Developing a Buddhist En-Based Systems Paradigm for the Study of Japanese Human Relationsips

Developing a Buddhist *En*-Based Systems Paradigm for the Study of Japanese Human Relationships

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For decades Japanese scholars have been willing to import and apply Euro-America-centered research paradigms not only in the natural sciences but also in the social sciences and the humanities. They have been doing so without trying to develop their own non-Western frames of research. Today Japanese researchers are expected to develop new research paradigms and perspectives based on their own Japanese cultural background and to contribute these to the international academic arena. This paper provides scholars of Japanese culture with a distinctly Asian paradigm for future research, theory construction, and methodological development. To achieve these goals, first, Western views of interpersonal relationships are discussed. Then the Buddhist *en*-based world view and its influence on Japanese human relationships are described. Next, general systems theory is introduced, suggesting its possible application to Japanese human relationships psychology. Finally, a hypothetical cosmic systems framework based on the Buddhist *en*-belief is proposed to conceptualize Japanese human relationships and help promote research in the area.

Key words: CAUSALITY, *EN, ENGI, GO*, HUMAN RELATIONSHIP, *INNEN*, INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIP, LOCUS OF CONTROL, PARADIGM, PREDETERMINISM, *ROKUDO RINNE*, SYSTEMS THEORY, WORLD VIEW.

> *Nanigoto mo en.* (Everything depends upon *en*.)
>
> —An old Japanese proverb

En (predetermined connection), which may be commonly defined as a "mysterious agency that connects a person to another person or to an object" (Shinmura, 1991, p. 296), is an extensively accepted popular belief among Japanese. The belief has long influenced Japanese traditional human relationships. Regardless of *en*'s ultimate eternal validity, *en* plays a crucial role, even in this age of science and technology, in the initiation, development, maintenance, deterioration, and termination of Japanese human relationships.

Japanese human relationships have been analyzed "scientifically" primarily by Western-oriented social psychologists and cultural anthropologists whose views of human relationships and whose research methods are based on Western values of individualism. They seem to conclude that Western individualistic, self-centered interpersonal relationships are more advanced and ideal than Japanese collectivistic, context-centered human relationships. Yet Japanese human relationships should preferably be researched holistically as relational systems rather than analytically. Ruben (1972), who stresses the significance of holistic general systems theory in studying human communication, observes that "...biological and social existence depends upon living systems organizing themselves metabolically and informationally with their environments and with the other living systems in it" (pp. 136-137).

Japanese human relationships based on the philosophy of *en* may be conceptualized as both an interpersonal system and a cosmic system which includes the interpersonal system. Not many scholars have studied the possibility of integrating *en* and human relationships into a system. Only Hamaguchi (1977, 1985, 1993), who has coined and repeatedly employed the term *kanjin* (contextual person), suggests the introduction of *en* and the concept of interpersonal *betweenness* to the study of Japanese human relationships as a system. He has not, however, reached the level of organizing *en* and Japanese human relationships into a dynamic systems model.

The purposes of this study are four-fold: First, the Western concept of individualism is reviewed along with Western views of interpersonal relationships; second, the Buddhist *en*-based world view is clarified as well as its impact on Japanese collectivistic human relationships; third, general systems theory is applied to the study of human relationships; and finally, an *en*-based framework to conceptualize Japanese human relationships is proposed. The proposed *en*-based framework should serve as a guide for those attempting to describe and explain the psychological characteristics of Japanese human relationships and communication practices.

WESTERN VIEWS OF INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Increasing numbers of Western researchers, especially social psychologists and communication scholars, have been interested in the study of interpersonal relationships. Planalp (1989), for example, reports that "As an area of research, the study of relationships is remarkable in terms of the number of academic disciplines that have contributed and the wide range of perspectives from which relationships have been studied" (p. 269). Scholarly interest has been directed to the essentiality of interpersonal relationships for mental and physical well-being (Fleming & Baum, 1986; Notarius & Pellegrini, 1984) and for making life meaningful (Klinger, 1977). This research trend is expected to continue.

