

# The sense of self of Japanese females: A survey related to previous literatures

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日本女性の自己意識—先行文献に関連する調査—  
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## 要約

1990年代末以前に実施された日本人の考え方に関する調査結果が、今日の女性に対して適用可能かどうかを探ることが本研究の目的である。文化的自己観に関する文献を検討し、また、高田他の尺度と下位領域（高田・大本・清家, 1996）を詳細に参照した。本研究では、関西圏に在住する20代～70代の女性147人から収集したデータを分析・検討し、日本人の男女を対象にして行った既存の研究結果と比較した。その結果、一致が見られた。

## Key words

self-construal, the elderly stage, Japanese females, independence, interdependence

## 1. Introduction

For some while changes and efforts have been called for in encouraging and promoting women's social advancement in Japan. According to Japanese government statistics, for example, over the last three decades from 1986 to 2016 the labor-force participation ratio of females increased from 53.1 % to 66 % for the 15 to 64 year-old age group and from 57.1 % to 72.7 % for the 25 to 44 year-old age group. The percentage of unmarried females aged 50 years old increased from 5 % in 1975 to 7.3 % in 2005 and 10.6 % in 2010. This ratio is expected to increase up to 22.5 % by 2030. The percentage of full-time housewives decreased in just over a decade from 17.7 % in 1997 to 9.1 % in 2010. When asked to select one course from some choices about future plans in relation to marriage and work, the ratio of female respondents who chose not to get married but to work was 9.3 % in 1997 and increased to 17.7 % in 2010. In a survey investigating changes of consciousness among females which asked whether husbands should work outside and wives should remain at home, the percentage of women who disagreed with this view increased from 4.5 % to 24.2 % between 1979 and 2004, and reached 26.6 % in 2009. <sup>(1)</sup>

Given these changes in Japanese society, the question arises as to whether female self-construal has changed, and since Japanese society is aging, any study should include attention to change among older Japanese women. First, a brief summary of recent research on self-construal is called for.

Takata et al. (1996) developed scales for measuring individual differences in terms of the "cultural view of self" based on Markus and Kitayama's theory, and proposed that each self-construal has two sub-categories of "view of self". Takata (1999b) also indicated that there are variations in degrees of independent and interdependent self-construals and that these differ in line

with age and gender. Takata's findings in this research include a tendency among Japanese to have an increase in the level of independent self-construal at old age (1999b, p.487, 2012).

Shigemasu (2016) analyzed the Japanese view of self based on data collected from Question 86 in Wave 6 (2010-2014) of the World Views Survey. <sup>(2)</sup> The purpose of Question 86 was to measure Japanese self-construals, and it was composed of eight questions <sup>(3)</sup> using Takata's (2000) four sub-categories. The data indicates that construal of the self is different with each person and varies depending on gender and age. Shigemasu points out Japanese people's tendency to be more individualistic and less likely to act in conformity with other people as they get older (p.60-61).

## 1.1 The independent construal of the self and interdependent construal of the self

Markus and Kitayama (1991) divided cultural self-construals into two main categories: an independent construal of the self, i.e. an independent view of the self from others, and; an interdependent construal of the self, i.e. a view of the self as interdependent with others. Markus and Kitayama (1991) characterize a person with an independent construal of the self as "an individual whose behavior is organized and made meaningful primarily by reference to one's own internal repertoire of thoughts, feelings, and actions" (p.226), and a person with an interdependent self-construal is described as an individual who sees "oneself as part of an encompassing social relationship and recognizing that one's behavior is determined" by emotions and "actions of others in the relationship" (p.227). It has been suggested that an independent self-construal reflects an individualistic culture, while an interdependent self-construal shows a collective one (e.g. Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Nisbett, 2003; Shigemasu, 2016, *inter alia*).

