

# Japanese and German Mother-Child Interactions in Early Childhood

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*The goal of this contribution is to describe some characteristics of mother-child relationships in Japan and Germany including consequences for child-rearing practices and children's development. In contrast to Germany, in Japan a strong emotional bond between mother and child, the encouragement of amae-behavior, maternal sensitivity, and responsiveness is assumed to influence the child's socio-emotional development through internalization of these specifics. Empirical results of an observational study including German and Japanese mothers and their 2-year-old girls confirmed cross-cultural differences of maternal sensitivity and related children's characteristics. The results of this study illustrate some of the theoretically assumed culture-specific features of mother-child relationships in Japan.*

*Key words: mother-child relationship, socio-emotional development, emotional bond, cultural norm, educational goals, child-rearing practices*

## **1. Introduction**

The process of modernization in Japan has evoked great interest of scholars in social science due to the fact that a capitalist system with a free market was installed while still preserving traditional values in regard to the organization of social life (see Tominaga; Scheuch, in this volume). At present, this interest goes in a different direction. After rapid economic development in the 20th century, Japan is facing an economic and political crisis. The question can be raised whether the present situation in Japan will lead to a shift from group-oriented to individual-oriented values in Japan including characteristics of western industrialized societies (see Nakamura & Flammer; Trommsdorff & Essau; Kornadt & Eisler, in this volume). Such a shift would not be possible unless the socialization conditions including cultural values and beliefs about children and child-rearing practices are affected accordingly. In order to understand the effects of such possible changes in socialization conditions on the personality development of children and adolescents and thus the future development of the next generation, it is necessary to clarify what the present situation is like with respect to

socialization conditions for early child development. Therefore, the focus of this contribution refers to the question which aspects of socialization and conditions for child development can be observed presently when studying early mother-child relationship in Japan.

## 2. A culture-psychological framework for mother-child relationships

Although it is not a simple task to define culture, a convergence of different approaches in cross-cultural psychology can be observed. A specific set of beliefs, norms, and values can be seen as the main features of a culture. Cultural differences between western and eastern cultures are often explicated by using “relatedness – separateness” (e.g., Kâgıtçibâsi, 1996), “individualism – collectivism” (e.g., Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, & Lucca, 1988), or “independent – interdependent self-construals” (e.g., Marcus & Kitayama, 1991) as a basic dimension. Schwartz and his colleagues developed a grid of dimensions focusing on different value dimensions like power, tradition, or hedonism (cf. Schwartz, 1995). A recent research approach suggests that cultures have “core cultural ideas” (e.g., Marcus & Kitayama, 1994). This perspective complements the other approaches by focusing more on the process of transfer. The assumption is that certain cultural ideas are highly salient on all levels of a culture including socio-political, institutional, family, and individual levels. By this, the individuals are strongly exposed to these ideas and it is likely that they adopt these ideas as goals for themselves. In this sense, culture provides meaning to intended and to actually demonstrated behavior and its consequences including emotional responses; these interpretations affect future behavior orientation (cf. Kâgıtçibâsi, 1996). Cultural beliefs, norms, and values are mediated in the social interactions between the members of a culture and above all in the process of socialization. Parents transfer the cultural beliefs to their children according to their own subjective interpretation (cf. Friedlmeier, 1996). Thereby, specific contextual conditions are created as will be outlined below. The internalization of these beliefs and values depends on the child’s understanding and interpretation, e.g., the experience of consistency between demands and parents’ daily behavior and experiences outside the family. Furthermore, the children’s reaction may foster or change parental beliefs. Therefore, the transfer of cultural ideas does not happen in a unidirectional nor in a determined way. Cultural beliefs and norms constitute a framework of constraints and opportunities in regard to the individual’s adaptation to the environment.