Western scholars of interpersonal relationships are implicitly inclined to believe that relationships based on individualism are superior to relationships based on collectivism. Rosenberger (1992) criticizes this Western ethnocentrism in viewing interpersonal/human relationships:

> Westerners living in industrial, economically "modern" societies idealize themselves as individuals, in control of emotions and social relations, able to think abstractly by cause-and-effect logic. Westerners often affirm this ideal by viewing non-Westerners as swayed by emotion, relation, and context.... It follows that Western societies can take the "higher" form of democracy because decision making can be entrusted to the hands of rational individuals, whereas non-Western societies require a strong collectivity for cohesion and control of people enmeshed in the immediacy of relationship and superstition. (p. 2)

Rosenberger (1992) further promotes scholarly ethnorelativism in the research of interpersonal/human relationships by stating that Western researchers are now required to understand that self attains form through relating to others.

Westerners often believe that interpersonal relationships can and should be intentionally manipulated and controlled. This common belief has motivated researchers to observe, describe, explain, predict, and control relationships. From the Western research perspective, stages of interpersonal relationship development and deterioration have come to be identified: contact, involvement, intimacy, deterioration, repair, and dissolution. The Western view of interpersonal relationships is that at each stage participants are expected to make intentional and active efforts to manipulate and control their relationships to achieve their personal goals. Such efforts are still unfamiliar to the majority of Japanese people who think that human relationships are given or naturally emerge and change. In this context, Hamaguchi (1985), in connection to the Western view of relationships as means for life, observes that "...for an individual, relationships among people have been derived from the associations of individual actors and are perceived as the objective means for his survival. Therefore, relations among individuals are seen as something that can be manipulated" (p. 300).

Western scholars have also been interested in dimensions of relationships. Triandis (1977), for example, identifies four dichotomous behavioral dimensions of relationships which he claims to be universal. The first dimension is associative-dissociative behaviors. Associative behaviors include being helpful, supportive, or cooperative, whereas dissociative behaviors involve fighting or avoiding another person. The second dimension is superordinate-subordinate behaviors. Superordinate behaviors involve giving orders or criticizing, while subordinate behaviors include agreeing, obeying, or asking for help. The third dimension is intimate-formal behaviors. Intimate behaviors include self-disclosure, or expressing emotions, whereas formal behaviors involve sending written invitations and other similar formal activities. The last universal dimension is overt-covert behaviors. Overt behaviors are visible behaviors, while covert behaviors are invisible to others.

Results of cross-cultural surveys have indicated interesting and important characteristics of Japanese psychology related directly or indirectly to the relational dimensions. The following survey results, for example, will help to probe Japanese interpersonal needs, self-disclosure, and argumentativeness.

First, Ishii, Cambra, and Klopf (1979) conducted a cross-cultural survey of interpersonal needs in terms of inclusion, control, and affection in Japan, Australia, Korea, and the United States, and derived the results that Japanese respondents were generally more passive in interpersonal relationships and that their interpersonal needs were weaker than those of the other three culturally different groups of respondents.

Second, according to results of the self-disclosure survey by Ishii, Thomas, and Klopf (1993) in Japan and the United States, "In public, typical Japanese practice restraint and formality in their talk, saying little that will harm harmonious relationships with others. In private, the talk is more intimate and personal" (p. 94). A more recent cross-cultural self-disclosure survey conducted by Ishii, Klopf, and Thomas (1994) on Japanese, American, and Korean subjects produced similar results. From the results they concluded that compared with the other two groups, the Japanese respondents were less inclined to talk, less assertive, and less inclined to initiate and maintain relationships.

Third, Prunty, Klopf, and Ishii (1990) administered a survey on argumentativeness to Japanese and American university students, and concluded from their study results that "argumentativeness is a Western practice—both impractical and inconceivable to the Japanese.