## 1.2 Interdependent self-construal among Japanese

Preserving interpersonal relationships and harmony and ful-

filling obligations are important in Eastern countries. An interdependent construal of the self is, hence, predominant in these countries (e.g. Nisbett, 2003). For instance, Japan is frequently described in various literatures (e.g. Kitayama, 1998) as a nation in which an interdependent construal of the self is prominent.

Japanese people place great importance on harmony with others, and they are not keen on—or they may even be afraid of—disturbing or troubling others in any way. Terms such as consideration for others, taking hints about others' emotions and thoughts, obligation, empathy, and so forth are often used when describing Japanese people and culture, from a perspective both inside and outside of Japan. In fact, Japanese may be hesitant of expressing anger and sadness if they believe or sense that such feelings are not appropriate and are likely to disrupt the harmony of social situations or relations with others. Thus expressions such as “*Kaode waratte, kokorode naitte*” (crying in one's heart, but smiling with one's face) and “*Kanninbukuro no o gakereru*”<sup>(4)</sup> (get into a fury suddenly) are known and used among Japanese people. However, as Takata (2012) writes, this does not mean that all Japanese share an equal interdependent construal of the self.

### 1.3 Japanese construal of the self by age and gender

The differences between the two self-construals are related to dissimilarities of individuals in such areas as cognition, emotion, and motivation (Markus & Kitayama 1991; Kiuchi, 1995; Takata et al., 1996). Takata et al. (1996) re-constructed scales for measuring individual differences among self-construals of independence and interdependence (see Table 1), and developed a total of four sub-categories under the two self-construals. The scales are based on scales created earlier by Takata (Takata et al., 1996; Takata, 1993b). The subjects of the research were both males and females and their average ages in the four groups were: group 1, 20.2; group 2, 19.1; group 3, 19.6, and; group 4, 18.8. Takata et al. (1996) pointed out that the tendencies shown in the four sub-categories are particularly distinctive for Japanese.

Takata (1999b; 2012) conducted researches and cross-sectional analyses of which the purpose was to gain an understand-

ing of the developmental process of self-construals in Japanese culture. The results of Takata's researches (1999b; 2012) include the finding that the level of independence increases after the stage of young adulthood and continues to increase till the elderly stage. The researches also indicate that the level of interdependence increases from the late stage of adolescence and decreases from the stage of adulthood. Then, it increases again from the elderly stage. In Takata's researches (1999b), people in their 20's and 30's were put in one group, the stage of young adulthood (average age, 33.2), people in their 40's and 50's were in the middle stage of adulthood (average age, 47.1), and people in their 60's and older were in the elderly stage (average age, 70.8).

Takata (2012) pointed out that for Japanese people the levels of the four sub-categories change depending on the stages of their lives. Takata's findings suggest that the level of Understanding and expression of self (*Ko no ninshiki, shucho*) surpasses Self-determination (*Dokudansei*) except for the stage of adolescence in the aspect of independent self-construal. For interdependent self-construal, the level of Affiliation and self-adjustment to others (*Tasha eno shinwa, junno*) surpasses the level of Concerns about being evaluated (*Hyouka kenen*) after the stage of adulthood. Takata (1999b) also concluded that independence and interdependence of self-construals are relatively unrelated to each other. In other words, the level of one self-construal does not affect the level of the other. According to Takata (2012), people in the range from the stage of adulthood to the elderly stage can be categorized into three types: a type in which independence is dominant, a type in which interdependence is dominant, and a type in which independence and interdependence are balanced at a certain level.

