

Symposium | Psychotherapy : [Symposium 84] At a cultural crossroads in our time

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[Symposium 84] At a cultural crossroads in our time

Moderator: Yuichiro Abe (Department of Psychiatry, Ishiki Hospital)

[SY-84-04] The Importance of Socio-Cultural Context in Psychiatric Diagnosis

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During my stay in Heidelberg, Germany, I attended a language school and observed psychiatric outpatient consultations alongside German psychiatrists and healthcare professionals. I also participated in psychiatric conferences and study groups, engaging in discussions and sharing perspectives.

These experiences were conducted in German. While my German sufficed for daily communication, it sometimes fell short in complex clinical interactions. However, psychiatric practice extends beyond verbal communication—nonverbal cues, attitudes, and atmosphere are crucial for understanding patients.

What stood out most was the role of socio-cultural background in clinical diagnosis. Although Japanese and German psychiatrists use the same international diagnostic criteria, such as the ICD, diagnoses often varied. I observed cases where identical symptoms led to different conclusions based on cultural context, social expectations, and clinician-patient dynamics.

These variations highlight that psychiatric diagnosis involves more than applying standardized criteria; it includes culturally shaped interpretations. In this symposium, I aim to share these observations and reflect on how cultural and social factors influence diagnostic decision-making. My goal is to raise awareness of cultural influences in clinical psychiatry and emphasize the value of cross-cultural experiences in fostering a nuanced understanding of mental health.