Though arguments may disrupt interpersonal relationships, Americans, perceiving argumentation positively, can try to revive the relationship and most often would" (p. 78).

These survey results indicate that the Japanese in general are passive in interpersonal relationships, cautious about self-disclosing to others, and apt to avoid argumentation. This psychological tendency of the Japanese does not imply that their human relationships and communication practices are inferior to those of Western counterparts. The cross-cultural results should be judged and interpreted relativistically, not one-sidedly from the Western value of independence and individualism. For, as Berry *et al.* (1992) emphasize, "in Eastern cultures relatedness, connectedness, interdependence are sought, rooted in a concept of the self not as a discrete entity, but as inherently linked to others" (p. 94).

BUDDHIST *EN*-BASED WORLD VIEW AND ITS INFLUENCES ON JAPANESE HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

World view affects human relationships. In this respect, the *en*-belief as world view is no exception. Doi (1984) discusses *en* and human relationships in Japanese society after introducing the daily-used popular phrases *enmusubi* (*en*-matchmaking), *ketsuen* (blood *en*-connection), and *chien* (land *en*-connection). Nippon Daijiten Kankokai (1987) lists and explains thirty-five set phrases and familiar sayings starting with the term *en*. The *en*-belief has thus penetrated deeply and extensively the concept and value of Japanese human relationships.

En is a kind of world view because it involves not simply human-to-human relationships but also human-to-superhuman and human-to-nature relationships. Samovar and Porter (1991) stress the crucial importance of world view in understanding the three domains of relationships and their roles in each culture:

> How we view our universe, our position in it, what we value, how we think, and how we behave within that universe are all products of cultural learning. We must decide what is worth noting and what to exclude. Each culture selects data that conform to its particular reality. But because these realities differ, the images of the world and reality will also differ. (p. 116)

World view is interrelated with religion, but its impact goes beyond religion to the way people live, think, and behave. The point is that world view influences how people relate to one another in their everyday life. Ishii *et al.* (1993) conducted a cross-cultural study of Japanese, Puerto Rican, and American world views. They identified six characteristics of Japanese world view:

1. The Japanese are not inclined to believe in a personal god.
2. The Japanese feel that humans and nature should be in harmony.
3. The Japanese think that the ideal society is one in which each person subordinates his or her personal goals to the wishes of the group.
4. The Japanese see meditation as offering personal enlightenment.
5. The Japanese perceive thinking as tending to isolate people from their feelings.

6. The Japanese place a heavy emphasis on the primacy of the group over the individual. (p. 19)

Most of these characteristics of Japanese world view are presumably related to their *en*-belief.

En is complicated and difficult to conceptualize because in its long history *en* has changed and extended its meanings. It was in India that *en* was first philosophically systematized and it later arrived in Japan with Buddhism through China and Korea. Kotajima (1990) has confirmed from Japanese classical literature that *en* began to be understood and accepted in the Heian period (794-1192) and, later in the Kamakura (1192-1333) and Muromachi (1336-1573) periods, it came to establish the concept and meaning "colored by predeterminism" which is similar to the present. In contemporary Japanese society, *en* seems to hold further extended meanings. Ueno (1987), for example, contends that human relationships in modern society function on the basis of generally inclusive *shaen* (social and organizational *en*) rather than *ketsuen* and *chien*. Inoue (1987) further extends the concept of *shaen* in modern social context by introducing and discussing *shumien* (hobby *en*), *sentakuen* (selection *en*), and *johoen* (information *en*). As modern society grows more structurally complicated, the term *en* will continue to be used with new connotations in new contexts. The most fundamental meaning, however, will remain the same—*connection.*