## 3. Traditional Japanese features of mother-child relationships

Interdependence is one core feature that characterizes group-oriented cultures like Japan (cf. Marcus & Kitayama, 1991). The higher evaluation of *interrelatedness* compared to an individualistic orientation is expressed in the term *jo* that includes an affective interpersonal relationship and a person who has *jo* (*jo no aru hito*) is a person who has a warm-hearted and caring mind (see Kojima, 1998). This concept is based on the belief of a positive nature in the human being. The importance of affectionate relationships can also be found in the cultural values of children and related parental beliefs, a central contextual feature of

mother-child relationships. The importance of *jo* in regard to the parent-child relationship can already be illustrated in Japanese child-rearing manuals starting from the 17<sup>th</sup> century (see Kojima, 1998).

In accordance with the high evaluation of interrelatedness, the Japanese mother tries to establish a strong emotional bond with the child. This bond is often characterized as *amae* (see Doi, 1974). Demanding mother's attention by crying, fussing, or protesting children is even encouraged under certain situations, i.e., such behavior is interpreted positively because it is expected that the child should behave in a dependent way, and the mother's task is to satisfy the child's needs. Mizuta, Zahn-Waxler, Cole, and Hiruma (1996) studied the acceptance of *amae*-behavior in a separation situation with mothers and their preschoolers: Japanese mothers accepted their preschoolers' expression of distress that occurred when orienting to their mothers when reunited. They engaged in more proximal reassurance. By this, the child experienced that it could seek and also receive comfort for regaining emotional security. In contrast, US-American preschoolers stayed more distant when reunited with their mothers, and mothers perceived their children as immature and problematic if they displayed distress. On this basis, American children learn that it is more adequate to regulate emotions on their own. This study underlines that culturally guided beliefs and behavior have consequences for the child's development. Different dyadic patterns develop and culture-specific differences in children's behavior can be explained primarily by the experience of different interaction patterns with the caregivers.

Educational goals are closely related to cultural ideas about the self-construals. Therefore, these child-rearing goals vary between different cultures along cultural ideas, e.g., with regard to the importance of group-orientation and interrelatedness versus individualism and separateness. In western industrialized cultures, parents view their children as separate entities, and consequently try to foster autonomy and independence; in eastern cultures parents view their children as an extension of themselves and a feeling of oneness characterizes Japanese mothers and their children (Azuma, 1984). Consequently, Japanese mothers try to foster dependency. They stress physical contact, whereas US-American mothers encourage their children to express their needs (cf. Caudill & Schooler, 1973). Japanese mothers teach their children to accommodate to social expectations as a further important child-rearing goal (Befu, 1986; Kornadt & Trommsdorff, 1990, 1997; Lebra, 1976; Trommsdorff, 1995a,b, 1997; Trommsdorff & Friedlmeier, 1993). These child-rearing goals in Japan are related to the cultural standard of harmony.

The goal that a child should develop a general positive idea of the human being (e.g., trust in others, that others support you, care for you, etc.) requires that the child experiences emotional security, availability of the caregiver, that harmony of the group is a preferred mode of interaction and that support is available in case of adverse experiences. In order to provide these experiences for the child, the mother has to be warm, nurturant, and very responsive towards her child. Warmth may be expressed in close physical contact but also in accepting the child's needs even if the child's behavior deviates from the mother's expectation. This quality of nurturance contains empathy, i.e., feeling with the other and the experience of sympathy and altruism for the less competent (cf. Kojima, 1998). Furthermore, responsiveness is required, this means adequacy and promptness of the mother's responses to signals from the child, depending on the cues of the child in a given situation and the mother's adequate interpretation of these cues. All these qualities characterize the

mother's sensitivity that may vary according to the meaning of the context, particularly in different cultural settings of mother-child interactions. Although the role of the caregiver's sensitivity for development in the early childhood may be the same in different cultures, e.g. providing a secure base for attachment and a related inner working model, it may acquire different functional properties in development because cultural values enter into socialization.

