Harmony in Men and Harmony in Women

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Introduction

Before beginning to discuss the abilities of men and women to harmonize, the meaning of "harmony" must first be defined. "In harmony" can be considered as being in an ideal state arrived at through regulation and adjustment. At the same time "state" indicates a certain relatedness. As defined in English, harmony can be thought of as a pleasing new relationship which is created when certain elements are combined, for example when the sounds do, mi, so are sounded together the pleasant sound of a tonic chord is produced. In concrete terms, in the instance of humans there are internal relationships, and external relationship namely the relationships between the self and other people, the self and society and the self and nature, with the ability to harmonize functioning in each of these. In addition we can probably say that this kind of relatedness is something which changes immensely with the time period and the life cycle of the individual, as well as with spatial differences (differences in nature and culture). At this symposium, the focus for consideration will be on Japan's present and its future. In order to understand harmony it is often useful to look at disharmony, so several instances of abnormal states will be taken up.

To bring out clearly the differences between men and women, the viewpoint that it is sufficient to understand only the characteristics of women has been taken, and so the discussion will be centered on "women".

"Femininity" and "Masculinity"

Before considering differences in "harmony" between women and men, it is necessary to deal first with the concepts of "femininity" and "masculinity". This is firstly because there are few terms which in general give rise to so many misunderstandings, and secondly because the basis for considering the differences between men and women is formed by many tacit assumptions.

What is femininity? Despite the existence of unmistakable biological and morphological characteristics, many aspects of femininity have been "manufactured", something which is reflected in Simone de Beauvoir's

impactful statement: "People are not born as women, they become women". In other words, femininity takes on many different meanings according to differences and changes in time, society and culture. While it goes without saying that "masculinity" has also undergone relative changes, it is probably safe to say that these have been small in comparison to changes in "femininity". Attention must also be paid to the fact that the difference in the rates of change between "femininity" and "masculinity" has brought about the breakdown of some kinds of societal "harmony". Of course, the "femininity" up to this time has also been the cause of unreasonable political, economic and societal discrimination, the result of which is already clear, that is the pressing need for recognition of the "disharmony" brought about by the changes in "femininity" and a structure for a new "harmony".

Up to this time elements in the consideration of "femininity" have been a biological basis centered on "childbirth" and "child raising", and a psychological-societal-cultural basis symbolized by the term gender. The former has also become the basis for feminism, which in its ideas and actions, aims to liberate women from the discrimination and oppression of the political and economic system. The latter it has been argued has come to from a tacit societal norm bringing about the differences in psychological and psychosomatic disorders between men and women. Just recently "femininity" has also come to be considered on the basis of "self-identity". Self identity means maintaining a sense of individuality while performing a role in society, giving rise to a feeling of being part of society and having a positive self image. From this viewpoint "femininity" goes beyond differences in sex and on toward the "nature of being human", in other words it says that "femininity" and "masculinity" are climbing a mountain from opposite sides, aiming for the same summit. It can be considered that Japan's political, economic and societal systems have at last reached the stage where this kind of thing is possible. In the opposite sense, in order to establish the future of "femininity" the present stage of political and societal development in Japan must now be put to concrete practical use. And as the first step in bringing this about, it is necessary once more to verify the present-day image of Japanese women.

Expressing this in the limited amount of space

available: 1) The essence of “femininity” based on the physiological framework of “childbirth” and “child raising” is, in contrast to feminism, being forgotten. 2) As factors contributing to the cause and driving force of this, the digitalization of information as symbolized by the computer, a shift towards the inorganic and an overabundance of information itself, could be cited. 3) As a result, this has brought the phenomena of non and late marriage, which together with the greater participation of women in society, and defects in the support system for childbirth and child raising, have brought about Japan’s extremely low birth rate. 4) On the other hand there is an opposing current with an increasing number of women desiring physical attractiveness based on a consciousness of “masculinity”. This appears as an intense desire for slimness and is clearly evidenced by “overeating”, “refusal of food” and “obesity” which are mentioned later. At the end of this section, it must be said that changes in “femininity” according to both the physiological basis and the psychological-societal-cultural basis are similar, in other words, research into physiological differences is well advanced.