Essentially, *en* is a Buddhist term. Iwamoto (1988) categorizes the inclusive concepts and meanings of Buddhist *en* as follows: (1) An indirect cause which leads a direct cause to its effect; (2) synonymous with *innen;* (3) Buddhist *en* or *innen* to be saved and become a Buddha; and (4) common secular *en* (p. 101). In a similar Buddhist vein, Inagaki (1992) classifies the concepts of *en* into three kinds: (1) A condition or an indirect cause; (2) an object of perception; and (3) a tie or relationship with other persons or worldly affairs (p. 44). Iwano (1991) introduces three descriptive definitions of *en:* (1) A contributory cause, as distinct from a direct cause *(in)*. For example, a plant is produced from a seed *(in)* and various other contributory causes such as rain, soil, etc. *(en)*. (2) Perception. Often used as a verb, to perceive. (3) A historical account, often of a temple (p. 59). In these three sets of conceptual definitions of *en,* the most important in discussing Japanese human relationships are *en* as an indirect cause and a tie or relationship.

Masuhara (1983) asserts that *en* should not be understood without referring to *engi* as a fundamental part of Buddhist thought. He defines and explains *engi* by arguing that "The literal meaning of *engi* is 'to depend and take place'. All phenomena and existences in the world take place by being interdependent on one another" (p. 115). In a similar context, Sakamoto (1995) describes five meanings of *engi,* the common essence of which is that all existences are spacially and temporally connected to one another. These concepts and definitions of *en, innen,* and *engi* will serve as an insightful clue to the clarification of the *en*-belief in Japanese culture and Japanese people's general attitude toward both formal and informal human relationships. It thus follows that *en* is often understood and interpreted by the public synonymously with or in relation to *innen* and *engi.*

Western-oriented scholars of social psychology and interpersonal communication have negatively assessed the Japanese predisposition to be passive and chance-oriented in interpersonal/human relationships. This predisposition may be explained and clarified by studying the traditional impact of *en* on human relationships in Japanese culture. Kotajima (1990) has analyzed the concepts of *en* mentioned by contemporary Japanese in their daily

life, and categorizes them into four types: (1) opportunity-centered *en* as the one in "See you if there is another *en*"; (2) inevitability-centered *en* as the one in "It is a strange *en* that we are here together"; (3) agnosticism-centered *en* as the broad and inclusive one in "It is because of some unknowable *en*"; and (4) destiny-centered *en* as the one in "Marriage is *en*." These analytical results indicate that Japanese people, perhaps unconsciously in most contexts, believe in and follow the impact of *en* in engaging in human relationships without feeling the necessity of making intentional and active efforts to manipulate them strategically.

The *en*-belief, especially when it is perceived as related to destiny, can not be discussed without referring to Buddhist *go* (*karma* or act), another essential part of Buddhist thought. *Go* may be defined as:

> Acts of the body, mouth, and mind, sometimes called *"goin"* because the causal acts in one's before-birth life bring about their effects in his or her present life and the causal acts in one's present life brings about their effects in his or her after-death life. (Iwamoto, 1988, pp. 252-253)

This trans-life definition implies that *go* is inherently connected to destiny-oriented *en* or *innen* and *rinne*. Most Japanese, however, generally tend to be reluctant to mention the term *go* in their daily life probably because it has such a negative connotation of individualism as *jigojitoku* (natural retribution for one's acts). This inference may be positively supported by Rosenberger (1992), who states that Japanese *jibun* (shared self) is valued not as an independent self but always in relation to the larger whole. It may be further supported by Hamaguchi (1985). He argues:

> If *jibun* is one's own share, someone else's share may be called the *tabun* (other's share). *Jibun* and *tabun* do not maintain separate domains from which they confront each other; rather, they occupy a space that commonly belongs to both (or at least partially overlaps) so that the distribution of their respective shares changes according to the changes in the overall situation. (p. 302)

These observations lead to a basic question of how the Japanese are predisposed to place the values of shares and relationships over independent beings.

