

The Ways of Life and the Self in Japanese Society: Examination of
Biological/Psychological Data of Japanese Company Employees

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Cultural psychology is an empirical, scientific study of the human *kokoro* (mind, psyche, or consciousness), concerned primarily with how *kokoro* is shaped by its social, cultural, and ecological environment, and how it in turn gives rise to meaning, value, and other elements of culture — or components of a socio-ecological environment. In this presentation, I would like to discuss the present and future of the Japanese sense of self based on my work as a cultural psychologist.

One of my findings is that the Japanese self can be described in terms of a "two-story house" model. The lower and upper levels of this structure represent, respectively, the interdependent and independent sides of the individual's self. An independent-oriented self is characterized by having its own unique value set and being able to think on its own. To an interdependent-oriented self, someone with these traits may appear "too different" or "overly assertive". In contrast, an interdependent self tends to place high value on interpersonal harmony, often to the point of appearing, to an independent self, to be lacking in initiative.

These contrasting sides together make up the representative Japanese "two-story self", with the interdependent side occupying the lower floor and providing the foundation. This structure reflects the results of earlier cultural psychology studies that revealed an interdependent self-construal as dominant among the Japanese population. As to the cause of this tendency, the latest research points to the influence of agriculture in general, and collective activities in farming communities in particular.

On the other hand, in business and elsewhere, globalization has encouraged the spread of an individual-focused work environment, typically characterized by merit-based promotion and other "upper-floor" features. Since 2014, in collaboration with numerous businesses and nonprofit organizations, my laboratory has regularly held workshops exploring "organizations conducive to individual growth". At the same time, we have been surveying corporate employees via questionnaires sent out to organizations of

various sizes across a wide range of sectors. We would ask the participating companies to try to include all their employees in the surveys, and in return provide them with feedback based on the collected data.

One of the key findings from these efforts is that independent-minded individuals — those who value competition and autonomy — along with organizations comprised of such people, tend to be happier than those who are more interdependent-minded. In contrast, we have discovered that emphasis on interdependence, which in Japan is more or less taken for granted — a component of an essential infrastructure — has little positive effect on happiness at both individual and organizational levels.

Yet another survey, based not on self-reports but on analyses of the conserved transcriptional response to adversity (CTRA, a biological health indicator), suggested that interdependent-oriented individuals are generally healthier than their more independent-oriented peers.

These results seem to suggest the need for a system that promotes both happiness and health by ensuring harmony between the self's two sides.