Several empirical studies have shown that Japanese mothers are more sensitive than German or US American mothers to their infants, e.g., keeping the infants calm and indulging them (cf. Azuma, 1986), or providing more attempts to ameliorate negative emotional states (cf. Barratt, 1996). This behavior has been reported for Japanese mothers of infants and also of pre-school children: Japanese as compared to German mothers react to their children in a more sympathetic, warm, and prompt way (cf. Trommsdorff & Friedlmeier, 1993; Trommsdorff & Friedlmeier, 1998).

#### **4. An empirical study of maternal sensitivity and its impact on toddlers' emotion regulation**

In the following, an empirical study is reported which aimed to investigate specific Japanese characteristics of observed mother-child relationships in Japan as compared to Germany by focusing on mothers' sensitivity and also taking into account children's emotion regulation. From a social interaction perspective, it seems inadequate to view sensitivity as a pure personality trait of mothers, independent of contextual conditions. Sensitivity should rather be conceived of as a quality of mother-child interactions. Therefore, observational studies are adequate. The study of the development of emotion regulation is important to clarify culture-specifics of social interaction in Japan: It allows one to gain insight into the quality of mother-child relationships, since young children only have limited abilities to regulate arousal and negative emotions (Campos, Campos, & Barrett, 1989; Thompson, 1990). In early child development, emotion regulation takes place as an interactive regulation, i.e., the mother gives support or the child is actively seeking for maternal help in order to regulate and modulate negative emotional states (cf. Friedlmeier, 1995; Kopp, 1989). Since knowledge about culture-specific differences in toddlers' emotion regulation is still lacking, we started from the idea that a child's emotion regulation is influenced (a) by the quality of maternal sensitivity that the child has experienced in previous interactions with the mother as well as (b) by the immediate maternal response in the actual context. The quality of maternal sensitivity was evaluated in a *dyadic mother-child-interaction* and mothers' contingent reactions depending on children's requests for (emotional) support were observed in a *triadic playmate interaction*. Both maternal indicators were analyzed with respect to their function for the child's emotion regulation in the playmate interaction. A detailed report about the methods and results is documented in Friedlmeier and Trommsdorff (1998). In the present contribution, we focus on the mothers' sensitivity without going into details with regard to the results of children's emotion regulation.

#### 4.1 Expected cultural differences with regard to maternal sensitivity

According to the outlined characteristic of Japanese parental beliefs and values it is expected that Japanese mothers are more sensitive compared to the German mothers in a dyadic situation. The feeling of oneness with the child enforces the mother to protect the child if he/she experiences negative emotional states. To the extent that the child turns to the mother for support in the triadic playmate interaction, the Japanese mother's reaction may be ambiguous. On the one hand, she calms the child, and on the other hand, she makes the child more tense, because the mother represents the agent who most emphasizes the importance of empathy in order to realize the goal of accommodation to the situation. In contrast, German mothers who conceive of their child as an independent being may react to their child independent of situational characteristics. Due to the assumed ambiguity and the situation-specific orientation of Japanese mothers, the relationship between maternal characteristics and the child's reactions may be stronger in Germany than in Japan.

Accordingly it was expected that

- a) Japanese compared to German mothers are more sensitive in the dyadic situation (mother-child interaction) and more contingent in the triadic situation (playmate interaction).
- b) Japanese compared to German mothers are less consistent in their reactions to their children in the two interaction situations.
- c) Relationships between Japanese mothers' sensitivity (resp. their contingent reactions) and children's emotion regulation are less strong compared to the German sample.

#### 4.2 Expected cultural differences with regard to children's behavior

Strong mother-child bonds are expected for Japanese mother-child dyads. This may include physical proximity which may have consequences for children's culture-specific distance regulation in general as well as in the case of distress and the need to regulate emotions. It therefore is expected that Japanese children stay closer to their mothers when interacting with another person (a playmate), and that in the case of distress Japanese children approach their mothers more often compared to German children.