Self-construals of independence and interdependence are believed to be different in general according to gender. Shigemasa (2016) analyzed differences between the self-construals of independence and interdependence by gender, based on data collected from the World Values Survey (2010-2014), and concluded that the results supported the common view of a difference between males and females. The results show that males ob-

Table 1: Summary of Takata et al.'s (1996) sub-categories of independent and interdependent self-construals

Independence of self-construal	
Independence (If anything, indicating awareness of the nature of the relation between the self and others)	
Understanding and expression of self ( <i>Ko no ninshiki, shucho</i> ):	Self-determination ( <i>Dokudansei</i> ):
Understanding and expression of the self as different from others.	Actions and behaviors based on one's own judgment and without consideration of others.
Interdependence of self-construal	
Interdependence (Relating to the level of consideration of and interest in others in one's behaviors)	
Affiliation with and self-adjustment to others ( <i>Tasha eno shinwa, junno</i> ):	Concerns about being evaluated ( <i>Hyouka kenen</i> ):
Emphasis on avoiding conflict and on keeping harmony with others.	Consciousness of others and concerns about being evaluated by others.

Source: Takata et al., 1996; Takata, 1999b; 2012.

tained higher values from all of the four questions asking about their level of independent self-construal and females got higher values from three out of the four questions about their level of interdependent self-construal. However, Shigemasu (2016) also pointed out that although differences between males and females were found statistically significant except for one question from the scale for measuring Affiliation and self-adjustment to others (*Tasha eno shinwa, junno*), the differences were small. Thus, it is important not to place a strong significance on the sex differences but to focus on individual differences.

## 2. Study

### 2.1 Purpose

Takata (1999b; 2012) suggests that levels of self-construals in sub-categories change depending on age, and indicates that both independent and interdependent self-construals of Japanese males and females increase at the elderly stage. New data obtained from Japanese females will be examined in this section in order to discover whether it matches previous findings on Japanese males and females together, while focusing especially on changes among the elderly.

### 2.2 Problems faced in the process of making the questionnaire

Some questions in the questionnaire for this study were composed with the aim of examining independent and interdependent self-construals, and originally these were closely based on the scales made by Takata (1999b) and Takata et al. (1996). However, after these questions were tested on people in their late 60's and 70's prior to proper distribution, some participants commented on the difficulty of understanding the context of some questions and said they felt that more description would help them understand. Some adjustments were made on account of this, notably adding more descriptive words to the questions. Thus the analysis in this paper will be carried out by examining the relations among questions, rather than by relating questions to independent and interdependent self-construals specifically.

### 2.3 Methods

#### 2.3.1 Method

The distribution of the questionnaires began in February, 2018. They were handed out and mailed by post to 160 female Japanese in the Kansai area, Japan. Out of 160 distributed, 159 answered-questionnaires were collected before April 1st in the same year. However, 11 questionnaires were eliminated from the data since their answers were not complete. There was one questionnaire answered by a person in her 80's, but this had to be removed from the data because there was no other subject in her 80's available at this time.

#### 2.3.2 Subjects

All of the subjects reside in the Kansai area. The subjects

in their 20's to 60's are people working for business offices, libraries, and universities as full-time and part-time workers. The subjects in their 70's are retired females; some of them are engaged in social activities such as hiking clubs, and some are full-time housewives. In previous studies, subjects were often students and people related to schools and universities, such as parents of students (e.g. Nisbett, 2003; Takata, 1999b). For this study, however, questions about the subjects' position in their office, their income, and other personal details were not asked when data was collected because of privacy issues. A total of 147 answered-questionnaires were used as data for this study.

#### 2.3.3 Age

The age of the subjects ranges between their 20's and 70's. In the questionnaire the subjects were asked to indicate their ages by circling a decade, from their 20's to 80's. The total number of subjects used as data in each group is: 24 subjects in their 20s, 19 in their 30's, 25 in their 40's, 42 in their 50's, 21 in their 60's, and 16 in their 70's.

#### 2.3.4 Questionnaire

The questionnaire consists of 32 questions, plus two other questions asking about the subjects' sex and age. The 32 questions were constructed in order to collect data in general about Japanese females today, and they include 8 questions used for the study in this paper. All of the 32 questions were constructed based on, or by extracting, content from the various literatures available, and they are related to specific Japanese traits including: inconsistency, the tendency to take up a moderate way or status between extreme positions, and the tendency to behave depending on the situation and presence of others in the context. Each question offers four answers to choose from (Very much agree; If anything, agree; If anything, not agree, and; Not agree at all), and the answers to each question were given scores as follows: 4 points for Very much agree, 3 for If anything, agree, 2 for If anything, not agree, and 1 for Not agree at all.