The question may be partially, if not totally, answered by the psychological concept of the locus of control. To define and describe the locus of control in connection to attribution, Fisher and Adams (1994) say, "One of the key elements in attribution (designating the cause or reason for some occurrence) is a 'locus of control' (similar to a cause). People attribute the occurrence to some controlling factor that is either 'internal' or 'external' to the self" (p. 71). People in Western individualistic cultures tend to have an internal locus of control, more or less believing that they are in control of their life and relational condition. The Japanese, in contrast, seem to have an external locus of control and perceive themselves, especially in human relationships, to be controlled by some strange external power.

"An external locus of control is closely related to fatalism—feeling that you are in the hands of an all-powerful god, government, or situation" (Borden, 1991, p. 136). Viewed from this cross-cultural aspect of control, *en* as a strong external power apparently has long

culturally influenced Japanese human relationships. Japanese people's relational behavior is relatively passive, interdependent, nonassertive, and non-manipulative of the given conditions. Their common belief is that human relationships are not artificially made and controlled but that they are naturally granted as *en* by supernatural beings unknown to humans. This attitude to relationships may be evidenced by various popular and widely accepted proverbs which directly involve the term *en* or indirectly imply belief in it. Thus *en* as an external locus of control is almost unconsciously perceived to be a cosmico-social power which penetrates and controls the fundamental spheres of Japanese human relationships.

GENERAL SYSTEMS THEORY AND HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

Human relationships are a system and the study of relationships should be approached from general systems theory perspectives. The systems approach to the study of human relationships basically assumes that relationships are emergent social organizations as wholes in which all members as parts of the wholes are organically interdependent on one another. Hence, human "relationships are not reducible to the characteristics of individual interactors or single messages, but are complex organizations of the combined actions of relational members" (Rogers, 1989, p. 280). Thus it may be said that the holistic systems view of human relationships is relatively Eastern in orientation.

Hamaguchi (1977, 1985, 1993) asserts that general systems theory should be introduced as a fundamental theory or meta-methodology. He contrasts so-called atomistic approaches to holistic approaches; in the former the whole is regarded as a collectivity of various parts or elements with specific roles and characteristics, whereas in the latter approaches the whole is thought to consist of a set of partial wholes. Furthermore, in discussing wholes, "there is no way to analytically explain these properties in terms of their parts and the whole should be taken as it totally is" (Hamaguchi, 1985, p. 319). From the standpoint of intercultural communication and adjustment, Kim and Ruben (1988) stress the value of general systems theory, saying "..., the theory emphasizes the holistic nature of any system and its functions and assumes the dynamic interactions among its parts and with its environment" (p. 306). Thus it is important and useful to view human relationships as systems and approach them from general systems theory.

The concept of a system is broad and inclusive. Littlejohn (1992), for example, defines a system broadly; "A *system* is a set of objects or entities that interrelate with one another to form a whole" (p. 41). According to Neuliep (1996), who proposes a more specific definition, a system is "A whole that consists of entities, parts, components, objects, or elements that are interdependently interrelated in such a way that allows for the generation of information, self-organization, self-renewal, change, and homeostasis" (p. 291). The most important point commonly mentioned in various definitions of systems is that parts or elements which compose a whole are interdependent and interrelated.

Systems are usually divided into open systems and closed systems. "An open system receives matter and energy from the environment and passes matter and energy to its environment. The open system is oriented toward life and growth" (Littlejohn, 1992, p. 41). In contrast, "A closed system has no interchange with its environment. It moves toward progressive internal chaos (entropy), disintegration, and death" (Littlejohn, 1992, p. 41).

Human relationships are and should be conceptualized as an open system which allows continual exchanges of information, energy, and matter between its internal and external environments. Japanese *en*-based human relationships can be said to function not simply in their open internal person-to-person contexts but also in their external social and even cosmic contexts.