It can be assumed that the child-rearing context in Japan is less prone to having children confronted with strong negative emotions such as frustration and distress, or to situations in which expression of negative emotions could be witnessed in the social environment. A long period of indulgence of Japanese children and the high value put on harmony do not permit expression of negative emotions in social interactions with children. Therefore, Japanese children experience negative emotions of other people less and possibly have less success in dealing with other persons' negative emotions in social interactions. The experience of another person's or one's own distress may evoke the child's activity to seek support in order to decrease or control the negative emotional state. No cultural differences are expected here because toddlers' *interpsychic* emotion regulation (by emotional referencing or approaching the mother) is more important at this developmental age than their *intrapsychic* regulation (no contact to the mother) in both cultures. Japanese mothers pursue the child-rearing goal that the child feels as one with another person in an in-group-situation in

order to mediate the value of interrelatedness. Therefore the Japanese child is expected to feel the pain and sadness of the other person as his own distress and consequently may not recover from such distress so easily.

Accordingly it was expected that

- a) the Japanese children will show closer distance regulation toward their mothers during the interaction situation with another person;
- b) the child's experience of another person's sadness will make a distress reaction more probable for the Japanese children compared to the German children;
- c) no cultural differences will occur with regard to the interpsychic emotion regulation, i.e. the majority of German and Japanese children look for maternal support;
- d) the Japanese children will be more often tense at the end of playmate interaction compared to the German children.

### 4.3 Method

#### *Sample*

German mothers (n=20) and Japanese mothers (n=20) and their 2-year-old girls participated in this study carried out in Kobe and Konstanz. Most of the Japanese and German mothers were on approximately the same educational level (BA or Abitur), and the majority of mothers in both cultures were homemakers. Due to technical problems the whole set of data was only available for 17 German and 19 Japanese dyads.

#### *Procedures*

*Observation of maternal sensitivity.* The mother and her daughter were observed in two different interactions. In the (a) task situation, the child was asked to build a tower. This task was too difficult for this age group. In the (b) disappointment situation, the child played with dolls and a doll-house. These toys were suddenly taken away by a female stranger who argued that she needed the toys for other children in another room. The interaction between mother and child during and after the task and disappointment situations were videotaped.

*Observation of emotion regulation.* The toddlers were observed during a quasi-experimental interaction with an adult playmate. The mother was sitting in a corner of the room; she was instructed to concentrate on reading some journals and not to initiate any actions toward her child; however, she could react if the child requested. The playmate introduced two teddy bears to the girl and both started to play with them. After a while the playmate took off her teddy's clothes. By this action one arm of the teddy bear broke. The playmate expressed her sadness (for about 2 minutes). The emotional reactions of the child and the behavior towards the mother were videotaped. After two minutes the playmate stopped being sad; she gradually changed her behavior and adopted a relaxed expression. Then she asked the child to continue to play together with the remaining bear.

*Order of series.* The mother-child interaction was observed in the first, the interaction with the playmate in the second session. The sessions were not varied systematically due to the necessity of guaranteeing a similar familiarity between the playmate and the child. Follow-

ing the mother-child interaction in the first session, the playmate and the child played together for about 30 minutes. This was a warm-up for the second session.

*Data Coding* (for more details see Friedlmeier & Trommsdorff, 1998)

(a) Variables of the mother-child interaction:

*Maternal sensitivity.* The quality of maternal sensitivity was assessed here in a separate situation of mother-child interaction. Maternal sensitivity was operationalized by a scale that consists of six 6-point-scales (“warmth,” “empathy,” “acceptance,” and “responsiveness” in the task situation and “warmth” and “responsiveness” in the disappointment situation. The internal consistency was high in both cultural samples.

(b) Variables of the interaction with playmate:

*Distance to the mother.* Two levels of the child’s distance to the mother were differentiated; the variable was evaluated within the period of play before the event happened. *Low distance* was coded if the child did not stay with the playmate for the whole time but tried to approach the mother from time to time. *High distance* was coded if the child played continuously with the playmate and did not show any movement to get closer to the mother.

