Japanese Child-Rearing in Comparative Culture Studies; Maternal Separation Anxiety

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Introduction

In comparative culture studies the following are often identified as features characteristic of Japanese mother-infant relationships. First is the close physical infants. Second is the extremely few instances of mother-infant separation seen during infancy. Even today, when about half of all mothers with infants work outside the home, the desire to raise their children themselves at least until their children reach the age of three still prevails. According to a survey of 467 mothers with infants (average monthly age 11 months), 16.1% expressed, “I want to hire baby-sitters” and 81.9% stated, “I do not want to hire baby-sitters” while 24.8% for mothers with children in their early childhood (average age 3 years and 7 months). Development of their children, for example weaning, makes mothers recognize Mother-Infant Separation. While mothers do expect their children to develop, it could be assumed that mothers also feel maternal separation anxiety caused by loneliness due to separation, resistance of giving up control over their children, and anxiety from their inability to secure their children’s safety. In presentation, I would like to focus on maternal separation anxiety.

Issues and Objectives

Since Bowlby (1988), it has been believed that the attachment qualities in early childhood play a significant role in forming one’s personality in later life, and a growing number of studies have supported the findings that these attachment qualities affect the social and emotional development of preschool and school children (Ainsworth, et al, 1978; Cassidy 1998). The following studies conducted in Japan show that there were fewer children categorized as avoidant (A), as compared with similar studies conducted in the United States and that separation anxiety is related to the child’s adaptation in kindergarten (Miyake 1990; Nakano 1991). The process of Mother-Infant Separation has been found to be related with borderline and emotional problems in adolescence as based on the separation-individuation theory (Mahler, Pine & Bergman 1981) and other clinical studies. There is a Japanese study demonstrating the relationship between the stability of separation and socialization in adolescence (Shimizu 1999). In this study, the type of separation in infancy does not predict an individual’s socialization in the future, but the stability of separation in infancy affects the ‘sense of self trust.’ It was discussed that socialization as a skill can be obtained through later processes of development.

The Dictionary of Mental Medicine, new edition, defines Infant Separation Anxiety as anxiety caused by the separation of mother or alternative persons to whom they depend on. Anxiety itself is not a clinical problem but rather healthy response indicating that there is a good mother-child relationship. Child Separation Anxiety is re-
flected in the child’s behavior in trying to find its mother through crying. Once children recognize that mothers will always come back, the resistance (tolerance) to separation can be developed. However, there are few studies discussing Maternal Separation Anxiety from a mother’s perspective. Nakano (1980) conducted research on the hypothesis that weekly parentchild classes, children who are not to be able to separate from their mothers are closely attached to their mothers. And the mothers are either extremely protected or neglected. The results show a relationship between a mother’s poor use of discipline and the children who are not to be able to separate from their mothers. It was discussed that in cases of children at around age three who are unable to separate from their mothers, it is not them but their mothers who have anxiety towards child’s independence and separation. Mizuno (1998) conducted a survey and found that mothers with high separation anxiety towards their infants have a strong sense of a traditional mother’s role and unwilling to seek baby-sitters, compared with mothers with low separation anxiety. In the following study, mothers with high separation anxiety towards their infants are likely to feel the importance of separation from their children in early childhood but still have high anxiety. As pointed out by Sugiyama (1982), further research is required to discuss Maternal Separation-related behaviors.

Considering the Background of this Study

(1) assumes that Maternal Separation Anxiety is a reflection of the’ inability to be separated from children’, and the’ inability to ask somebody to baby-sit’ as based on Nakano (1980)

(2) assesses the amount of anxiety by asking mothers[] "If you have a person who will baby-sit for you, how much time will you allow for baby-sitting?"

(3) discusses whether the amount of anxiety can be reflected in the duration mothers can allow somebody to baby-sit, in case an actual separation situation is created.

Method

1. To create the observational situations

Referring to Settlage (1991), Okimoto (1997, oral presentation, submitted), the Semi-Structured Observational Situation was conducted. There were 4 situations[] stage 1 (Play), stage 2 (Phone call, aimed to take mothers’ attention away from their children), stage 3 (Interview), and stage 4 (Physical separation). Unlike Okimoto (1997), the physical situation was made to be as natural as possible for mothers, and mothers could decide the time of separation freely in these observational situations. In the practical setting, we explained about the filming by saying, “We would like to videotape how your child will get used to the place and the people”.

Then we moved to the“ phone call”, and the“ interview” which would take the mother’s attention away from the child.

Afterwards, we made the mother leave the room by saying,” Please go and bring some sweets that (name of child) likes, because, we would like to see how( name of child) will do”. Despite the physical separation, which was supposed to be avoided in case the mothers verbalized a refusal, there was no mother who actually refused(There was one pair who refused the physical separation because the child was sleeping)

The mother goes into the room where the sweets are prepared and where the video taping is monitored. The staff would suggest to the mother[] “Why don’t you watch and see( through the TV monitor) how( name of child) is doing?” We decided not to prevent the mothers from immediately returning to their children.