Holistic systems approaches to the study of social events and phenomena as well as human relationships may be considered Eastern in that they place priority on wholes and interdependent relationships among components. Western approaches based on individualism, in contrast, value the division of wholes into components and the analysis of characteristics of each component. Hamaguchi (1993) criticizes Western "methodological individualism" and emphasizes the necessity of introducing the idea of "network" to systems approaches to the study of human beings. An important dimension is that simply extending characteristics of each component does not make a systematic whole. The point is that "the sum of the components in any system is qualitatively different than the actual unique whole system itself" (Neuliep, 1996, p. 279). So human relationships may be called a "web of mutual influences" as well as a "network of interrelationships." From this perspective of systems, Hamaguchi (1977) observes that *"en* is one of the key elements that compose Japanese society. In a sense, mutual relationships in Japanese society are networks of *en"* (p. 106).

AN *EN*-BASED COSMIC SYSTEMS FRAMEWORK FOR CONCEPTUALIZING JAPANESE HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

The term *en* has deeply and extensively penetrated everyday Japanese vocabulary and human relationships. The common expression *"okagesamade"* implies that one's life does not exist independently but is interdependently supported by all other humans, superhumans, and nature. Coincidental encounters with strangers and unexpected reunions with old acquaintances begin with the greeting *"Fushigi-na go-en desu"* ("This is a strange *en"*) and terminate with the departing expression *"Kore o go-en ni* ("Let's make this encounter a valuable *en* for us"). Romantic relationships expected to develop into marriages are also assessed by professional fortunetellers and others in terms of *en*. In various employment situations applicants who have some personal *en* connection with their target firms are usually seen to be advantageous. In short, *en* is perceived, generally at the unconscious level, by Japanese to have strong influences on Japanese personal and public human relationships even in the present age of science and technology.

In this cultural and psychological context, researchers in Japanese culture, cross-cultural psychology, intercultural communication, and other related areas would find it insightful and enlightening to approach the study of Japanese human relationships from the perspective of an *en*-based cosmic systems model. Figure 1: A Model of *En*-Based Human Relationships Systems is a hypothetical framework to conceptualize and illustrate human relationships based on the widespread secular *en*-belief rather than a scholarly view of Buddhist *en*.

In systems theory, systems are thought to be embedded within one another, in given conditions called *environments*, forming a nested hierarchy. That is, one system is a part or *subsystem* of a larger system or *suprasystem*, which functions as a part or *subsystem* of a larger system. Further, since systems are parts of larger suprasystems, their boundaries are
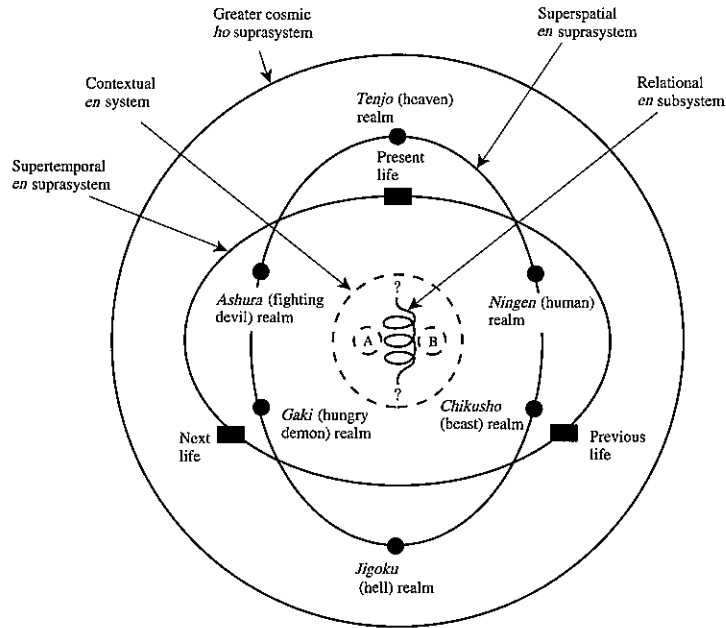
Figure 1: A Model of *En*-Based Human Relationships Systems

arbitrary, viewed broadly or narrowly, and can be established only by the observer. According to Littlejohn (1992), "One can take a very broad view—observing a number of interacting subsystems in a larger *suprasystem*—or a narrower view—observing one or two smaller *subsystems* interacting with the larger system as environment..." (p. 43). The hierarchical views of systems may be basically applied to Figure 1.