*Distress reaction.* The child’s emotional reaction (facial expression, gestures, and postures) within the first 20 seconds were coded in a dichotomous way: *Distress* versus *no distress*. Criteria used for coding facial distress were taken from Eisenberg et al. (1990): the child exhibited non-functional nervous mouth and chin movements, e.g. biting of the lips. Non-functional gestures, e.g. fiddling with the shirt and a tense posture, e.g. no motor movements, were used as further criteria for distress. No distress was coded if none of these criteria could be observed clearly.

*Quality of support-seeking.* Three categories were evaluated for support-seeking: (1) *Eye-contact*, i.e. the child did not reduce the physical distance to the mother but tried to engage in eye-contact, (2) *support-seeking*, i.e. the child moved closer to the mother, showed that she wanted physical contact and communication with the mother; and (3) *no support-seeking*. A differentiation between getting support for oneself and requesting that the mother helps the other could not be realized due to the toddlers’ reduced verbal abilities.

*Maternal contingency.* If the child looked for support, the maternal reaction was evaluated in a dichotomous way: *contingent*, i.e. the mother reacts promptly, in a spontaneous way; and *non-contingent*, i.e. the mother does not react, reacts late, or the mother does not react adequately, i.e. she gives orders to the child in a harsh tone

*Toddler’s emotional state at the end of the event.* The girl’s emotional state within the following 20 seconds after the playmate stopped her sad reaction was coded in a dichotomous way: *relaxed*, i.e. the child is able to go back to the play situation, to come closer to the playmate without any signs of tension, and *tense*, i.e. even after the end of the event the child stays distant, clings to the mother, avoids contact with the playmate, or does not want to continue to play with the playmate.

#### *Data analysis and interrater reliability*

Due to the small number of subjects in both cultural samples,  $\chi^2$ -tests and non-parametric methods were used. Interrater reliability and interrater agreement reached satisfying levels (for more details see Friedlmeier & Trommsdorff, 1998).

#### *4.4 Results*

*Maternal sensitivity in the mother-child interaction.* Japanese compared to German mothers were more sensitive to their girls in the mother-child interaction [ $M_j = 5.50$ ,  $SD_j = .49$ ;  $M_g = 4.92$ ,  $SD_g = .75$ ;  $t(27.5) = 2.73$ ,  $p < .05$ ].

*Maternal response in the playmate interaction.* When the girls tried to receive their mothers' response, Japanese [79.92%,  $n = 10$ ] compared to German mothers [44.44%,  $n = 4$ ] reacted more often in a contingent way, but this difference was not significant [ $\chi^2(1) = 2.42$ , ns].

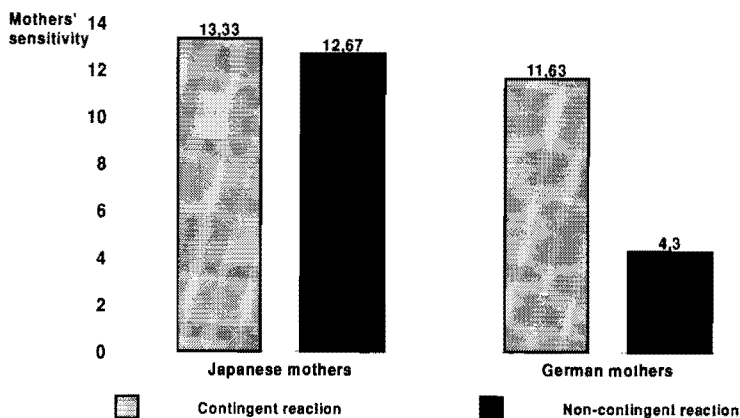
*Consistency of maternal reactions in both situations.* The non-parametric 2x2 variance analysis (Kruskal-Wallis test) yielded a culture-specific pattern [ $\chi^2(3) = 8.05$ ,  $p < .05$ ]: The German mothers showed greater cross-situational consistency. Mothers who reacted in a contingent way displayed more sensitivity [ $MR = 11.63$ ,  $n = 4$ ] compared to the mothers who reacted in a non-contingent way toward their toddlers [ $MR = 4.30$ ,  $n = 5$ ;  $\chi^2(1) = 3.87$ ,  $p < .05$ ] (see Figure 1). The Japanese mothers' sensitivity in the mother-child interaction was independent of their contingency in the situation with the playmate [contingent reaction ( $n = 9$ ):  $MR = 13.67$ ; non-contingent reaction ( $n = 3$ ):  $MR = 13.33$ ].