## 3. Results and overview

The questions used in this section are as shown in the Appendix. Six questions were categorized in two groups: Group I and II. Each question was constructed and adjusted by referring to Takata's scales (1999b) for measuring independent and interdependent self-construals with sub-categories. The average scores obtained for the subjects are shown and categorized into different age-groups in Table 2 and Figure 1.

Figure 1 shows the various average values by age-difference for the questions listed in the Appendix. The values in Q2 [Do you think that you are not bothered by what others think is ok? /Ref. Takata's Independent self-construal, Self-determination (*Dokudansei*)] and Q8 [Do you think that you follow what you believe, even if others think differently? /Ref. Takata's Independent self-construal, Self-determination (*Dokudansei*)] show

Table 2: Average scores for different questions and age-groups

	20's n = 24	30's n = 19	40's n = 25	50's n = 42	60's n = 21	70's n = 16
Q2	2.08 (0.88)	2.11 (0.81)	2.32 (0.63)	2.24 (0.69)	2.43 (0.68)	2.56 (0.73)
Q8	2.54 (0.66)	2.79 (0.63)	2.76 (0.72)	2.62 (0.79)	2.48 (0.98)	2.69 (0.87)
Total average	2.31 (0.80)	2.45 (0.80)	2.54 (0.71)	2.43 (0.76)	2.45 (0.83)	2.63 (0.79)
Q30	2.33 (1.05)	2.32 (0.67)	2.48 (0.71)	2.26 (0.63)	2.67 (0.80)	2.81 (0.83)
Q15	2.38 (0.65)	2.42 (0.69)	2.56 (0.65)	2.40 (0.73)	2.14 (0.91)	2.50 (0.63)
Q21	2.88 (0.68)	2.84 (0.69)	2.76 (0.66)	2.57 (0.74)	2.62 (0.80)	2.69 (0.95)
Total average	2.63 (0.65)	2.63 (0.71)	2.66 (0.66)	2.49 (0.74)	2.38 (0.89)	2.60 (0.80)
Q28	2.50 (0.93)	2.79 (0.92)	2.56 (0.65)	2.36 (0.91)	2.33 (0.97)	2.19 (0.91)

Note: Total number of subjects = 147, values in ( ) are standard deviations.