Viewed from these overall characteristics of systems, the largest and outmost circle of the Model may be seen as the eternal cosmic *ho* (dharma). The eternal and supreme *ho* or dharma, which is believed to be omnipresent and all-inclusive, has come through centuries to have a wide range of meanings and concepts. Iwamoto (1988), for example, maintains that it has five basic Buddhist meanings: (1) The Buddha's teachings; (2) the eternal and supreme truth; (3) what exists that humans can experience; (4) the esoteric Buddhist practice and prayer; and (5) the set manners (p. 636). Further, Iwano (1991) describes the *ho* with eight meanings: (1) Law, truth, and righteousness; (2) the universal norms or laws which govern human existence; (3) the Buddha's teachings or the Buddhist canon; (4) good deeds that have no defilements; (5) the consequence of action of *karman* or the result of previous action which must work itself out; (6) the whole universe as the object of thought; (7) the predicate of a preposition in Indian logic; and (8) religious truth as opposed to secular truth (p. 118).

As an integrated summary of these diverse and inclusive definitions, the *ho* may be said to

mean in this context *the eternal and supreme universal law or truth which governs and controls all existences and their acts in the cosmic circle.* In terms of systems theory, the *ho* would be illustrated as the *greater cosmic* ho *suprasystem* in which all subordinate suprasystems and subsystems exist and interact with one another.

En is believed to function beyond spatial borders. The vertically oval *superspatial suprasystem* of *en,* which involves the human relationship context of *en* by interacting with the *supertemporal suprasystem* of *en,* may be thought to rule and control the context, behavior, and value of human relationships. In more scholarly Buddhist studies, the superspatial suprasystem is believed to consist of the six realms of *tenjo* (heaven), *ningen* (humans), *ashura* (fighting devils), *chikusho* (beasts), *gaki* (hungry demons), and *jigoku* (hell). The names of these six realms, often mentioned in everyday Japanese conversations, have been traditionally thought to form the *rokudo rinne* (six-realm circle of rebirth). It is a common belief among Japanese that in his or her next world, a person is destined to move from one realm to another, repeating birth-death-rebirth cycles, for *eigo* (incalculably long periods of time) until he or she is ultimately enlightened and emancipated to the world of nirvana or saved by Amida Buddha in the Pure Land. This belief in *rokudo rinne* appears to be affecting, directly or indirectly, Japanese predeterministic *en*-based human relationships.

En is also viewed to work transtemporally. The horizontally oval supertemporal suprasystem of *en* illustrates the Buddhist concept of human previous or preborn life, present secular life, and next or post-death life. The important point is that time does not pass linearly from past through present to future; time moves around circularly in combination with the *rokudo rinne.* This Buddhist belief naturally leads to the trans-life *innen* causality of "a good cause produces a good effect" and "a bad cause produces a bad effect" as a traditional moral teaching. Probably these mental cause-effect variables have conventionally penetrated and influenced Japanese human relationships based on *en,* making the people passive and awkward in initiating, developing, maintaining, and terminating their relationships with others; they accept natural changes rather than artificially manipulated changes in relational contexts.

The broken circle, or the *contextual* en *system,* within the superspatial and supertemporal suprasystems is the human relationship context of *en.* Human relationships can not exist in vacuums but always function in physical, sociocultural, and relational contexts. The brokenness of the circle implies that the context is an open system which receives various information from the superspatial and supertemporal suprasystems. The Japanese human relationship between person A and person B within the smaller broken circles or open systems function under a variety of *en*-based influences from the external environments represented by the two oval suprasystems and the broken-circle contextual system.