*Distance to the mother.* More Japanese [42.11%,  $n = 8$ ] compared to the German girls [23.53%,  $n = 4$ ] stayed closer to or approached their mothers. However, this difference was not significant [ $\chi^2(1) = 1.39$ , ns].

*Distress reaction.* As expected, more Japanese [84.21%,  $n = 16$ ] compared to German girls [35.29%,  $n = 6$ ] displayed a distress reaction [ $\chi^2(1) = 9.03$ ,  $p < .01$ ].

*Support-seeking.* A culture-specific relationship occurred with regard to the function of mother as a source of support [ $\chi^2(3) = 5.49$ ,  $p < .06$ ]: more Japanese girls [26.32%,  $n = 5$ ] did not show any signs of referencing to their mothers, while most of the German girls showed some referencing [87.23%,  $n = 15$ ]. With regard to the kind of support-seeking, a further culture-specific difference occurred: 35.29% of the German girls ( $n = 6$ ) used eye-contact, whereas only one Japanese girl showed this behavior. If the Japanese girls looked for support, they did so by getting closer to their mothers, although they were already closer to their mothers compared to the German girls. In both groups the interpsychic regulation dominated and no cultural difference appeared [German girls: 88.24% ( $n = 15$ ); Japanese girls: 73.68% ( $n = 14$ ),  $\chi^2(1) = 1.21$ , ns].





Note: The mean ranks of the non-parametric variance analysis are illustrated here. Sensitivity-scale ranges from 0= not sensitive to 5= very strongly sensitive.

Fig. 1:

*Stability of maternal behavior. Relationship between mothers' sensitivity in the mother-child interaction and their contingent reaction in the playmate interaction*

*Emotional state at the end.* More German [63.16%,  $n = 12$ ] than Japanese girls [31.58%,  $n = 6$ ] appeared to be relaxed after the sadness period in interaction with the playmate [ $\text{Chi}^2(1) = 5.46$ ,  $p < .05$ ]. They showed less tension and went back to the playmate more often to restart the interaction.

*Relationship between toddlers' emotional state at the end and maternal reaction.* A relationship between maternal reaction and the girls' emotional state at the end is stronger for the German compared to the Japanese sample; due to the small numbers of subjects in both samples the difference was not significant [Fisher Exact Test:  $\text{Chi}^2(1) = 2.72$ , ns, for German and  $\text{Chi}^2(1) = .04$ , ns, for the Japanese sample]: If German mothers did not react in a contingent way (i.e., showing prompt reactions), 80% of the girls [ $n = 5$ ] ended in a tense state. If German mothers reacted in a contingent way, the girls ended in a relaxed state in 75% of all cases [ $n = 4$ ] (see Figure 2). In contrast, it did not matter whether Japanese mothers reacted in a contingent [ $n = 10$ ] or a non-contingent way [ $n = 3$ ]. Only about one third of the Japanese girls showed a relaxed state in the end [30% resp. 33.33%].

Relationships between toddlers' emotional state at the end and maternal sensitivity. Differences occurred in the non-parametric analysis of variances that points to a culture-specific interaction effect [ $\text{Chi}^2(3) = 6.86$ ,  $p = .06$ ]. The German girls who showed a negative emotional state at the end also had less sensitive mothers [MR = 8.13,  $n = 4$ ] compared to Japanese mothers of girls with negative emotional state at the end [MR = 19.72,  $n = 9$ ] (see Figure 2). The two groups of mothers whose toddlers displayed a relaxed state did not differ