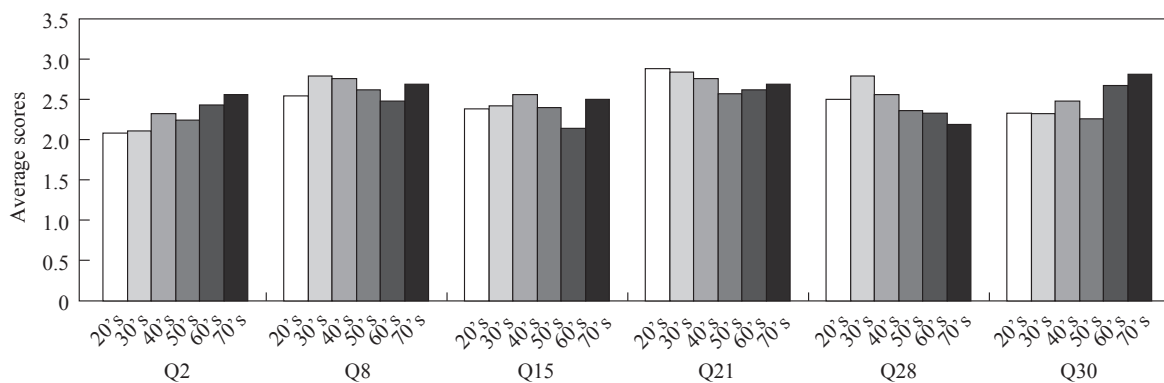


Figure 1: Differences in age-groups for questions

a gradual increase of values between people in the 20's to 40's age-group and between those in their 50's to 70's [the differences between the lowest and highest for each question are not statistically significant (with  $\alpha = 0.05$ , Q2;  $p = 0.07$ , Q8;  $p = 0.24$ )]. The value of the 70's age-group is the highest for Q30 [Do you think that you tell your opinions directly? /Invert scale, Ref. Takata's Independent self-construal, Understanding and expression of self (*Ko no ninshiki, shucho*)]. Takata (2012) indicates in his studies that an independence of self-construal increases after the stage of young adulthood (cf. Takata's "stage of young adulthood" is equal to the 20's and 30's age-groups in this paper) and it continues to increase till an elderly stage (cf. Takata's "elderly stage" is equal to the 60's and 70's age-groups in this paper). According to Shigemasu (2016), these changes mean that when Japanese get older their "sense of self" becomes more apparent, although this does not mean that they become intolerant of others.

Q15 [Do you think that you do not say what you think in order to avoid conflict with others? /Ref. Takata's Interdependent self-construal, Affiliation and self-adjustment to others (*Tasha eno shinwa, junno*)] shows a decrease of value in the 50's and 60's age-group, and then an increase in the 70's. Q21 [Do you think that you do not change your words and deeds depending on the people or situation around you? /Invert scale

Ref. Takata's Interdependent self-construal, Affiliation and self-adjustment to others (*Tasha eno shinwa, junno*)] also shows a drop of value until the 50's age-group and then an increase up to the 70's. Takata (2012) indicates that an interdependence of self-construal increases again at the elderly stage (cf. "Elderly stage" in Takata's scale means people in their 60's and 70's and its average age is 70.8). In contrast Shigemasu, (2016) who analyzed data collected from the World Views Survey based on the scales constructed by Takata (2000), suggested the values of the question asking "I sometimes change my words and deeds depending on the people or situation around me" decrease as the age of the subjects increase.

Q28 [Do you think that you do not change how you treat members in your group according to their age, sex, social status, or other matters?/Invert scale, Ref. Takata's Interdependent self-construal, Affiliation and self-adjustment to others (*Tasha eno shinwa, junno*)] is a question based on one of Takata's scales ("I sometimes change my words and deeds depending on the people or situation around me") but more descriptive words have been added in order to help people in their 60's and 70's understand, as was explained earlier. The values of Q28 decrease over the 30's age-group to the 70's, and the value for the 70's age-group for Q28 marks the lowest among all of the 70's age-groups.

The values of the 70's age-group in Q30 [Do you think

that you tell your opinions directly? /Invert scale, Ref. Takata’s Independent self-construal, Understanding and expression of self (*Ko no ninshiki, shucho*) and Q28 [Do you think that you do not change how you treat members in your group according to their age, sex, social status, or other matters?/Invert scale, Ref. Takata’s Interdependent self-construal, Affiliation and self-adjustment to others (*Tasha eno shinwa, junno*)] seem to agree with Shigemasu (2016) that, as females get older, their sense of self as an individual becomes more obvious and they become less likely to behave depending on the situations or presence of others.

Figure 2 shows changes of values by age difference between Group I [Q2 and Q8,  $t(10) = -3.93, p = 0.003$ , and the questions constructed based on Independent self-construal, Self-determination (*Dokudansei*)] and Group II [Q15 and Q21,  $t(10) = -4.23, p = 0.002$ , and the questions constructed based on Interdependent self-construal, Affiliation and self-adjustment to others (*Tasha eno shinwa, junno*)]. Q30 and Q28 were excluded from this comparison. The reasons for this exclusion are: Q30 was composed based on Understanding and expression of self (*Ko no ninshiki, shucho*), one of the two categories belonging to independent self-construal made by Takata et al. (1999b), while Q2 and Q8 were based on Self-determination (*Dokudansei*), the other sub-category belonging to independent self-construal made by Takata et al, and; Q28 was also constructed based on Takata’s scale (1999b) but was considerably adjusted to improve its understanding by the subjects.