2. Subjects

24 pairs of mother and child (Table 1). They joined the experiments in the K University laboratory during December-January of 1998. The average age of mothers was 32.2 years (SD[] 2.2, range[] 28- 35, excluded two no answers). Most were housewives (18), the rest were full-time workers (4) and part-time workers (2).

3. Survey items related to separation time

1) Separation time

Using the videotapes, we counted the time of seconds elapsed from the mother leaving to reentering the room.

(1) Separation anxiety
’Duration allowed for baby-sitting’, ‘a place where someone can be asked to baby-sit’ and’ prior acquaintance with the interviewers’. 
(2) Development score
Enjyoji's Development Test': moving movement, motoring of hands, basic living habits, social relationship, speaking, understanding of language'.

(3) Mother's survey
Three items regarding children's temperament[9] While trying to explore the new place, the children actively move around (running, jumping, climbing) "", They approach those who visit the place"” They look away and stay close to their mothers to avoid encountering children they have never met (a reverse item). Parent attitude towards child-care: five items regarding child attachment[9] It is not a good idea to ask somebody to baby-sit at a day-care center"” Babies cannot do anything by themselves"”. I become bored watching babies"”. I do not want to be close to babies (a reverse item) "”. Three items regarding anxiety in child-care[9] I am anxious about child-care”. I do not know much about babies”.” I am not confident about child-care”.

(4) Others
Questions about living(behavior of children when they are with mothers or others who take care of children in the daytime, or whom children sleep with, etc.) , the position of the mother and the child while entering the room, incidence of eye contact in the phone call situation, and whether the child cried at the time of separation were discussed.

Table 1. Monthly age of children at the time of VTR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>24.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE</td>
<td>.3</td>
<td>.3</td>
<td>.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Min.</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max.</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>28.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Average time of separation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Min.</th>
<th>Max.</th>
<th>Missing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>239.636</td>
<td>125.383</td>
<td>26.732</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>32.000</td>
<td>522.000</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Result

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items related to separation time</th>
<th>Mother with shorter time of separation</th>
<th>Mother with longer time of separation</th>
<th>Levels of significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Prior acquaintance with the interviewers</td>
<td>Mother do not know the interviewers before the experiment</td>
<td>Mother know the interviewers before the experiment</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Children’s temperament</td>
<td>Looking away and staying close to their mothers to avoid encountering children they have never met</td>
<td>Active in exploring in the new place and approach those who visited the place</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Development score</td>
<td>More than the average ability of development of motoring of hands and language</td>
<td>Average development</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More than the average ability of development of moving movement, social relationship</td>
<td>Average development</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Video presentation

We will show the separation situations for the cases of minimum and maximum separation time (one boy and one girl in each). In the first case of a boy with short separation time, we asked the mother how she felt when she went out to bring the sweets. She answered ‘I wondered how he was doing, I thought he was having fun, I know he does not cry in this situation, he needs me, when he sleeps, but he knows everybody is nice to him, (in the room) he is not afraid of people’. She emphasized that she was anxious about the separation. In the second case of a boy with long separation time, the mother mentioned her anxiety, ‘I was a bit worried if he is OK. Because he cries when he is with his father. He is fine today, but when he is sleepy, upon waking up, he is worried, he tries to look for me’. In the third case of a girl with short separation time, the mother was conscious about the resistance to the separation, ‘I thought she was going to cry, I hesitated even though I had to leave (because it is an experiment), for the moment’. She also pointed out the effect of interviewers, ‘She is not going to cry if she knows the person’. In the fourth case of a girl with long separation time, the mother said ‘I thought she was going to cry, but she stopped crying earlier than I thought, she is playing as usual’. The interviewer, the mother, and the child all seem to be relaxed. There was a mother who said ‘I am more worried if he/she does not cry’. Another one expressed her loneliness and boredom, saying ‘He/She is fine’. She was expecting the child to cry and long for her. The other one wanted the child not to cry and lose his/her temper, ‘I thought about what I could do if he/she bothered someone’.

Discussion

From these findings, we will discuss the following issues:
(1) Issues from the experiments
(2) Issues to be concerned in the future
(3) Maternal-Child Separation in Japan
(4) Mother’s support.

(1) Issues from the experiments[5] First, the separation time was related to whether mothers are acquainted with the interviewers and whether mothers would come back soon in case the interviewer is a stranger. Mothers might have an anxiety that prevents her to ask somebody to babysit. These findings support the finding of Sugawara (1997) that Mother-Child Separation is related to how mothers perceive their relationship with the baby-sitters, and interpersonal anxiety affects the mother’s separation behavior. Second, the mothers with the long separation time regarded their children’s temperament in the new situation as active with no display of shyness. The mothers could be separated by believing in their child’s ability to adapt. In the Temperament studies, temperament in infancy can be changed through interaction with the environment until adolescence and late adolescence. Comparatively, it is said that the stranger anxiety when placed in unknown situation in the childhood could be easily kept as self-control tendency. Therefore, the child’s shyness would make the mother’s separation time shorter, as a result, a dependent environment is created and will reinforce child dependency.