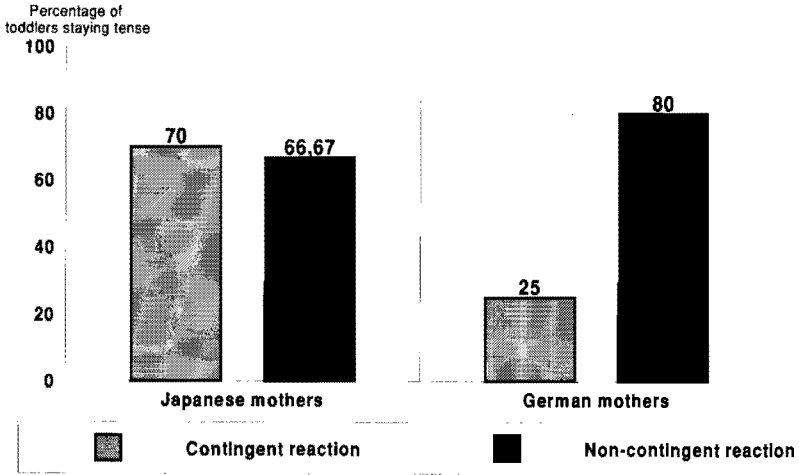


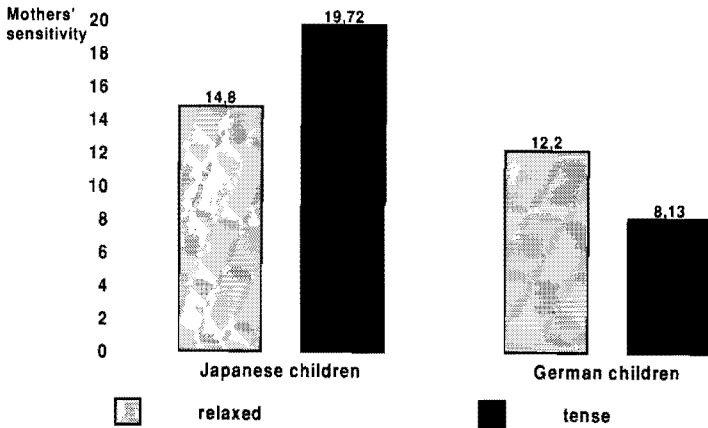
Fig. 2:  
*Percentage of toddlers staying tense in relation to the maternal reaction*

with regard to the extent of their sensitivity [Japan dyads ( $n = 5$ ):  $MR = 14.80$ ; German dyads ( $n = 10$ ):  $MR = 12.20$ ].

## 5. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to test maternal sensitivity toward toddlers in two different cultures. We assumed that toddlers' emotion regulation is dominated by interpersonal regulation and that the caregiver's sensitivity is a means of helping the child to fulfill his/her needs. At the same time it was expected that culture-specific differences occur with regard to the extent of mothers' sensitivity and the relationship between maternal behavior and children's emotion regulation.

*Culture-specific features of the children.* Although the Japanese children were only tendentially less distant from their mothers compared to the German children, it should be noted here that a different quality of distance regulation occurred. German toddlers who displayed low distance from their mothers moved back and forth between playmate and mother, whereas Japanese toddlers who displayed low distance approached and stayed closer to their mothers continuously. By this, the Japanese children made the playmate come closer in order to continue playing.



*Note: The mean ranks of the non-parametric variance analysis are illustrated here. Sensitivity-scale ranges from 0= not sensitive to 5= very strongly sensitive.*

*Fig. 3:  
Mothers' sensitivity and toddlers' emotional state*

The overwhelming majority of children looked for support, i.e., they focused on the mother as a source of reference in order to regulate their negative emotions. This underlines the importance of the interactive process in emotion regulation in early childhood (cf. Parritz, 1996; Malatesta-Magai, 1991).

