) existed (Amano, 1990). So, when opened up to the West in the 19th century, Japan seemed to be one of the more education-minded countries.

However, there was no intellectual tradition of psychology during the feudalism era in Japan. Although a psychology as metaphysics or philosophy of mind had been growing from remote times under the influence of Buddhism and Confucianism (Kido, 1961), there seems little connection between Western and Eastern psychologies (Sato, 2002).

After the Meiji Restoration the Ministry of Education (*Mombusho*) published the first book of *shinrigaku* (psychology) in 1875. This psychology remained the metaphysical psychology rather than modern (positive) psychology.

Psychology today

Today, psychology is one of the most popular subjects at university. But because the number of students is fixed, entering a department of psychology is highly competitive.

The total number of graduate schools related to psychology has risen steadily from very few in 1950 to around 180 now. The number of courses related to clinical psychology has been the main contributor to growth since 1990. Before then, clinical psychology tended to be taught alongside

educational psychology. Independent courses in clinical psychology are now found, although there is no official certificate of clinical psychology.

The growth in popularity of clinical psychology may be related to events such as the 1995 Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake and the poison gas attacks in Tokyo, allegedly caused by the Aum Shinrikyo religious group. The mental state of the victims came to the fore, and the abbreviation ‘PTSD’ became famous in Japan. From these humble beginnings clinical psychology is certainly growing in popularity: the biggest of the 30 associations related to Japanese psychology is the Association of Japanese Clinical Psychology (AJCP), established in 1982.

Special areas of research

There are many psychologists in Japan, and it’s difficult to describe all the research areas. So we’ve picked some projects promoted by the 21st-century COE (Center of Excellence) programme, an initiative by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) to further strengthen educational research throughout Japan. In the area of human sciences, some programmes related to psychology have been selected and are now progressing well.

Professor Fujita leads the ‘center of excellence for psychology’ at Kyoto University, aiming for a comprehensive understanding of mental functions by integration of experimental, field and clinical approaches to mind.

Professor Uchida of Ochanomizu Women’s University is a leader of the project named ‘Study of human development from birth to death’. There are four subprojects, looking at

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Japanese Psychological Association:

www.soc.nii.ac.jp/jpa/index-e.html

Primate Research Institute, Kyoto University:

www.pri.kyoto-u.ac.jp/ai/index-E.htm

Tatsuya Sato’s homepage:

www.psy.ritsumeai.ac.jp/~satot/English/ENGvisit.html

fundamental psychological processes of human development and their educational applications, diagnosis of issues in human development, studies of social and cultural factors affecting the transition from child to adult, and longitudinal studies on the crucial transitions at middle and old age and social support.

Professor Yamagishi of Hokkaido University is trying to create a new centre for the 'study of cultural and ecological foundations of mind'. From the perspective of social psychology, this project intends to design an international centre for research and education to generate new understandings of society and culture.

Besides these projects there are other COE programmes that use psychologists. The University of Tokyo has two: 'Center for research and development of core academic competence', mainly involving educational psychologists, and 'A construction of bio-thanatology concerning culture and value of life', namely research activities of nerves and brain. Keio University has the project 'Toward an integrated methodology for the study of the mind' and psychologists launched the subproject of 'development and evolution'.

The COE programme tends to pick up the national universities' and some major private universities' programmes, 80 per cent of university students in Japan belong to the private universities. Here, the 'Academic frontier programs' and the 'Open research center program' are financially supported by MEXT for private universities. Professor Inoue leads the 'center of psychological support for regions' at Otemon Gakuin University. Professor Kobayashi of Kibi International University is a leader of the project named 'Theory of mind from the viewpoint of the behavior analysis'. Professor Mochizuki of

THE FIRST JAPANESE PSYCHOLOGIST

Y. Motora was born into a samurai (Japanese warrior class) family at 1858, in the last days of the Tokugawa Shogunate. He entered the mission school named the Doshisha English School of Kobe at 1876. Two years later he quit for Tokyo, and became a teacher in some private schools.

Then Motora decided to go to the US. After studying philosophy at Boston University, he moved to the Johns Hopkins University to study psychology under Stanley Hall, one of the eminent psychologists at that time. Hall and Motora's (1887) paper on skin sensitivity in the *American Journal of Psychology* was the first paper on which a Japanese psychologist's name appeared. Motora got his PhD in 1888 with a dissertation entitled 'Exchange, considered as the principle of social life'.

After returning to Japan, Motora began to teach psychophysics at the Imperial University (now Tokyo University) in 1888. This was the seed of modern psychology in Japan (Sato et al., 2004). Motora was appointed to teach and study psychology at this university in 1890, and opened the first formal laboratory of psychology in 1903.

After Motora's death in 1912 his student Matsumoto succeeded him in his chair. Matsumoto had studied at Yale University, and after earning his PhD in 1899 he went to Leipzig to study under Wundt. After returning to Japan in 1906, Matsumoto opened the second psychological laboratory in Japan at Kyoto. Eight new laboratories followed in the 1920s (Oyama et al., 2002).



Ritsumeikan University tries to create the new centre for the study of human services based on the cooperation of psychology, education and social welfare.

Associations and celebrations

The Japanese Psychological Association (JPA) was established in 1927 as Japan's first organisation for researchers in psychology. Since then, the JPA has contributed to Japan's academic development at the core of the nation's research activity.

Before World War II the association was a small-scale organisation, since chairs of psychology existed at only 15 universities and researchers in psychology were even fewer. Current membership exceeds 7000 members. Representing the study of psychology in Japan, the association has

also promoted international exchange as a member association of the International Union of Psychological Science (IUPsyS).

In 2003 the Japanese Association of Psychology celebrated the centenary of the foundation of the laboratory of psychology in Japan with a symposium at the 63rd Annual Convention of the Japanese Psychological Association. Now it's time for Japanese psychologists to start the next century.

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AI PROJECTS

Ai is not artificial intelligence, but the name of Japan's famous chimpanzee. Ai has been learning linguistic skills since 1978 at the Primate Research Institute, Kyoto University. Ai Projects was founded by Dr Murofushi, an associate professor and the head of the section of psychology at the time. Dr Matsuzawa, then a young assistant professor, assisted her. First, this project was inspired by ape-language studies; later the recognition of numbers by the chimpanzee was studied. Then Ai became the first chimpanzee who learned to use arabic numerals to represent quantities.

The project increasingly covers wide research areas, and Ai's baby Ayumu has also participated in the project since 2000. The cultural transmission of chimpanzees' knowledge and skills from one generation to the next is the main area of research interest. Dr Matsuzawa (2003) suggests that Japan's unique natural and cultural background facilitates the study of chimpanzees and other primates – monkeys are familiar animals in Japan and are often found in old Japanese tales.