Third, short separation time is related to the development of children. The actual separation anxiety of whether the mother would like to know about her shy child is doing increases mother’s attention to their children. As a result, it promotes the development of their children. It can be argued that good child development might motivate mothers and promote mother-to-child attachment in this period. However, it is said that the developmental differences of children will be evident in low social classes, but disappears in middle class. The subjects of this study were all from middle class families from cities. Further research is required to investigate the developmental aspects.

(2) Issues to be concerned with in the future[6] Unlike the findings of Okimoto, et al (1997), in this study, there were no mothers who could not separate from their children due to crying, and separation time was not related to the crying of the child during the separation. It supports the suggestion of Okimoto, et al (1997) that staying abroad itself would increase the anxiety. However, the result demonstrating that mothers who do not care about their children’s crying is a different image of the traditional Japanese mothers who respond quickly when their children start crying. It can be argued that mothers were conscious about how the interviewers thought of them and intentionally ignored the crying of their children in the experimental situation. The results could have been different in more natural observations. The following three points should be addressed in future studies[6] (1) to think of a better way on how to observe conscious Maternal Separation Anxiety and to increase the size of the samples, (2) to identify the longitudinal behavioral and psychological changes, and to make predictions based on these changes, and to discuss whether the prediction can be used.
to reduce anxiety, (3) to investigate how long, how frequent, and what factors are related to the effect of child care which makes children get used to the place in terms of the acquaintance.

(3) Mother-Infant Separation in Japan[

I would like to introduce another videotape that features some scenes from a special program aired on NHK, Japan’s national broadcasting station on January 22, 2000, entitled “The Amazing Super Power of Babies Throughout the World.” We see a Japanese family with a 14-months-old baby visiting a family in Norway, who have a 10-months-old baby (Playback). First, the Japanese baby becomes cranky, perhaps exhausted from the long trip. The mother tries to put the baby to sleep by strapping it on her back. The Norwegian mother looks puzzled and asks the Japanese mother why she won’t put the baby in bed, warning her that if she is always with the baby, the baby will become overly dependent on its mother. Acknowledging this piggyback ride as an expression of love, the Japanese mother responds that her baby sleeps better this way. She even challenges the Norwegian style of child rearing in which the baby is made to sleep all by itself immediately after birth. However, when the Japanese baby starts crying, she immediately becomes worried and rushes to her child, explaining, “If my child calls for me, how can I ignore him?” In Norway, most 10-months-olds babies sleep alone.

An unseparated child studies by Nakano (1980) and Sugiyama (1992) were conducted with the hypothesis that the inability of children over three years old to be separated from their mothers in children’s school must be caused by the mother’s behavior. Our study can not directly be compared with the one conducted by Nakano et al on Mother-Infant Separation in a children’s school, because, in our study, though the subjects were around two years old, mothers could decide the time of separation, and the separation time was rather short (average 4 min.). However, Okimoto (1997) shows that many white American children could be separated at around two years of age. As the video suggested, the age factors were influenced by the culture. Therefore, the difficulty of separation at around two years old is not caused by the developmental age but rather by the Japanese culture which does not promote Infant-Mother Separation until three years old.

(4) Mother’s Support[

In Japan, as the mother said in the video, piggybacks and holding babies are positively promoted as ‘expressions of love’. This leads to their tendency of not hiring baby-sitters in infancy. With the history of the big family system, if mothers have to ask somebody to baby-sit, many of the baby-sitters are either grandparents or relatives. Unlike for house HELPERS, social welfare does not financially support baby-sitter services in Japan. Also, mothers feel pressure under the sense of the traditional mother’s role that it is a women’s role to take care of the children. In other words, mothers are likely to feel guilt if they do not take care of their children, and feel that good mothers do not need to ask somebody to baby-sit. For social reasons, the number of working mothers has been increasing, and there are children who spend much of their time in day-care centers. Between the ideal and reality, mothers feel responsible for the separation. Mother’s support would be required to enable mothers’ to accept their children as they are, and to know their limitation (Fujiyama, 1998) without considering a typical image of children and an ideal image of mothers influenced by the culture.

**Conclusion**

As the number of working mothers increase, early Mother-Infant Separation is expected among many mothers and children. Therefore, mothers might feel overall responsibility for the separation. Considering these situations, the following messages have to be conveyed to mothers[

First, both early separation and late separation have positive and negative aspects. Second, the achievement of separation appears as the result of the interaction of children’s temperament and mother’s Personal Anxiety. Third, children’s behavior could be changed by establishing many relationships in the future. The most important thing for mothers is to make a decision by herself on whether to ask somebody to baby-sit, the same as she does on the choice of breast milk or artificial milk, cloth diapers or disposal diapers. It should be mothers (possibly everybody in child-care) who have the strength to accept both the positive and negative results of these choices.

*The subjects were the pairs of mother and child who applied for other projects at the time of the check-up in the public health centers or through the community news letters. We visited their house when the children were six months and again at one year. In this study, we asked them to participate
once more when their child is around two years old. There were 25 pairs, excluding one mother with triplets.

References