Furthermore, culture-specific differences occurred with regard to the way the children looked for support. The German children used more eye-contact whereas all Japanese children except one approached the mother. This difference can be explained by their stronger negative emotional reactions (cf. Trommsdorff, 1995a; Trommsdorff & Friedlmeier, 1993). Since Japanese compared to Germans are less often confronted with openly expressed emotions by adults, the lower readiness for adequate reactions as well as the lower familiarity with such situations may contribute to the tendency to react with distress. More Japanese toddlers remained tense compared to the German toddlers. This cultural difference may also be based on their stronger negative emotional reaction to the playmate's sadness.

*Culture-specific features of the mothers.* The results that Japanese mothers reacted more sensitively in the dyadic situation (mother-child interaction) and displayed tendentially more often a contingent reaction to their children compared to the German mothers in the triadic situation (playmate interaction) are in line with other studies (cf. Azuma, 1986; Trommsdorff & Friedlmeier, 1993, 1998). Consistency of mothers' reactions over both situations yielded a culture-specific result in the expected way: Low sensitivity was related to non-contingent reactions and vice versa for the German dyads, while the Japanese mothers' sensitivity was not related to the way they reacted in the playmate interaction.

The German mothers' behavior was not only consistent over these two situations but their behavior was also related to the children's emotional reactions in a specific way. Toddlers who ended in a relaxed state had more sensitive mothers and these mothers reacted in a contingent way when the toddlers needed support in the playmate situation. Such relations could not be found for Japanese mothers and their children's emotional reactions. Maternal sensitivity in the mother-child interaction turned out to be a necessary condition for children's emotion regulation in the German sample. These results indicate culture-specific implications for the development of children's emotion regulation. The significant relationship between low maternal sensitivity and toddlers' negative regulation in Germany may end in a distant mother-child relationship with negative consequences for the child's development of emotion regulation. The generally more supportive interaction of Japanese mothers with their toddlers who showed negative emotion regulation does not allow a prediction of the same development but rather raises the question of whether their children will be more successful in regulating negative emotions later on. Such questions can only be answered in further cross-cultural longitudinal studies.

To summarize, these results indicate the different nature of mother-child relations in the Japanese and German cultural context and also the different conditions for the development of emotion regulation in both cultures. Furthermore, it can be assumed that mother's sensitivity has different meanings in different cultural contexts. The Japanese mother-child relationship is characterized by mutuality and interdependence. Japanese mothers vary their behavior according to their child's needs with respect to the situational demands. In contrast, German mothers conceive of their child as an independent organism. They react to their child independent of situational demands (see Trommsdorff & Friedlmeier, 1998).

Only mother-daughter dyads were observed in this study. Since gender-specific socialization practices might vary according to cultural contexts, these results cannot be generalized to boys and an empirical study including mother-son dyads is a necessary step for the future. Furthermore, the present study could not differentiate between long-term and short-term effects of mothers' sensitivity for children's emotion regulation. This is a topic for longitudinal research starting in early infancy with the study of processes of coping with negative emotions and emotional control. However we know from other research that it is considered very important in social interactions in Japan to be able to control one's emotions. A person who shows negative emotions such as anger is considered as immature. The effective control of negative emotions and at the same time the sensitivity to understand the emotional state of the other person fosters harmonious social interactions. So far, socialization conditions in Japan are structured in a way that this culture-specific quality of close emotional relatedness is promoted in the development of Japanese children and adolescents. This specific quality of interdependence, in contrast to the individualistic value orientation of western societies, has so far been the basis of the value system of Japanese culture. This specific quality of social orientation in Japan can also be conceived of as the basis of the so far highly successful economic and social development. However, ongoing transitions in Japan raise the question whether this specific quality of social interrelatedness may have been misused in the past and thus has developed some dysfunctional elements (see Trommsdorff, in this volume). The question is also raised whether and how far ongoing processes of change in the role of women affect the basic conditions for early child development by changing the quality of mother-child interaction (see Kornadt, in this volume).

Social change and transitions presumably affect several areas of Japanese society. Due to the interrelation of these areas with aspects of socialization, it can be expected that changes in conditions and effects of personality development may be observed in the future. Empirical research is necessary to clarify these phenomena.

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