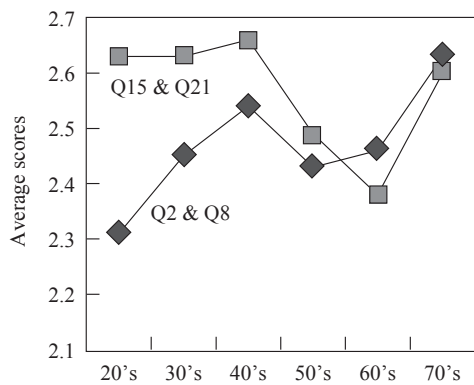


Figure 2: Changes by age difference

The values of Group I (Q2 and Q8) increase between the 20’s (the lowest value in the figure) and 40’s age-groups, drop to the 50’s, and then increase again to the 70’s. The values of Group II (Q15 and Q21) are on a gradual increase between the 30’s and 40’s. They decline between the 40’s and 60’s and increase again to the 70’s. The results seem to agree with the much-noted Japanese characteristics of high interdependence and low independence based on studies conducted of males and females together, as well with as a rise in both independence and interdependence at the elderly stage. The difference of the

average values between Groups I and II was found to be not statistically significant ( $p = 0.16$ ).

However, the values from the 40’s to 50’s age-groups in Group I do not seem to agree with some previous findings from studies based on males and females together (e.g. Takata, 2012), as the values obtained from females in this study show a decline from the 40’s age-group to 50’s age-group and an increase again to the 70’s age-group. Nevertheless, the decrease is small and the results agree with the existing understanding of Japanese characteristics on the whole. This may suggest that there is no significant difference by gender, as Shigemasu (2016) points out.

It is often noted that an independent self-construal reflects an individualistic culture and an interdependent self-construal reflects a culture of collectivism. Some of the literature examined so far suggests that Japanese are becoming less affected by others and that their sense of self is becoming more established as they get older. Simultaneously, some studies indicate that Japanese people’s “individualistic” tendency becomes stronger while they keep their traditional tendency towards “collectivism”, as their independence of self-construal increases and interdependence also increases.

The questionnaire for this paper included two questions composed in relation to tendencies of individualism and collectivism, based on and adjusted from Agata and Kugihara (2008) (see Appendix).

The values of Q29 are higher than Q1 (i.e. the average values are 2.98 and 2.89, respectively), and it is interesting to note that both the 70’s age-groups obtained high values for both questions and that the values increase as age increases on the

Table 3: Average scores for the two questions and age-groups

	Q1	Q29
20's	2.80 (0.78)	3.13 (0.85)
30's	2.84 (0.76)	3.00 (0.75)
40's	2.76 (0.60)	2.72 (0.68)
50's	2.90 (0.59)	3.10 (0.69)
60's	3.00 (0.80)	2.80 (0.68)
70's	3.00 (0.44)	3.13 (0.72)

Note: Values in ( ) are standard deviations.

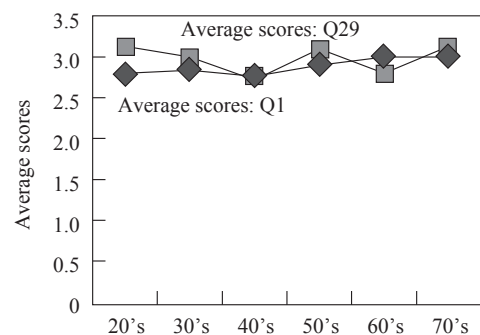


Figure 3: Changes by age difference

whole. However, the difference is statistically insignificant ( $p > 0.05$ ), and it may be more appropriate to infer that the view of self, at least for the female subjects in this study, differs according to each individual.