Internal “Harmony” and “Disharmony”

Adjustment of the human body in order for it to reach “harmony” is accomplished through hormonal balance and nervous control. Concerning the former, through the female hormone (estrogen), there exist very clear sexual differences. To elaborate, the main physiological action of estrogen, beyond that directly related to the female reproductive organs, is to increase HDL cholesterol, decrease LDL cholesterol, and in small quantities to act on vascular endothelial cell to increase prostacyclin which reduces blood pressure. Taken together, these prevent arteriosclerosis which results in an incidence of ischemic heart disease in women under 50 years less than half of that in men. However, with the sharp decline in estrogen after menopause, after 60 years of age incidence in women is of course comparable to that in men.

The rapid changes which take place at this age are specific to women, and the resulting “disharmony” is menopausal disorder, which appears as autonomic imbalance (“burning sensations”, “palpitation”, “excessive perspiration”, etc. caused by vascular motor nerve disorders), psychoneurosis (mainly a state of “depression”), and urinary and reproductive organ disorders (incontinence, atrophic change to the vulva and vagina).

This same “disharmony” inherent in women is also seen in young women as bulimia (as well as the closely related anorexia nervosa, omitted from this discussion), which has been attracting much attention in recent years.

Women suffering from bulimia, while on the surface

appearing to carry on normal social lives, go through a cycle of repeated spasmodic overeating and self-induced vomiting. At the basis of this lies a strong desire to be slim, and great difficulty in controlling the desire for food. Despite their undoubted intelligence their self-evaluations are abnormally low, and especially, even when they have normal body weight they have a strong sense of being fat.

In both Japan and America, this syndrome is extremely common amongst young women, and it also came to notice in both countries in the 1970’s. It can be considered that the mechanism is a strong desire to be slim, which is triggered by dieting and leads to the establishment of a vicious circle. In this sense it is probably safe to say that the manufactured “femininity”, as referred to in the section on “femininity”, derived from the psychological-societal-cultural basis has produced this “disharmony” of present-day women.

Nervous control (especially autonomous nerve adjustment) and its close relationship to estrogen operates very differently in men. And as differences in central nervous control at the cerebral level, the differences in intellectual abilities of men and women are known. That is while men excel in spatial perception and mathematical inference, women are superior in their ability to compare related conditions and to distinguish the differences between them. In the case of women too, there is correlation between ability in spatial perception and the level of male hormone secreted.

External “Harmony” and “Disharmony”

This section takes up external “harmony” which refers to relationships with others and “harmony” with others, and uses as a representative example, childbirth and child raising as seen in the mother-child relationship. In the mother-child relationship, the woman sees her child as both an offshoot of herself and as a separate person, which can be considered the greatest cause of “harmony” and “disharmony” for both woman and child.

In this example the feminine issue of “motherhood” arises, together with another important factor, “breast milk”, which is closely related. “Motherhood”, rather than having a transcendental existence within a woman, is something that is formed within the mother-child relationship, and in particular, it is considered that this is promoted by the act of breast feeding. Both “motherhood” and “breast milk” give rise to an effect which impacts equally on mother and child. This is a vast subject in itself, and so a general survey cannot be attempted here, however there is one point to raise. In the 1960’s there was a sudden decline (of 50%) in the number of children being breast fed and following on from this the appearance of bullying and violence in schools—is this something which can be passed over as just coincidence? This together with a sense of loss of motherhood suffered

by an increasing number of young mothers will be important future topics for physiological anthropology.

Another "external harmony" equal in importance to the mother-child relationship is the husband-wife relationship. The "harmony" between husband and wife is a subject that requires due consideration. Comment here is limited to say that for the same reasons mother-child "harmony" arises, husband-wife "disharmony" arises in the form of increasing numbers of divorces between young people immediately after marriage, and divorces between couples of retirement age.

Towards the Creation of a New "Harmony"

As is clear from the foregoing, present-day "femininity" (and its reverse side "masculinity") arise in distinctive ways out of "disharmony". Those with a special interest in this subject have been awaiting a countermeasure for "disharmony". It is no exaggeration to say that "bulimia", as was mentioned earlier, exists as a phenomenon of present-day "femininity". It follows that an effective countermeasure has the possibility of being related to the resolution of other kinds of "disharmony" and so it would be an important experimental model of "harmony". At this point, BOOCS (Brain Oriented Obesity Control System) as developed and previously

reported, has had a 95.4% success rate in treating a total of more than 1,500 "obese" people. Even though the number of people with "bulimia type obesity" who have been treated under BOOCS is still small and a conclusion cannot yet be reached, it is predicted that there will be a high success rate. And it probably can be said that the 2 basic principles of BOOCS, that is liberation from self-imposed suppression and the aim for pleasantness, will be seen to have a profound relationship with the causes of present-day "disharmony".

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