The helix between the two *en*-influenced persons, A and B, symbolizes the dynamic continuity of their relationship as an open subsystem, sometimes combining them and at other times separating them. Human relationships are thus dynamic and ever-changing, yet continuing to exist and function in many different forms. The question mark at one end of the helix refers to the unknown beginning or source of the two persons' relationship predetermined by *en.* The same mark at the other end of the helix represents the unknowable ending or termination of their relationship in the present world or in the next world, which is also perceived to have been predetermined by *en.* In this respect, in Japanese culture, human relationships as daily phenomena based on the *en*-belief are dynamic open subsystems which

function in open contextual systems located in the center of the overlapping region of the superspatial and supertemporal suprasystems, and the two suprasystems are believed to be constantly governed and controlled by the greater omnipresent and ever-lasting cosmic *ho* suprasystem. The integrated systems view of these interrelationships and interdependences may be conclusively conceptualized as *ichinyo* (oneness) or the true substance of all existences and phenomena as one.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In this paper, four major subjects with regard to conceptualizing Japanese human relationships were propositionally studied. First, Western individualistic views of interpersonal relationships were introduced. Second, a Buddhist *en*-based world view and its influences on collectivistic Japanese human relationships were described. Third, some fundamental characteristics of general systems theory were discussed. And fourth, an *en*-based cosmic systems framework for conceptualizing Japanese interdependent human relationships was proposed and illustrated.

Over the past decades, Japanese social psychologists, cultural anthropologists, and researchers in other related areas have viewed and assessed Japanese human relationships rather negatively from West-oriented pespectives. Their common criticisms have centered around their perception that, according to the Euro-American assessment criteria, Japanese self-concept, self-identity, independence, and other similar individualistic predispositions are premature and underdeveloped. In recent years, however, the validity of individualistic, human-centered, and analysis-oriented theories and research methods have come to be extensively questioned by non-Western scholars of the humanities. For example, in discussing the possible contributions of Buddhist philosphy to contemporary paradigm shifts, Matsunaga (1997) argues that the Buddhist holistic world view of humans, nature, supernatural beings and the whole universe as one that exists and functions systematically is essential to the reformation of Western human-centered, individualistic, and dualistic science and technology.

The ultimate goal of this study was to erect an insightful signpost, from the point of view of Buddhist *en,* toward building a non-Western research paradigm for the research of Japanese human relationships. The proposed framework is still at a tentative early stage, and needs to be empirically refined and revised in the future, particularly from the perspectives of religious psychology. Nevertheless it will hopefully serve as an innovative guideline for challenging researchers in this field in the present age of dynamic paradigm shifts—from individualism-centered to relationalism-centered. For no humans exist as independent individuals; they exist only as interdependent and interrelated beings.

In the beginning was *en.*

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日本人の人間関係の研究に仏教の縁に基づく
システム・パラダイムを開発する

石井　　敏

要旨：従来の西洋中心の研究パラダイムに新しい視点が求められるパラダイム・シフトの現代において、本研究は日本人の人間関係の基本的特徴を仏教の縁思想から明らかにし、研究上の新しいパラダイムを提示することを目的とする。目的を達成するために、第1節では個人主義と独立主義に基づく西洋型の対人関係の特徴を論じ、続く第2節では仏教の縁の概念とそれが日本人の運命主義的で相互依存的な人間関係に及ぼす影響について解説する。第3節ではシステム理論の構造的特徴を述べ、最後の第4節では日本人の人間関係を概念化するための縁システム・モデルの構築を試みる。本システム・モデルは、いわば仮説的段階にあり今後の研究による宗教心理的検証を必要とするが、人間至上主義と個人主義の西洋型研究パラダイムに見直しを迫る一観点を提供すると考えられる。