#### 4. Conclusion

The results of this paper suggest that Japanese females today do not exhibit strong tendencies related to independence (individualism) or interdependence (collectivism), but rather they show differences based on their own individuality. However, the number of subjects used as data for this survey is limited to 147, which may be considered a rather small sample. In the future, a survey with a larger number of subjects, including male subjects, should be conducted in order to reflect the nature of the parent population.

As is well known, Japan is now a rapidly aging society, and this fact will affect Japanese society and people in every possible way. In the future, people who are categorized as elderly may perhaps behave and think differently from the elderly today as they may be as healthy and active as people currently categorized in the stage of adulthood. Understanding the elderly will be improved by analyzing and examining their self-construals, but in order to do so some changes or adjustments may be required in the process of developing scales for measuring their self-construals.

#### Notes

- <sup>(1)</sup> Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office, Government of Japan. [http://www.gender.go.jp/about\\_danjo/whitepaper/h29/zentai/html/zuhyo/zuhyo01-03-05.html](http://www.gender.go.jp/about_danjo/whitepaper/h29/zentai/html/zuhyo/zuhyo01-03-05.html).
- <sup>(2)</sup> World Values Survey (2010-2014): See Questionnaire “WV6\_Official\_Questionnaire\_v4\_June2012.pdf”. <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWV6.jsp>.  
\*In Japan, the research was conducted between November and December in 2010. The age range of its subjects was between 18 and 79 years old, and the number of respondents to questionnaires was 2,443. <http://www.ikeyken-lab.jp/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/WVS2010time-series20110422.pdf>.
- <sup>(3)</sup> Two questions from each of Takata's (2000) four sub-categories [Understanding and expression of self (*Ko no ninshiki, shucho*) and Self-determination (*Dokudansei*) as two sub-categories of independent self-construal, and, Affiliation and self-adjustment to others (*Tasha eno shinwa, junno*) and Concerns about being evaluated (*Hyouka kenen*) as the other two sub-categories of interdependent self-construal].
- <sup>(4)</sup> *Kanninbukuro* is the title of a story in Japanese traditional comic monologues called rakugo. *Kanninbukuro* is a bag filled with anger and *o* is a kind of band binding the bag to stop “the anger” leaking out. This phrase means literally that the bag is so filled with anger that the band is torn and the anger bursts out—indicating how much Japanese suppress their anger.

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## Appendix

## The contents of and references for questions

	Questions (originally in Japanese)	Reference
Group I		
Q2	Do you think that you are not bothered by what others think is ok?	Ref. Takata's Independent self-construal/ Self-determination ( <i>Dokudansei</i> )
Q8	Do you think that you follow what you believe, even if others think differently?	Ref. Takata's Independent self-construal/ Self-determination ( <i>Dokudansei</i> )
Q30	Do you think that you tell your opinions directly?	Ref. Takata's Independent self-construal/ Understanding and expression of self ( <i>Ko no ninshiki, shucho</i> )
Group II		
Q15	Do you think that you do not say what you think in order to avoid conflict with others?	Ref. Takata's Interdependent self-construal/ Affiliation and self-adjustment to others ( <i>Tasha eno shinwa, junno</i> )
Q21	Do you think that you do not change your words and deeds depending on the people or situation around you? (Invert scale)	Ref. Takata's Interdependent self-construal/ Affiliation and self-adjustment to others ( <i>Tasha eno shinwa, junno</i> )
Q28	Do you think that you do not change how you treat members in your group according to their age, sex, social status, or other matters? (Invert scale)	Ref. Takata's Interdependent self-construal/ Affiliation and self-adjustment to others ( <i>Tasha eno shinwa, junno</i> )

Note: Q: Question numbers in questionnaires.

## Contents of questions related to individualism and collectivism

Related to individualism	
Q29	Do you think "you like a job which encourages and demands the originality of the individual"?
Related to collectivism	
Q1	Do you think "sustaining harmony in social relations takes priority over having individual success"?